



## ••• MESSAGE FROM THE MANAGING DIRECTOR

- As Fairtrade is making solid inroads into mainstream consumer markets and Fairtrade Products become ubiquitous in many a household, journalists writing about it are virtually ensured an eager audience. And their reports are often critical, as some of those published in the past year show. As if when Fairtrade does indeed promote the development of poor producers and workers in the global South, it isn't worth writing about. The problem with most of these critical stories is that they are so superficially researched that they either only paint a very small part of the picture, or are plainly erroneous. Moreover, to really understand Fairtrade's lasting impact, which encompasses much more than extra money, nothing beats meeting producers where they work and live.

- Last June, I visited several Fairtrade Certified Tea Estates in Darjeeling in north-eastern India. One of them was Samabeong Tea Estate, hidden in the forests of the Himalaya foothills. It was established by the British colonialists in 1882. After India's independence in 1947, new Indian owners took over. All along, it produced "brick tea" which was transported by foot across the mountains to Tibet in the north, where this tea had a steady market. But in 1962, China invaded Tibet and the Indian-Tibet border was closed. The estate closed down, and a few thousand families lost their main and often only source of livelihood. In 1990 Samabeong was acquired by Tea Promoters India (TPI), an innovative company that, with strong support from the German Fair Trade Organization gepa, heavily invested in reviving the estate. Nowadays, 265 workers and their families live in small houses scattered on the 500 hectares of the estate. They produce highest-quality organic Darjeeling tea, jointly managing the estate with TPI. When Samabeong became Fairtrade Certified, a "Joint Body" was established of mostly women workers and some TPI representatives, to manage the Fairtrade Premium funds received on Fairtrade sales. The funds' most spectacular use to date: the equipment of all houses with solar panels. They brought electricity, light, and ...television: for the first time ever, the

isolated mountain community had a window on the world. Samabeong's Joint Body is led by women workers, who manage the investment of over 50.000 € Premium money a year. Together with Tea Promoters, gepa and Fairtrade, they have given the Samabeong community a new lease of life. But it did take a generation to achieve this. Indeed, development is a long-term process, rarely spectacular, and the slow, incremental progress is not really the stuff journalists make their headlines with. Some years ago, we investigated the critical factors for successful worker empowerment and development through Fairtrade on estates and plantations such as Samabeong. While these factors varied from one estate to the next, three success factors stood out: **1. commitment of the estate management to Fairtrade, 2. adequate support to the Joint Body – which is a specialty of FLO's "Producer Business Unit", with its over 25 "Liaison Officers" based in the producer countries, and 3. regular Fairtrade sales.**

- The last factor explains why FLO's member Labelling Initiatives and we at FLO put so much emphasis on making Fairtrade Products more attractive for consumers: because it is only through consumers' daily purchases of Fairtrade Certified Darjeeling Tea, for example, that Samabeong's workers receive the Fairtrade Premium. Which is why the continued increase in Fairtrade sales all over the world – for a value of over 1,6 billion € in 2006 – is the single most important milestone of Fairtrade Labelling in 2006.

- Finally, a personal note. After over six years of serving Fairtrade Labelling as FLO's managing director, I am handing over FLO's direction to Mr. Rob Cameron. It has been an honour for me to serve the organization and to contribute to the improvement of the livelihoods of ever more producers, workers and their families.

- **LUUK LAURENS ZONNEVELD**