

From the Rainforest TO THE COFFEE CUP

... AND THE SMALLHOLDERS PROFIT

Until some years ago, wild coffee was known only to the farmers of the Ethiopian rainforest. In their homes they enjoyed the aromatic black liquid, but the rare plant was not something from which much money could be made – until a development initiative brought together the producers in the South and the coffee connoisseurs in the North.

1 Few people associate the east African country of Ethiopia with a dense rainforest. Yet once there were forests in the south-west of the country covering an area the size of the former West Germany. Only a tiny portion of these forests remains. However, the remnants continue to harbour many endemic species of animals and plants that are native to no other part of the world. One such species is *Coffea arabica*, the most precious of the coffee varieties. It first grew here thousands of years ago and this is the only place in which it continues to grow wild in the forest. With its undreamt-of biological diversity, this forest represents a genetic treasure house of enormous value for mankind.

2 *Coffea arabica* is an evergreen plant that grows where it is protected and shaded by trees. Its preferred natural habitat is the lower stories of the mountain rainforest, at altitudes between 1,400 and 2,000 metres. As soon as the first rain falls after the dry season in February, the trees and bushes produce white flowers on thin branches, permeating the forest with their pervasive scents.

3 Nine months after flowering, the coffee plants bear red, cherry-like fruits. The sweet, soft flesh conceals two seeds, flattened on their inner side – the green, rock-hard “coffee beans”. Depending on the location in the Ethiopian highlands, the plants have adapted in the course of evolution to the different growing conditions and so have developed a great number of different varieties – with properties that could be of great importance for future breeding.

4 The inhabitants of the present-day province of Kafa have probably been using the coffee berries for more than a thousand years. They also discovered how to roast the beans and drink the coffee-flavoured liquid. Now, as then, they pick the wild-growing fruits for their own use and sell them at the local markets. The preparation of coffee – celebrated in the well known “coffee ceremony” – is an essential part of Ethiopian tradition and everyday life.

5 For the best quality, only the red, ripe berries are used. When the berries are dried, fermentation begins to take place inside the seed. This produces substances that are responsible for the delicate flavour of the arabica coffee after roasting. This traditional method of fermentation is superior to the commercial process, which involves removing the flesh of the coffee berry in a water bath. This process robs the coffee of its wild, spicy and fruity notes.

6 Today, the smallholders dry the coffee berries on well-ventilated drying frames. The dried fruits are then milled to obtain the green coffee beans. When coffee prices were low, many farmers would simply spread the berries on the ground to spare themselves the work of laying them out. This often resulted in the fruit going mouldy, which in turn affected the flavour of the beans. As a result, the inferior coffee could not be sold on the international market.

8 The small-scale farmers of the Kafa province normally live from what grows in their fields. Coffee is the only product with which they can earn some additional money. With the aid of the development project, some 6,500 farmers are now organised into cooperatives selling coffee of a single variety and from a single source. The profit from this business has pushed up the value of the coffee forests to such an extent that it would make no sense for the farming families to cut them down and replace them with maize or millet fields.

7 Since high-quality wild coffee has started fetching a good price, farmers in the province of Kafa have formed cooperatives. The coffee beans are brought to special collecting points where experts from the project check them for quality. The cooperatives’ recently established umbrella organisation has been granted its own export licence and can thus export the coffee it buys directly, bypassing the middlemen. The extra profit is shared out among the members of the cooperatives and invested in improving local infrastructure.

10 Sacks of the coffee are transported by lorry to the coast. When they reach the port of Djibouti they are packed into containers and shipped abroad. In the first five years of the project, the Farmers Union exported almost 500 tonnes of raw coffee. Upon arrival in its country of destination, the coffee is taken to special roasting facilities where it is slow-roasted in small quantities at low temperatures. Experts regard the wild coffee from Kafa to be one of the best varieties in the world.

11 After a long journey, the rare product from the homeland of coffee reaches the coffee cups of the consumers. The project has fulfilled all expectations: the smallholders of Kafa now have the means of improving their economic position without further assistance. They know that a product of whose exceptional quality they themselves are already convinced is valued and appreciated in other parts of the world too. That gives them an incentive to invest further in quality and in particular to conserve the natural basis of their business – the rainforest, without whose protective, shady roof the wild coffee cannot flourish.





Development FROM WITHIN

Ethiopia is one of the most fascinating countries in the world, but also one of the poorest. It has imposing landscapes and unique biological diversity, while facing enormous population growth and struggling with an infrastructure that puts a brake on development. The country still has the remnants of rainforests, but they are shrinking at an alarming rate.

These forests in the south-west of the country are home to the wild-growing *Coffea arabica*. It is this important crop which is the focus of the development project, involving co-operation between private companies, NGOs and the German Technical Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit) GTZ. The forests form a natural seed bank whose value as a genetic resource experts estimate at up to 1.5 billion dollars. Despite this immense value, smallholders in the past earned nothing at all from preserving the Arabica gene pool.

In the light of this disparity, a range of partners with differing expertise and experience got together to launch a model project whose aim is to promote the sustainable development of the entire region. The main objective of this multi-componential project is to establish a permanent international market for Ethiopian wild coffee. An appropriately high price for this speciality, so the thinking goes, would make it more attractive in the long term for farmers to conserve the forest than to convert it into ploughland.

The partners are also keen to have the area recognized as a UNESCO biosphere reserve in order to establish a strong link between development and conservation. A large-scale nature reserve of this kind, which would include both untouched core zones of forest, buffer and transition zones in the region, would provide important marketing opportunities both for local products and for tourism to the “birthplace” of coffee.

