

Briefing: Impact on Sireet OEP, the Fairtrade tea co-op in Kenya, of Sainsbury's decision to withdraw from Fairtrade

Fairtrade Devon have just returned from a visit to Sireet OEP, the Fairtrade tea co-op in Kenya, who visited Devon in 2015. They have brought back evidence of the impact the change from Sainsbury's Fairtrade Mark to Fairly-traded tea is already making. Sainsbury's decision means that in the future the Fairtrade Premium will not be given to communities to invest on projects they initiate and choose themselves.

Sainsbury's has not purchased any Fairtrade tea from Sireet Outgrowers Empowerment Producers Co-op since the end of May 2017. This is a major problem for Sireet OEP as they normally receive the Fairtrade Premium every quarter. Now, they may not be able to complete the projects agreed by the 6320 members at the last AGM, held every October.

Without the Fairtrade Premium, valuable projects may not be funded and probably will not happen. All members of the community can access these facilities even if they are not members of Sireet OEP.

The biggest impact will be educational, as individual young people will be denied bursaries to continue or complete their education. 3200 bursaries have been given out in the past 8 years. Now there will probably be none.

Since 2008, Sireet OEP Co-op, has used the Fairtrade Premium to provide training for farmers, for improved tea growing, adapting to climate change, and training in diversification in horticulture and beekeeping. Many community projects are also supported through the Fairtrade Premium: including schools, health care, water projects and school students' bursaries for 3200 young people from low income families.

Details of community projects funded by the Fairtrade Premium since 2008

For schools: 5 completed laboratories for secondary schools; dormitories at 2 girls' secondary schools; classrooms at 3 secondary schools; kitchen at 2 schools; teachers houses at one school.

School students' bursaries: 3200 young people from low income families, have received bursaries to share the cost of fees at secondary school, college and universities.

Health care: 8 dispensaries; nurses' houses at 2 sites to provide 24 hour medical cover; 2 maternity wards. Water projects: 5 completed, providing free clean water to approx. 6600 people (plus their cows, goats and hens).

Local decisions for local community

To date, proposals for how the Fairtrade Premium is invested in the community are put forward at the grassroots, then forwarded to the local Fairtrade Premium Committee, comprising elected co-op members. They visit all the proposed projects and make recommendations. The final decision is taken at the AGM of all Sireet OEP Co-op members. Projects are funded according to the funds available and a fair distribution of

projects around all areas is ensured. All members of the community can access these facilities even if they are not members of Sireet OEP. Sainsbury's intention is to replace this with a decision taken in London, far removed from local people, about how to spend the premium.

Report from Fairtrade Devon visit to Sireet OEP, the Fairtrade tea co-op in Kenya by Sue Errington, Fairtrade Devon coordinator, Alison Derrick, member of Fairtrade Ivybridge, Devon, Jean Harrison, Fairtrade consumer, London

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Photo: Sue Errington, Fairtrade Devon, Paul Tiony, Sireet OEP Co-op, Kenya, Revd Philip Bourne, Sidmouth Parish Church, during Fairtrade Fortnight 2015.

Paul Tiony has been a director of Sireet OEP for 10 years and they have over 6,000 small scale tea farmers working with them in a co-operative. They sell their tea to Cafe Direct / Tea Direct as well as Fairtrade own brand blends of supermarkets like Sainsbury's, the Co-op, M&S.