

## PEOPLE OF 3 FAITHS WORK TOGETHER USING COFFEE TO BRING A BETTER LIFE



The following story illustrates how a village in Uganda hungered for a better life. They grew coffee but despaired of the low prices they received for all their hard work. The villagers included Jews, Muslims and Christians who tolerated each other but were not close. In 2003 they came together to form a co-operative; they have been working together to improve their coffee production. Together they have built a Fairtrade relationship with a coffee importer in the US to get a better deal for their coffee and they have decided together on ways to improve the life of their community.

An observer\* commented:

*"There are Jews, Muslims and Christians in this coffee cooperative. They are all working together. It's one community. The co-op president is Jewish, the vice-president is Christian, and the treasurer is Muslim. There are hundreds of families all together"*

**[Laura Wetzler, the Ugandan Coordinator for the Jewish NGO, Kulanu, based in Washington DC]**

What you have here:

- a quote from the founder, JJ Keki
- the story of how the co-op was formed
- update on progress and situation today
- what farmers say
- interviews with farmers – this section includes three farmers (one for each faith) talking about their experience, including the founder and Director. You can read the views of many more farmers on the Mirembe Kawomera website <http://www.mirembekawomera.com/cooperative>
- how you could use this material

## THE PEACE KAWOMERA COOPERATIVE



- **a quote from JJ Keki, founder & director, Peace Kawomera**

*"I brought the idea to my fellow friends, Muslims and Christians, and I said we should make a co-op selling our coffee but as well as spreading peace in the world.*

*They were all so happy so we called it Mirembe, which means peace, Kawomera, which means that even our coffee must be of quality. Then we made that cooperative."*

- **how the co-op was formed**

Mirembe Kawomera Coffee began with one man's dream. In 2003, JJ Keki, a Ugandan coffee farmer, walked door to door asking his Jewish, Christian, and Muslim neighbours to put aside old differences and come together. Their community of third and fourth generation coffee farmers was struggling to make a living off the low prices offered by the local market. With the assistance of Laura Wetzler from the US-based Jewish organization Kulanu, these Jewish, Christian and Muslim farmers formed a cooperative to build lasting prosperity in their villages and to spread a message of peace throughout the world. They named their coffee Mirembe Kawomera, which means, "Delicious Peace" in the Luganda language.



Somali Bissaso, one of the Peace Kawomera Cooperative's most prominent members, hosts a visit from fellow farmers.

Photo: Ben Corey-Moran, 2006



One of Peace Kawomera's 200 women members.

Photo: Ben Corey-Moran, 2006

- **update on progress and situation today**

By 2008, the Peace Kawomera Cooperative had grown to over 750 members. Thanks to their collective effort, the farmers sell directly to Thanksgiving Coffee Company, and receive prices four times higher than what they were previously paid. This has enabled farmers to send their children to school, start savings accounts, and reinvest in their farms. (lots more on the website <http://www.mirembekawomera.com/development> )

Together, the farmers have succeeded in doing something that none could have done alone. As they face the many challenges of life in rural Uganda, they look to their cooperative for hope and strength. In the coming years, the Cooperative plans to invest in land and equipment, offer microfinance to members and contribute to a variety of public health and education projects.

# STORIES TO INSPIRE



## • what farmers say



Photo: Holly Moskowitz, 2009

Kadija Lackahi 81 years old, Muslim, who joined Peace Kawomera in 2005, says:  
*"Peace Kawomera is like rain during the dry season. My joy is too much. The market was so bad that when Peace Kawomera formed it was like the first drop of rain during the dry season."*



Photo: Rachel Namadousi, 2005

Nakidodo Alisati, 42 years old, Muslim says that, when religions work together for peace in a world that's often divided by religious violence,  
*"It means a lot because we see each other as people of one God. Who created us to serve Him. Religions are like departments of production in a factory; this means we need each other to serve humanity."*

## • interviews with farmers

Hadija Wankusi 44 years old, Muslim, joined Peace Kawomera in 2004



Photo: Holly Moskowitz, 2009

### What does Peace Kawomera mean to you?

Peace Kawomera is an organization that has created peace to everyone in the community.

### What was life like before Peace Kawomera?

Life was not very good. We used to sell our coffee at a very low price. Income was not a concern of our buyers. It was not fair.

### What has been the greatest change in your life since joining Peace Kawomera?

Peace Kawomera trains us on how to maintain our coffee. The standards have gone up and then we are even certified organic.

### Did you face any religious discrimination before Peace Kawomera formed?

Before we were friends but not close. The government used to control relationships between religions, but Peace Kawomera is about development of relationships.