THE RIGHT PRICE FOR QUALITY

The economic responsibility for the wild coffee project lies with the German company Original Food. The company imports sun-dried wild coffee from the Bonga Forest to Europe where it is refined and marketed as a speciality product. The local cooperatives are supported on issues such as improving quality by coffee experts from Kraft Foods, who have set up quality laboratories specifically for this purpose.

Finally, GTZ, the implementing organisation active on behalf of the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), contributes the experience of an international organisation, has all the necessary contacts at policy-making level, and provides the local experts.

On the Ethiopian side, the project has developed an impressive momentum of its own. When the farmers realised that the product they themselves held in such high esteem could also fetch a good price on the market, some of the cooperatives that had formed during the era of Ethiopian socialism but subsequently fallen into inactivity, awoke from years of slumber. On their own initiative, with the support of the local government, they created a quality control system, provided advice to the smallholders and set up a network of central collection points.

With the support of the project partners, the cooperatives, which now number the grand total of 26, then set up the umbrella organisation the Kafa Forest Coffee Farmers Cooperative Union under whose auspices over 6,500 farmers are now organized. The union has its own export licence, which means it can sell and transport Kafa's wild coffee to the port of Djibouti without having to employ middlemen.

PROGRESS ON ALL FRONTS

Within a short time, local harvesting and processing conditions had improved significantly. Since then, the amount of high-quality, sustainably harvested, certified organic wild coffee produced each year has risen steadily. Members of the cooperatives have received training in harvesting, internal monitoring systems and aspects of fair trade. Managers and bookkeepers have been employed, and offices and storage facilities set up. The Farmers Union has such a good credit standing that farmers can be paid before the coffee has actually been sold on the international market.

The smallholders of Kafa take a certain pride in the fact that their product and labour is appreciated by connoisseurs and gastronomic experts in faraway Europe. They can see their lives improving in other ways, too, as the social aspects of the project take effect. In numerous areas, the villagers themselves have taken over responsibility for rainforest conservation and for granting rights to use the forest. With support of the DSW, youth clubs provide information on the threat of HIV/Aids and the benefits and necessity of family planning. Nurses and midwives are now active even in remote areas, caring for the local population.

In order to avoid stagnation in the development process and to ensure that things improve even further for Kafa province, the “birthplace” of coffee, yet more economic support and targeted project work is planned.

The medium-term objective, for instance, is to set up an internationally recognized nature conservation area to foster the development of the region over a sustained period and to ensure that the remaining varieties of wild coffee are enduringly preserved in their natural habitat, the rain forest. The rules governing UNESCO biosphere reserves permit the sustainable use of resources, making this a promising approach.

It will take time to achieve this ambitious goal, but time that it is worth investing - for Kafa, for Ethiopia and, from a climate policy perspective, for all of us. Only the necessary groundwork will ensure that the rain forests can continue to fulfil their crucial function for the global climate.



PPP IN COLLABORATIVE DEVELOPMENT?

As a form of cooperation between the state and the private sector, Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) provide an effective means of linking private sector interests and government development goals for the benefit of both sides. In 1999, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) set up the PPP programme and commissioned GTZ to implement such projects.

SUMMARY OF THE PPP PROJECT

	Before project start	Now
Annual export of wild coffee certified as being from a single site	0	up to 150 tonnes
Trade price for one lb (456 g) of raw coffee	45 US cents	up to 160 US cents
Number of cooperatives	3	26
Number of farmers organised into cooperatives	57	6,500
Cooperative warehouses	0	12
Number of people profiting from the export of wild coffee	0	ca. 55,000

The nature conservation and development organisation GEO Rainforest Conservation, which has been active in the Kafa region for years, is working to ensure that the long-term conservation of the rainforests can be sustainably reconciled with the careful utilisation of wild coffee. A participatory forest management scheme which sees the smallholders enter into agreements with the local government of the Kafa Province is an important element of this work.

The large-scale conservation area is planned by the Ethiopian government in close cooperation with the environmental group NABU (Naturschutzbund Deutschland e.V.). GEO Rainforest Conservation and the Aid by Trade Foundation provide support to the implementation on both the local and national levels.

The social aspects of the project are jointly coordinated by the German Foundation for World Population (DSW) and Rotary Germany. The measures these bodies are involved in are primarily aimed at slowing population growth in order to reduce pressure on scarce natural resources, and at halting the spread of HIV/Aids in the region through an extensive programme of outreach work.



IMPRINT

The following organisations are involved in this project:

Aid by Trade Foundation (www.cottonmadeinafrica.com)
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (www.gtz.de)
German Foundation for World Population (DSW) (www.weltbevölkerung.de)
GEO Rainforest Conservation (www.regenwald.de)
Kafa Forest Coffee Farmers Cooperative Union (www.kafacoffeeunion.com)
Kraft Foods (www.kraftfoods.de)
Naturschutzbund Deutschland e.V. (www.NABU.de)
Original Food GmbH (www.originalfood.de)
Rotary Germany (www.rotary.de)

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PRESERVING ETHIOPIA'S Wild Beans

A successful development cooperation project shows how nature conservation and economic development can complement each other: the Ethiopian province of Kafa is the only place in the world where wild coffee grows in the rainforest. The genetic treasure house the forest represents, however, is under threat from logging and deforestation. In order to create an international market for Kafa's wild coffee so that this rare product can be sold, Ethiopian smallholders have joined forces with partners in a move which also benefits the rainforest.

