



Cocoa - from farming to retailing

A Swedish-Fijian culture
and knowledge exchange
- Project Description

Partners:



WHY CROSS THE RIVER TO FILL A PAIL OF WATER?

Sometimes little details are worth recording, and sometimes it is the little details that help everything come together. Just as for many countries, their flags reflect their national characteristics, so those of Fiji which up close are particularly apparent in the precise details of its flag. The national flag features the British Union Jack on a light blue background, and the shield from the Fijian coat of arms. The coat of arms features two warriors with war club and spear, a takia (Fijian canoe) and a shield. The shield bears images of the staples and hopes of Fijian prosperity; sugar cane, a coconut palm, a bunch of bananas, a white dove of peace, and last but not least, a heraldic lion clasping a cocoa pod.*

Evidently cocoa farming was once integrated into Fijian culture. After discussing this matter with people around the Fiji mainland the unanimous response was that those times were long gone and that it would be hard to find such plantations still being worked. However the Fiji Ministry of Agriculture, Sugar and Land Resettlement referred to the agricultural district of Korovou, just north of the Fijian capital of Suva, as being the area where to find cocoa farmers still in operation. Mr. Ilai Nabobo who is one of a handful of cocoa farmers in the area guided me around his orchard, which is literally in the rainforest as an integrated part of a self-sufficiency farming system. We were accompanied by Mrs. Tepola Seniloli from the Korovou Agriculture Department. They informed me about the quality of the cacao varieties he grows, the harvest procedures and how they transport it all to nearby Suva, from where it is finally exported. I asked him if he and his family regularly indulged in the pleasure of drinking hot chocolate. The answer was bewildering. When introduced to the Fiji Islands, THEOBROMA CACAO apparently did not come bolstered by its supporting chocolate culture. The only chocolate products obtainable in the cacao farming district of Korovou were such imported products as Nestlé Cocoa Powder, Snickers and Twix bars. When they heard of my experience of Mexican chocolate making, where roasted cocoa beans, sugar, and flavourings such as vanilla and cinnamon are used, they were all very surprised at how easy it all seemed to be. After a moment of silence the cocoa farmer Mr. Ilai Nabobo said: “Vanilla grows wild in my back yard...” So why cross the river to fill a pail of water?

Fabian Rimfors
Project initiator

* The Fijian coat of arms is featured on the cover of this document.

Introduction

A preparatory trip was undertaken in September 2006 in order to properly plan a culture and knowledge exchange within the cocoa and chocolate industry between the Swedish NGO **COCOA BELLO** and the Fijian co-operative **TAILEVU PROVINCE COCOA GROWERS AND PRODUCERS CO-OPERATIVE ASSOCIATION LIMITED**. The Fijian sister group has declared that an exchange of this character has much been longed-for and that it can create a platform for a recovery of Fijian cocoa industry which has been declining for more than 15 years. In Sweden the exchange aims at contributing to bring increased knowledge about the agricultural prerequisites of cocoa and the wholesome properties the cocoa bean offers. The needs and competence of both organizations supplement and correspond to each other very well.

The importance of getting a general and comprehensive picture of the industry was equally important for both parties. Without this picture and holistic perspective it is impossible to build a platform with the prerequisites to generate a fair dispersion on equal terms vertically throughout the industry. These are fundamental principles important to maintain as society becomes increasingly globalized and polarized. For this reason it is just as important that the stages *after export* from the country of origin are equally initiated in the conditions and opportunities the commodity requires until that stage, as it is important for the stages *before import* to understand how the commodity is processed and consumed at the destination.



Cocoa farmer Isikeli Namoro holding on to promise, an amenolado cocoa pod.

Background

Over the past 10 years the character of Swedish chocolate consumption has changed, from being a “candy product” among many others, to becoming a luxury commodity. Increasing numbers of international chocolate companies open their businesses to the Swedish public. We have become more familiar with previously unknown ways of using high quality chocolate in gourmet cooking and chocolate has transformed from being unhealthy sweets to a wholesome condiment in life.

Today seminars and workshops in everything from chocolate manufacturing to chocolate tasting are organized throughout Sweden. Surprisingly though, little is done to promote discussions about cocoa cultivation and its conditions and very few asks themselves about the origin and processing requirements of this agricultural product. Little is known in the western hemisphere about cocoa, its provenance and agricultural prerequisites. But just as little is known among cocoa farmers in developing countries about how their primary produce later on is refined and consumed, and also what the possibilities their crops offer, especially in terms of niche marketing. This situation generally applies to all cocoa cultivating areas with the exception of countries in Latin America. In Fiji it is even often wrapped in a mystery in what field of application their commodity circulates as well as how it is refined and consumed at its final destination.