### How many children live your home?

8

### What does Fair Trade mean to you?

As the social premium comes in, we can pay for school fees and goats for our home.

### What does coffee mean to you and your family?

It means a source of income and employment for the family.

### What are your hopes for the future?

Our cooperative will be one of the best in the country.

Wotti Elisa 25 years old, Christian

### What does coffee mean to you and your family?

It means an income generating activity, it is an investment in which one can reap profits.

### What are your hopes for the future?

My hopes are to improve on the household and community income.

### What difference has Fair Trade made in your life?

Farmers have been encouraged because of the prices and have improved their output.

### What does the Mirembe Kawomera Cooperative mean to your community?

There is unity amongst the people, they have a common goal, they share responsibilities, they have a sense on community ownership of projects, they struggle to make their programs succeed.



Elisa takes a break from weeding his tomato patch.

Photo: Rachel Namadousi, 2005

# STORIES TO INSPIRE



## **What does it mean when religions work together for peace in a world that's often divided by religious violence?**

Before we used to take Jews as enemies who killed Jesus Christ, and Muslims as violent people, we used not to work with them, but we have tasted with time, that our community problems are the same regardless of religion. Therefore working together has made us clear the misconceived ideas and we have tasted the fruits of working together.

## **What is the best thing about working together in a cooperative?**

We can gain a lot in the forms of monetary and equipment acquisition. Cooperatives can make our communities develop.

**JJ Keki** Founder and Chairman of the Cooperative, Jewish

## **When did you decide that your community needed the Mirembe Kawomera Cooperative?**

I decided to initiate this cooperative having been elected by many Muslims and Christians into the seat of a Local Council III leader in Namanyonyi Sib-County in 2002.

## **What were relations like before, and how did you unite the farmers of the Mirembe Kawomera Cooperative?**

The relationships were not so bad, but the cooperating spirit was not in existence as the cooperative movement had lost direction in the country for over a decade. With the farmers they were fragmented, each one was for his/her self. As leader of course I had the foresight of improving the lives of the farmers the majority whom I lead.

I had to mobilize the farmers using my position in the community, we brainstormed and through participatory discussions we came up with Mirembe Kawomera Cooperative Society.

## **What did you have to do to bring all three communities of faith together?**

I have had a personal and good relationship with the Muslims and Christians on top of being a Jew. This also has a firm background when I campaigned to convince them to vote for me. I had a conviction that all these groups could come to me. I had a tour that took me to mosques, churches and synagogues to tell the communities about peaceful coexistence for development in communities. So when I called them, my intentions were already clear to the communities.

## **What are relationships between the communities like outside of the cooperative?**

The relationships in communities outside the cooperative is not so bad, people love each other, and only there are some problems with ethnicity especially on the side of tribe especially on land ownership. This is one area of conflict that can be addressed.

## **How did religion help to unite the farmers of the Mirembe Kawomera Cooperative?**

Only we looked at common things that were reflected in the holy books that were in relationship to the values of cooperators. For example we all acknowledge that we greet with the word of "Peace," "Shalom," "Salam," "Mirembe."

## **What are your hopes for the Mirembe Kawomera Cooperative?**

We hope to make the cooperative a model of championing peace and development in the area. We also hope that others will emulate the principles of Mirembe and bring about peaceful coexistence in communities.

## **What does it mean to buy Mirembe Kawomera Coffee?**

It means that the buyer and the consumer want quality, peace and love, and this can be spread world over.



JJ Keki and his youngest son Aaron look over the Namatala River Valley, and the slopes of Mt. Elgon.  
Photo: Ben Corey-Moran, 2007

## HOW YOU COULD USE THIS MATERIAL



1. You could just use a quote or tell the basic story of how the community came together as an example in a talk, or:

2. You could involve a number of people in presenting this story to an audience –

You would need:

- a narrator, who could introduce :
- the Founder and Director, JJ Keki, in the village near Mbale, Uganda, and he could introduce:
- some individual members/ farmers
- an interviewer to ask the questions
- you could also add in some of the youth from the village (you'll find them on the website at <http://www.mirembekawomera.com/youth> ) and find out what they hunger for.
- You might like to switch the scene to Fort Bragg, Northern California [to read Paul Katzeff's story of how the Thanksgiving Coffee Company became involved see <http://www.mirembekawomera.com/paulstory> ]
- Round off with a discussion of the benefits of working together / Fairtrade / the role played by the Thanksgiving Coffee Company and reflect on some of the things people said about working together with people of various faiths.