

Fairtrade: a World of Difference

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Kasinthula, Malawi, Sugar



Photos: Traidcraft/Richard Else

Kasinthula Cane Growers Ltd

Kasinthula provides sugar for Traidcraft's Geobars. Kasinthula has around 280 members who farm sugar in the Chikwawa area of Malawi which is very poor. Long droughts can result in famine and the twice-yearly rains frequently bring floods. Irrigation systems are basic and farmers are often not used to farming to sell on an international market. Despite these challenges, sugar is one of Malawi's top three exports, second only to tobacco.

Kasinthula was set up in 1986 by a commercial sugar mill and the state-run Sugar Corporation. It aimed to convert an area of largely uneconomic land to sugar cane production which would both increase the amount of raw sugar cane to the mill and provide an income for the subsistence farmers who worked nearby and were barely able to grow enough food to feed their families.



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Kasinthula's sugar became Fairtrade certified in 2002 and is processed and marketed through Illovo sugar. It is the first non-organic sugar cane producer to be certified Fairtrade. Farmers grow sugar cane on plots of 2.5 – 3 hectares. Around 30% of Kasinthula's production is now sold to Fairtrade buyers including companies from Belgium, Germany, Norway and the UK including Traidcraft.



The Fairtrade premium is paid into a fund, which is run by the farmers and brings benefits to the local community. These include boreholes to provide fresh water in villages where people had to previously fetch their water from a crocodile infested river. The first borehole was dug in the village of Kapasule in March 2004 and means that over 500 villagers no longer have to use the river. A second borehole was dug in Chinangwa village in 2005. Chinangwa has also been the first village to benefit from electricity.

The extra income from Fairtrade sales has allowed virtually all members to build new houses. Small mud huts with flimsy thatch roofs have been replaced by larger, sturdy houses with brick walls and tin roofs. Kasinthula are also using some premium money to plough up their land and replant it with new sugar cane and maize which will help them increase future crops and feed their families.

Kasinthula's mission:

“to grow quality cane for sugar production and earn increased returns with the aim of not only improving the farmers' livelihoods but also those of the people within the greater Kasinthula area in line with government's initiative to reduce poverty among rural communities.”