

I am Esther Jemaiyo Chepkwony, from Kenya.



I am a small-scale tea grower and founder member of the Sireet Outgrowers Empowerment and Producer Co-operative Ltd, Nandi Hills in the western part of Kenya.

I have benefitted a lot from Fairtrade. As a result of the Fairtrade certification (awarded in 2006), we receive a **guaranteed minimum price for our tea** and my income rose by 50% compared to what I was earning per month. I have 2 acres of tea which gives me between 800 and 1500 kgs of green leaf tea per month, for which I am paid 20 Kenyan shillings (Ksh) per kg. Previously I was paid 14Ksh per kg (Current exchange rate is 140Ksh = £1)



I have also benefitted from **the Fairtrade Premium**, because the Co-operative has built school buildings, water tanks and health centres. They also pay bursaries for our children. My daughter, Jemutai, was among the beneficiaries. The bursary paid part of her university fees for 2 years.

I think that women benefit most from Fairtrade, because it is women who travel a long way to fetch water, but now we are getting water in our own home compounds. Myself, I used to walk between 2 and 4 km to find water. But now, thanks to the Fairtrade Premium, I have water in my compound.

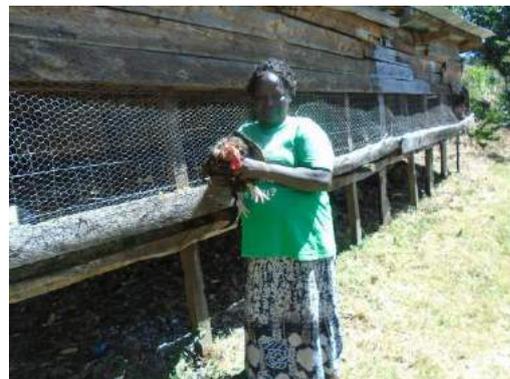
It is usually the mothers who are the ones to take their children to the hospital. I used to travel 24 kms to the nearest hospital. But now, we have a health centre 3 kms away from my house.

Siret Secondary School is near to my home and my daughter Mercy is a student there. The Fairtrade Premium paid for 2 classrooms to be built – and 2 were built by the community.

I have been elected to serve on 3 committees: the zonal, environmental and welfare committees. I have been re-elected 3 times, because I am active in this work.

The Zonal Committee has representatives from all 6 zones where Sireet tea growers live. There are 54 members on the committee and we meet 4 times every year. We discuss issues brought to us by members through the Shed Committees and also from the Directors and the officers.

Environmental committee. There are 12 members. We discuss how to keep our environment clean. We have a tree nursery and we decide which type of trees to plant there. When the tree seedlings are ready to be transplanted, members of the Environmental Committee distribute them to the tea farmers and instruct them where and how to plant the seedlings. The environment is a very important aspect of the Fairtrade audit.



We also advise farmers about how to store and look after their agricultural chemicals (again a Fairtrade requirement). They should build a lockable store in their compound to keep their chemicals.

We also check that farmers are providing latrines in their fields for use during tea picking.

Welfare Committee. There are 12 members. The main work of the welfare committee is running the Sireet OEP health insurance scheme for co-operative members and their families. Members who join the scheme pay 500 Ksh per month (or 200ksh for those with very small tea plots). Then, if they require surgery or other treatment at the hospital, the scheme will pay up to 100,000 Ksh in one year (or 40,000 Ksh for the small growers).



There was a commitment to add 50% to farmers' savings from the Fairtrade Premium, but sadly that is now on hold, now that Sainsbury's, which was our major Fairtrade buyer, has stopped purchasing our tea. This scheme started 2 years ago and so far 700 members have signed up.

My family: I am married to Ernest Limo and we are blest with 6 children. 3 have finished their education and they all have degrees. 3 are still in secondary school. Their names are:



Joel Kipsang Too, BSc in IT
Nicholas Kiprotich Too, BSc in Engineering
Jemutai Limo, Bachelor of Business Management in Finance and Banking

Mercy Jepkemboi, Year 4 at Siret Secondary School
Faith Jerubet, Year 4 at Lugulu Girls High School.
Cornelius Kipruto, Year 1 at Nakuru Boys High School

So please we ask you to buy Fairtrade-certified goods, especially tea, so as to enable us to have guaranteed minimum prices for our produce and also to receive the Fairtrade Premium, because Fairtrade is wonderful. It has significantly improved my life and that of my family.

Esther Chepkwony, 2nd March 2018.