



FAIRTRADE FOUNDATION DRIED FRUIT PRODUCER PROFILE

Fairtrade Fortnight 2009 Producer Visit

Arsene Sourabie Baperma, Association WOUOL, Burkina Faso

WOUOL's mission is to work with the producers and improve their condition... we are one big family who work out our problems together.

Monsieur Antoine Sombie, Chairman of WOUOL

Association WOUOL is a development association located in the Bérégaougou region of south-west Burkina Faso, near the borders with Mali and Côte d'Ivoire. The association is made up of 46 rural organisations which either produce organic mangoes and organic cashew nuts or operate processing plants to prepare the crops for export to Europe. WOUOL was set up to contribute to a sustainable improvement of the local population's life conditions by protecting and developing the natural and cultural resources of the region. The word 'wouol' means solidarity and mutual assistance in Turka, the local language, and the organisation's motto is Solidarity, Dynamism and Development.

ARSENE SOURABIE BAPERMA

Arsene is 33 years old and the eldest son of a large family. He lives in Bérégaougou with his wife and young daughter, along with his mother, four brothers and two sisters.

Arsene is connected to two of WOUOL's member organisations: as a mango farmer he is a member of the SOCABE mango producer group, and he also works as a technician in the processing factory operated by the GSBE mango drying group. Much of his time is spent assisting farmers in his group and leading workshops to train workers in the factory.

BACKGROUND TO BURKINA FASO

Burkina Faso is a landlocked republic in West Africa. It has a per capita GDP of \$1,200, making it one of the poorest countries in the world. Its 15 million people have a life expectancy of 55 years and, with a maximum of five years in school, it has a literacy rate of just 22 per cent.

Around 90 per cent of the population is engaged in subsistence agriculture, with only 10 per cent of the workforce employed in industry and services. Opportunities for gainful rural employment are rare, with 77 per cent of the workforce officially unemployed. As a result a large part of the male workforce migrates annually to neighbouring countries for seasonal employment, particularly to Côte d'Ivoire where 3 million of its citizens live.

Periodic drought, poor soil, lack of adequate communications and infrastructure, and an economy vulnerable to external shocks are all longstanding problems. Its main export is cotton – vulnerable to fluctuations in world prices – followed by livestock and gold. At least 20 per cent of the government budget is financed from international aid, and the majority of infrastructure investments rely on external finance.

ASSOCIATION WOUOL - BACKGROUND AND STRUCTURE

The Bérégaougou region is named after the Béréga river. With its fertile land and well-paid jobs it is relatively developed compared to the rest of the country. The majority of the rural population there depend on mangoes, cashew nuts, rice and sugar for their income. Its proximity to the border with Côte d'Ivoire and access to the port of Abidjan makes Bérégaougou an important transport hub, with a bustling commercial and hotel trade. The sugar industry is well established in the area and its economic strength has led to investment in banks and schools.

In 1977 an industrial sugar production operation was set up in the Bérégaougou region. Many local farming families were forced off their land so that it could be converted to sugar cane plantations to supply cane to the factory. In response a number of young farmers formed an agricultural co-operative society as a way of improving their economic circumstances and livelihoods. The organisation had strong local support and in 1986 it became Association WOUOL. In 1999 it was given the official status of a Development Association. In this capacity its objective is to contribute to the sustainable economic development of the population by: supporting small rural enterprises; diversifying production; providing relevant information and training; supporting food security; developing partnerships with local and foreign organisations; developing tourism; and protecting the environment.

Association WOUOL is made up of 46 member organisations which are either agricultural producers or processors. These in turn have 2,150 individual members between them. The producer organisations grow mangoes and cashew

nuts which are processed by the processor groups. The mangoes are washed, de-skinned, sliced and dried in gas ovens then vacuum packed. On average 17kg of fresh mangoes are needed to make 1kg of dried fruit. The cashew nuts are shelled, dried, graded and packed, with around 8.5kg of raw nuts needed to make 1kg of processed nuts. The products are then packed in cartons and sold directly to exporters, bypassing intermediaries and enabling the organisation to get a higher price. Finally, they are sent by container to Banfora railway station, 15 kilometres away, en route to Europe by sea, via the port of Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire. In 2007, the association produced 143 tonnes of dried mangoes and 52 tonnes of cashew nuts for export.

WOUOL provides much-needed local employment in the drying stations and nut processing plants, and the vast majority of employees are women. Mademoiselle Hetie Fatimata Roseline has worked at the cashew plant for two years: *'It's great because it's year-round work even though the harvest is March to May, as the cashews can be stored for 12 months. Before I sold furniture but I earn more here so it's good.'*

WOUOL is committed to diversifying its members' products. In addition to mango and cashew nuts members grow maize, millet, cassava, pineapple, jatropha, figs, lemons, limes, papaya, guava, moringa, citronella and palms. WOUOL plans to extend its export operation to fresh and dried pineapple, processed cashew nut products, and fruit juices. It also produces cashew butter and women members are experimenting with manufacturing small caramel bars containing cashew and sugar for local sale.

FAIRTRADE PRICE AND PREMIUM

Association WOUOL became part of Fairtrade when nine of its member organisations were Fairtrade certified in 2005. The number has now grown to 13 groups representing 587 individual members, of which 480 (82%) are women. The groups also employ 35 workers.

Latest figures show that Association WOUOL sold 40 tonnes of dried mangoes to Fairtrade buyers in 2008 and 29 tonnes of cashew nuts in 2007. For these sales the organisation receives at least the Fairtrade minimum price which is calculated to cover the costs of sustainable production. They also receive the Fairtrade premium, an additional sum that they can invest in business development or in projects which benefit their members and the wider community. Members discuss and vote on how the premium should be used at the annual assembly.

FAIRTRADE PREMIUM PROJECTS

WOUOL has invested their premium in a number of schemes including;

- small loans scheme for members and employees – used to purchase bicycles to make the journey to work easier; purchase of gas cookers for their homes; help with payment of school fees
- construction of a canteen for employees
- construction of a cereal bank – rice and maize grown by members can be safely stored when prices are low then sold when prices rise during the off season
- construction of two bore holes for safe, clean water
- contributions of funds to the health centre
- payment of teachers' salaries and provision of teaching materials for free adult literacy and French classes which are open to everyone.

'The premium brings more to the women, the producers and for the whole chain, so we are very happy with it. In future years, we would like to continue to share with the women through financing the canteen so women can eat well here and relax properly for half an hour. It is also good that the premium comes in September and October as this coincides with the school term starting and the demand for school fees. It is very good to receive the premium, we know it comes from UK... Send goodwill to those over there and sincere thanks to all of them from our families.'

Madame Alimata, mango drier, WOUOL member

Dried mango and cashew nuts produced by Association WOUOL are available in more than 30 cereal bars and snack products, details at www.fairtrade.org.uk

Fairtrade Foundation January 2009

Look for the FAIRTRADE Mark on products. It's your guarantee that disadvantaged farmers and workers in the developing world are getting a better deal.

The Fairtrade Foundation, Third Floor, IBEX House, 42-47 Minorities, London EC3N 1DY
Switchboard: 020 7405 5942 Website: www.fairtrade.org.uk
Registered Charity No. 1043886, a company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales No. 2733136.