Fiji is probably better known as a paradise island than as a cocoa producer, nevertheless there is a modest production with great potentials. The potentials are constituted by the fact that the varieties of cacao cultivated here are regarded as the most exclusive ones, as well as the fact that only a certain amount of the cultivated cacao is harvested. The farmers of relatively modest means, who cultivate cocoa, do not utilize their produce to a larger extent, despite the fact that they occasionally purchase refined chocolate products (bars, drinks etc.). The knowledge among farmers of how to refine and process has been lost and is hardly represented anywhere in the islands at all. The processing of the Fijian cocoa beans takes place in remote distances; mainly in the countries of import.

To develop and establish the know-how of processing and refining cocoa beans among the Fijian cocoa farmers would not only contribute to diminish the dependence on world market prices and reduce expenditures by not buying imported chocolate. It would also lessen the increments the export and import present products are being the object of on their detour back to Fiji. But most important of all is perhaps to emphasize that this could contribute to the production of a more wholesome high quality chocolate accessible to wider circles, while focusing on the production process, from organic farming to an end product labeled Fair Trade.

This product could with advantage be sold in various forms to meet the domestic market demands, locally, regionally and nationally. The considerable amounts of tourists who visit the Fiji Islands each year also constitute a great potential as they will be able to support domestic production while shopping for souvenirs and refreshments. By re-establishing a chocolate culture, and in that way contributing to boost ecotourism, Fiji could set a good example when it comes to sustainable deployment of available resources. At the same time as this kind of tourism adds to improving conditions for the local population, which we regard as being of vital importance.

Besides contributing to enhance knowledge of cocoa production and chocolate processing in different regions and cultures of the world, we aim to highlight this type of chocolate with its wholesome properties and high content of nutrients. We expect to supply the Swedish public with the knowledge of traditional processing techniques while focusing on the high content of nutrients and cocoa as a commodity in the manufacturing process.

Objects and execution

Cocoa Bello's object is to bridge present day's gaps in knowledge in Sweden as well as in Fiji and to create a supporting network, from farming to retailing, for future deployment of available resources. International co-operation will in this way help local small-scale holdings to establishing a sustainable development plan for production, processing and retailing (environmentally as well as socioeconomically) with first-class chocolate products. The project also aim to obtain and promote public dissemination of information linked to sustainable and small-scale farming in developing countries, while focusing on the global market's possibilities to support, develop and have a positive outlook on sustainable and fair trade.

The project resulted in a knowledge and experience exchange between Fiji and Sweden. The exchange consisted of delegations visiting each country respectively, where selected representatives from the cocoa industry (and related industries) in Sweden visited local cocoa farmers and marketing stages in Fiji, and later vice versa in Sweden. The Swedish delegation was represented by the non-profit NGO *Cocoa Bello* and the Fijian delegation was represented by the farmers' co-operative *Tailevu Province Cocoa Growers and Producers Co-operative Association Limited*.

Thus far the exchange has generated a greater understanding of the need of a sustainable agriculture and fair trade. A platform has been created for meetings between local producers in developing countries and representatives from the growing Swedish chocolate market. Consumers will be given the possibility of supporting fair trade and local community development and welfare in developing countries through quality-conscious purchases.

The exchange trips lasted for two weeks in each country respectively. In connection with the delegations' visits, seminars and lectures were organized, concerning local customs in relation to chocolate production and consumption. Further there were daily field trips to locations and factories/shops within the cocoa, and related, industries. Each day was concluded with discussions on today's topics (field trips/seminars etc.). During the entire visit in both countries all activities were documented on camera and film. This documentation will serve as a tool for further and future discussions and as a distribution instrument for the experiences acquired during the exchange.

Prerequisites for a successful exchange

Strategies on how the Swedish-Fijian collaboration will continue and how expected long term objectives shall be attained has been worked out together by Cocoa Bello and the Tailevu cocoa co-operative. The quality of the exchange project is assured by establishing broad *and* vertical support at all levels, locally and regionally as well as nationally and internationally, from farming of cocoa to retailing of chocolate. The mutual understanding regarding the ideas behind the project and its execution has from the very beginning been met with full sympathy, despite vast differences in social orders, cultures and traditions. Consequently under the existing circumstances the exchange has every chance of succeeding in attaining its objectives and to create opportunities ranging far beyond the exchange. Furthermore both organizations share a strong ambition expecting the exchange to generate long-lasting effects on the cocoa industry as well as being a breeding ground and springboard for future initiatives and co-operation.

Time Schedule

October 2005 – August 2006

Contacting sister organization in Fiji, planning of a preparatory trip and exchange in connection to the exchange project: **Cocoa – from farming to retailing, a culture and knowledge exchange.**

September 2006

Preparatory trip to Fiji.

October 2006

Reporting of the preparatory trip to Fiji.

November 2006 – January 2007

Ratification of exchange program

May 2007 – June 2007

Exchange 1: Sweden→Fiji

August 2007 – September 2007

Exchange 2: Fiji→Sweden

September 2007

Evaluation and documentation of the exchange



Official IT-sponsor



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