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FEBRUARY 2010

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A World Class Coffee Magazine

\$8.95 (inc GST)
No.7 ISSN 1449-2547



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Kyle Freund is the Communications Manager for Coffee Kids in Santa Fe, New Mexico, a non-profit organisation dedicated to helping coffee-farming families improve their quality of life.

A cup of coffee can make such a difference



Carlos Javier Altamirano Picado is responsible for stockpiling at his local cooperative in Nicaragua. He is a first year Agronomy Science student thanks to a Coffee Kids-supported scholarship project.

With nearly \$90 billion in retail coffee sales in 2008; coffee traders, roasters and cafés reap many financial benefits from coffee. Unfortunately, these benefits don't always extend to those who cultivate the beans.

Many of the world's coffee-producing countries remain mired in poverty, and the challenges of life are often overwhelming. The top coffee-producing states in Mexico are among the poorest in the country. In Guatemala, 40% of students never make it to sixth grade and almost 40% of the population in Nicaragua have no access to health services.

At this time of year, the coffee lands buzz with activity. Labourers pick at coffee bushes and mills process the cherries. The beans are dried and turned, workers sort the defects and the green coffee eventually finds its way to distant shores – all so we can enjoy a warm cup of wake-me-up.

More than 50% of coffee is grown on small family farms where income from coffee barely covers the costs of production. For many of these families, the true benefits from coffee never materialize.

Fair Trade and other price premiums acknowledge the problems inherent in the coffee trade and strive to pay a more equitable price. These efforts have put the specialty coffee industry at the vanguard of the corporate social responsibility movement. But even with the higher prices paid for certified coffee, it does not address one of the most pressing issues facing many families: the sole reliance on coffee for their income.



Each evening, after working at a local coffee plantation in Paraxaj, Guatemala, José Silvestre Xalix Morales studies at home thanks to a Coffee Kids supported adult education project.



Students in a Coffee Kids supported scholarship project in Costa Rica frequently return to work in their communities after they complete their schooling.

Coffee does not provide a stable year round income. Coffee-farming families need alternatives– in addition to a more equitable price – that can help them weather coffee price fluctuations. Creating alternatives can promote a vibrant local economy, improve access to health care and education, and provide food security.

INTRODUCTION TO COFFEE KIDS

Coffee Kids, a US-based non-profit organisation, partners with coffee-farming communities to create projects outside of coffee that provide farmers, their families and their communities with alternatives. Coffee Kids currently supports 24 projects managed by 15 partners in five Latin American countries including: Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Peru.

Coffee Kids' success lies in providing a hand up, not a hand out. Communities identify and prioritise their most pressing problems. They create strategies and implement projects based on their own values and culture. Coffee Kids provides the funding and support. The projects focus on economic diversification and microcredit, health awareness, education and training, and food security.

"We don't pretend to know what these communities need. By listening to coffee-farming families and working to create an effective approach, they can make significant improvements to quality of life," says Carolyn Fairman, executive director of Coffee Kids.

Just as each coffee-farming community is unique and has different needs, each Coffee Kids project is uniquely suited to its community.

In Peru, the World Health Organization reports that 69% of women have suffered some form of physical violence. Coffee Kids' partner AYNI, in the province of Cusco, is working to confront this problem

by teaching women about their rights, options for support, and advocates for policy changes.

- In Nicaragua, the school system does little to encourage active participation, decision-making skills or leadership. Coffee Kids' partner SOPPEXCCA manages two programs in rural coffee communities that promote leadership skills and environmental stewardship.
- Oaxaca, Mexico, is home to CAMPO, a successful organization that works with indigenous populations in the surrounding mountains. Last year, CAMPO completed construction on a training centre that will be used to teach community members about sustainable agriculture, human rights and community organising.

SHARING WHAT WORKS

Coffee Kids encourages sharing between partner organisations. These 'encuentros,' or meetings, give long time partners the opportunity to share their successful efforts with other organisations.

Coffee Kids' partner Self-Managed Development (AUGE) in Veracruz, Mexico, operates an extremely successful microcredit and savings program that boasts over 4000 participants. In February 2009, leaders from AUGE traveled to Chajul, Guatemala, a remote community in the Cuchumatanes Mountain Range to work with the Chajulense Association of Women United for Life (ACMUV).

ACMUV manages a Coffee Kids supported microcredit program for women to complement an established textile project. For three days, women from both organisations shared their achievements, needs, hopes and dreams in the fields of microcredit and basic finance.



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Children in Pantepec, Mexico, learn about raising chickens from their parents who take part in a chicken-raising project managed by Coffee Kids partner ICSUR.



Women around Lake Atitlán in Guatemala benefit from a local health program that teaches them about pre and post-natal care, basic nutrition, herbal remedies and the importance of hygiene.

“Despite the geographic distances, the women (in Mexico and Guatemala) share the same problems. We women have the same aspirations. In Chajul, we discovered that women everywhere have the capacity for self-employment, self-education, and self-organisation,” says Norma Alcántara, general director of AUGE.

PARTNERS IN COFFEE

Coffee Kids garners tremendous support from the coffee industry. Nearly 84% of funding comes from cafes, roasters and associated coffee businesses around the globe. Efforts range from cafés with a coin drop, commercial agreements with contributions linked to sales, to individuals that hold creative fundraisers.

“People in the coffee industry recognize that healthy communities produce quality coffee. If families aren’t struggling to survive, they can produce better coffee,” says Carolyn. “And it’s just the right thing to do.”

Five Senses Coffee in Rockingham, Western Australia and Cheltenham, Victoria, became a Coffee Kids supporter in 2008.

“Five Senses has always donated to a variety of charities and non-profit organisations. A few years ago, we decided we wanted to direct a lot of our support to people within the coffee industry,” explains Bree Paterson of Five Senses Coffee. “We do this primarily through Direct Trade relationships with the farmers who grow our beans, and we feel that Coffee Kids complements that perfectly.”

In addition to making contributions to support Coffee Kids’ efforts, many companies educate customers about their connection to coffee-farming families and the challenges they face.

“We have several education programs,” states Robert Forsyth of Forsyth Coffee and Tea in the Sydney area, a Coffee Kids member since the late 1990s. “We are involved with several primary schools that contribute and at the same time we educate the young students about the social issues and what Coffee Kids does.

“We also have the students pick coffee off our 30 trees that are in front of the retail shop. I pay them the equivalent world rate. The young people quickly learn to appreciate the life they have in Sydney.”

EXTENDING THE BENEFITS TO THE COFFEE LANDS

In 2008, over 6200 people in nearly 150 communities participated in Coffee Kids supported projects. We all participate in the circle of coffee that begins in the coffee lands and ends in our morning cup. By supporting grassroots projects – like those managed by Coffee Kids — and educating consumers, you complete this circle making a connection with the families who grow your coffee.

“As the harvest season comes to a close and the green coffee gets loaded into containers destined for locations around the world, it’s important to remember those who make it all possible,” Carolyn says.

For more information on how you can contribute to Coffee Kids and help coffee-farming families improve their quality of life, visit www.coffeekids.org or send an email to info@coffeekids.org.

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