

Oliva Kishero

Oliva was born on a coffee farm in 1973 in the same village she lives in today. She left school at 17 to get married. She regretted not being able to study to 'O' Level and eventually, after having four children, went back to school and gained her 'O' Level certificate. She couldn't afford to continue to 'A' Level but plans to enrol in a business administration course and would love to get the skills so that she could get a job working for Gumutindo or a similar business. Oliva would particularly like to learn more about coffee marketing and get work in that area.

Oliva is one of Buginyanya Co-op's seven committee members and has been treasurer of Gumutindo for four years. She takes these responsibilities very seriously and is proud that she is setting an example for other women.

"I am a representative of my co-op society and also of our 10 women members. In Africa women are under men. If your husband refuses to let you go to work then you can't go, that's final.

"It's the women who do all the work in the coffee gardens while men 'supervise'. Women prepare the food and look after the children; they do everything in the home as well. But now women are getting jobs and getting more respect from men. Women have seen me become a successful farmer and a voice in the co-op and many women farmers are interested in joining our co-op. They have seen foreigners come to my farm with their cameras and they admire what I do. Now they also want to earn their own money, to be independent and support their families financially. And now some of the men are realising that it is better for their home if they treat women more equally."

Gumutindo buys all the coffee its 3,000 members produce and sells 99% of it to Fairtrade buyers. It receives the guaranteed Fairtrade minimum price plus an organic premium. This means members can predict their income and plan their finances accordingly.

*It receives the guaranteed Fairtrade minimum price of 121 cents a pound plus the organic premium of 15 cents a pound and pays members in two stages after deducting its costs. This means members can predict their income and plan their finances accordingly.*

Oliva says: "Fairtrade is a good idea and makes a big difference to us. It is marketing our coffee and giving us a fair price. And we know we are not being cheated."

She explains that life could be very hard before the co-op started buying their coffee. "We women carried the coffee to market on our backs, sometimes to villages 10 kilometres away. The traders would say our coffee is no good and offer us a low price. We had to take what they offered or carry it all the way back to our farms."

The co-ops receive an additional Fairtrade premium to invest in projects that benefit the farmers and their communities. Each year at the AGM the members discuss how they want to spend the money. They recently built a new village coffee store where members' coffee can be kept safe and dry away from the sun, rain and dust.

Oliva is a member of the Gumutindo Social Premium Sub-committee. Their job is to examine the plans of the six member co-ops to make sure they have the budget to carry them out. There is a consensus among members that projects should help the whole community, not just coffee farmers. Future plans include improving local roads: the potholes are so bad in places that only four wheel drive vehicles can use them. The ubiquitous small buses can only get so far up some roads and bicycles can't be used. This means everyone wastes long hours walking up and down the mountain whenever they need to get to the towns on the plain.

Improving schools is a priority. They want to build more classrooms and a computer lab and provide grants or scholarships for the poorer children.

"The co-op provides a place to sell our coffee quickly. The coffee store is a place where we can meet and discuss coffee matters with other farmers. The co-op provides information about how to improve quality and explains how this will make our coffee more marketable in the future. It pays us in cash when we deliver our coffee and we also get a second payment when the coffee has been sold. No farmers who aren't members of the co-op get this.

"The Buginyanya Co-op will expand to 1,500 members when all the farmers who want to join are able to. First they have to bring their standards up to our level. The Gumutindo committee and co-ordinator help them with this. After joining, they must continue with the process of organic conversion. This is a requirement of membership."