

## **LUIS ARMANDO CHOCO, COCOA PRODUCER**



My name is Luis Armando Choco, an indigenous Mayan living in the village of San Pedro Columbia, Toledo District, Belize. I am currently managing the Toledo Cocoa Growers Association (TCGA). I have been working with the cocoa farmers for almost 5 years and have since developed a close working relationship with them, developing farmer ethics and understanding basic social and economic needs. Since becoming Fairtrade, the TCGA has accomplished various social, environmental and economic benefits for the farmers, including the rehabilitation of an abandoned cocoa plantation whose income provides jobs for farmers and assistance for local schools. Similarly, it provides loans to farmers for major orchard maintenance thereby increasing productivity. Fairtrade contributes significantly to farmers when given the right to decide where their money will be spent.

The TCGA is a grassroots association whose vision is to “improve the socioeconomic standard of living of its farmers through competitive and diversified systems of production that incorporate sound ecological practices”. Today the TCGA has a membership of 1020 farmers, both men and women, whose lives are dependent on sustainable farming, cocoa being one of their major sources of income. TCGA continues to work for the interest of the farmers, maintaining Fairtrade and Organic certification as well as maintaining a premium price for quality cocoa beans.

My own responsibilities, amongst others, include the daily purchasing of cocoa beans, ensuring that all the procedures of certifiers are adhered to and ensuring that our farmers are being provided with the best technical and capacity-building skills necessary for them to increase productivity and attain the maximum benefit from the price they receive.