Keswick and District Fair Trade Campaign

KESWICK FAIR TRADE

Charity no. 1121690

Fairtrade Changes Lives

Newsletter No.16 January 2009

Dear Friends,

This is a rather different type of Newsletter from past numbers, and follows fairly quickly after our last, sent in November. We wanted to give you a report of the visit to Choche in November, 2008. The other factor is the change in practice of the **Fairtrade Foundation** which is now bringing out **Fair Comment** quarterly. The latest accompanies this Newsletter, but we may not now always send a Newsletter with *every* copy of Fair Comment.

The account below of the visit to Choche will only provide a glimpse of what we felt was a highly significant stride on our journey towards a friendship with the village.

If you want to hear more and ask us questions, please come to the Quaker Meeting House on Thursday 12th February at 7.30 p.m. when we shall give a much fuller account.

Choche, November 2008

The village of Choche lies about 200 miles south west of Addis Ababa, the animated – and at times alarming – capital city of Ethiopia. The drive there takes us first across a high level plateau at between 6000 and 7000 feet, before crossing the immense Omo Gorge. All the way there are long, dramatic views to the north and south. We do not stay in the village but in the town of Jimma, so each day we drive for 45 minutes through the green rolling hills where the coffee is grown. Most of the way, we are on a tarmac road, but the last 4 miles are a rutted un-surfaced road which brings us to the village centre, and the coffee Cooperative compound.

Kasech Jihaad *Photo Richard Human*

Our welcome is warm and boisterous and we shake many hands, using one of our few words of Oromifa – 'Akum' This welcome bears witness to what we were told by many, including Zamzem, the lively widow who is one of the few women active in the committees of the Cooperative, that they are now convinced that our commitment to friendship with the village is genuine and will last.

My presence on this visit is largely motivated by the wish to speak to the women of the village. To this purpose the Director of the school arranges for a young English teacher to be an interpreter for two hours on our second morning. Another young woman Kasech – of whom more later – arranges visits to the homes of six women. She also arranges for another woman to come to the office, and there I also speak to Birquissa, who is responsible for the coffee ceremony at the Co-operative office and who runs a coffee shop in the village, and to Kasech herself. All except Birquissa, who is divorced and Kasech who is an orphan, are widows. I ask each of them about their families, how much land they farm, whether they are finding the price of food more expensive, and whether they feel that Fairtrade has helped them.

Most of them have large families, but small plots of land and the price of their staple food, teff, has doubled over the last year, so their lives are very hard. To my surprise, they are vague about the benefits of Fairtrade and it dawns on me that this is because they have little knowledge or understanding of what it is.

The absence of clear understanding among the farmers and other villagers about Fairtrade and its benefits is tackled by Joe. He has brought with him his laptop and a PowerPoint presentation which he uses when giving talks in Cumbria about Fairtrade. He shows a shortened version of this in two of the local schools to older students and their teachers, and in the Cooperative office to farmers. The audiences are riveted, and the school teachers are converted to support for Fairtrade.

And we dream up a plan for a continuation and extension of this process. We notice that Kasech is very active around the Cooperative and has a confidence in relating to the older men, which is not the case with all the women. We suggest that she might be employed both to speak to people in the village about Fairtrade and to encourage more women to become active in the Cooperative. We propose this first to Jaba Merdassa, our wonderful interpreter and facilitator who is employed in Addis by the Coffee Cooperative Union to oversee the registration of Fairtrade and organic coffees, and he is enthusiastic. So are Mekonnen and Raya, the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Cooperative who came to Keswick last summer. Later we gain the support and involvement of the local government cooperative office for the proposal, and of Tadesse Meskela and Dessalegn Jena, the Manager and Deputy Manager of the Cooperative Union.

Once back in Keswick we discuss the proposal with the committee. We have a most thoughtful discussion, and agree to fund Kasech for an initial 6 months, to run a campaign in Choche in parallel with our own.

To hear more – much more – and to see some of Richard Human's superb photographs, come on 12th February!

Jo Alberti

On the last Friday and Saturday (6h / 7th March) of **Fairtrade Fortnight** we are encouraging local community groups to **'Go Bananas'**. For more on this, look out in the press.

▪ **AGM** date tbc ▪ **Strawberry Tea** 28th June ▪ **Portraits from Choche**, photographic exhibition TbL, 10th June – 30 July ▪