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Good afternoon everyone, my name is Nduzani Zaya, I am the daughter of a Fairtrade farmer, I visited Scotland for Fairtrade Fortnight in 2020 and I am a Trustee of the Scottish Fair Trade Forum.

I was born and raised in Chikwawa in Malawi, and today I'm going to tell you my story and where Fair Trade fits in.

I attended my primary school at Dyeratu primary in Chikwawa, and secondary at Pact North Park in Blantyre.

I am the first born in a family of four girls. Life was pretty good when I was young until September 2006 when I lost my father. Things were tough, though, I was young, I could see how my Mum struggled to raise 4 children all by herself. There was not any financial support from any of my father's relatives. My mother depended on farming maize and beans for consumption. I would help her sometimes during holidays. When I was in secondary, fees were a problem. She sold the land our father left to pay my school fees. The other year my grandfather sold a cow to help my mother with the fees.

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The good thing is I finished high school and went to college. My interests were going to church, reading and chatting with friends. I wanted to be a Manager or an Administrator, but I ended up doing Education. I didn't want to be a teacher because I knew salaries are not good for teachers.

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I was involved in Kasinthula sugarcane farming. I used to help my mother with farming activities like weeding, sowing and fertiliser application. Farmers were benefiting from farming. There have been so many developments which farmers have accomplished due to dividends, and also the Fairtrade premiums. There is a school which was sponsored by Fairtrade, a health clinic, electricity supply in Chinangwa village, water taps and many boreholes that were drilled using the Fairtrade premium.

I will show you more photos of the projects paid for with the Fairtrade premium shortly.

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I chose a different career because I knew my family needed constant income. And as of now, I can't become a farmer at Kasinthula because I don't have land where sugarcane can be grown - that is what is needed to become a farmer.

So I had to find a job to support my family and also help my siblings to go to school. More about that later.

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Fairtrade came along many years ago. Kasinthula was Fairtrade certified in 2004. Kasinthula gets premiums when it sells its sugar on the Fairtrade market. That money goes to farmers for them to use it on various developments and projects. As I said earlier, there is:

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Mantchombe primary school which was built in Chinangwa village. Before this school, children used to walk a very long distance to get to the near school. As a result, children were starting school at the age of 8 or 9 so that they can be able to walk the long distance.

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The Kasinthula clinic. This clinic helps farmers and non-farmers to get immediate help before going to the district hospital.

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Clean water. You cannot talk of Fairtrade without mentioning the clean water that people have now. Before, people used to drink unclean water from streams and rivers. Where cows and goats could also drink. But now, that is history. Many thanks to Fairtrade.

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Women Action Group (WAG). There is a maize mill that is run by women farmers at Kasinthula - that is also another project that came along with the help of Fairtrade.

Women work as a team and they formed a group. Any female farmer is allowed to join. The money they make from the mill, they can give each other small loans to start businesses to help their families, and also, pay fees for their children. The money from this maize mill, women also use it to help the elderly with basic needs and providing any support they can.

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Chinangwa electricity project. Chinangwa was a village located in Chikwawa - rural since it had no electricity. But now, the village has electricity. Before that, people used to travel long distances to go to the maize mill, barbershop or to charge their phones. But now, there are more than 3 maize mills in Chinangwa village. People do small businesses like selling cold drinks, water and barbershops to generate income.

The final project to mention is the Association office and hall which is yet not done. And that leads into the challenges faced as the Fairtrade premiums received have decreased. I will come to that shortly.

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The first challenge faced at Kasinthula is that dividends have been too low. Kasinthula is struggling financially basically because of a loan it got from an agricultural company. That loan was used to replant the sugarcane in all farms to try to improve the yield, and to pay electricity bills. The electricity company had cut the power connection because Kasinthula wasn't able to settle the bills. As a result, sugarcane in the fields suffered because it depends on irrigation, which then led to a low yield.

Another challenge is the increase in costs associated with sugarcane farming.

The costs of purchasing chemicals and fertiliser have gone up especially this last year. This is a challenge because high costs decrease the revenue and profits made by Kasinthula.

Kasinthula doesn't have a mill for the sugarcane, so it depends on the sugar millers, Illovo. Illovo gets 40% of the revenues and this reduces the revenue going to the farmers.

On the same note, 20% of the revenues goes to the transport company, leaving the farmers with 40% revenues to cover operation costs, salaries to employees and dividends to Association farmers.

Covid also impacted farmers due to the restrictions, and revenue decreased.

With these challenges, sugarcane farming is not providing enough income so many farmers will then struggle to send their children to school as they do not have money to afford the school fees. In addition to that, farmers also are lacking enough money to buy food. This year, there have been many cases of deaths of farmers due to malnutrition.

And more, the Association does not have a vehicle to use for medical emergencies or funerals. Such a vehicle would also be used to monitor activity in the fields.

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Despite the challenges, we are resourceful and hard working people - we have started some projects to diversify our income and improve our situation.

The maize mill that is run by women is the first project I can mention - the money especially helps older farmers, and the maize can be given to families who need it.

We also do bee keeping. This is another project I can mention. The aim is to generate income as much as possible from selling bees and honey.

And we have a fish pond. The pond has many fish and when it's harvesting time, they sell to many people, both farmers and non-farmers in order to generate funds for the farmers.

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But on to the impacts of climate change.

The recent cyclones Anna and Freddy brought floods to many areas. Kasinthula suffered a lot from these floods. So much got damaged. The offices were in water, the fish that were in the dams and fish ponds got washed away, and the bee boxes were also washed away.

Cyclone Freddy also damaged the small farms of farmers who grow food crops. And this has increased the rate of famine or hunger amongst farmers.

Our sugarcane yield dropped due to the flooding, which has resulted in what we have available being sold domestically as there is not sufficient surplus to be sold on the international and Fairtrade markets. So we then do not receive the Fairtrade premium which we need desperately to help us protect against future flooding and droughts, and to improve our farms and community.

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But we have made a good start on repairing the damage. Dykes have been built to try to avoid the worst impact of the floods in the future, the dams for the fish have been reconstructed again, and bee farming has started again.

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As for me and my family.

Due to the situation at Kasinthula, and with my Mum being alone, I am responsible for the education and up-keep of my three sisters. They were only able to go to school when I got my first teaching job.

We are all hard working, bright and dynamic people but life is hard, especially when poverty stands in your way. As of now my eldest younger sister can't graduate from university due to available funds. For my next sister, I have paid only two of her four years at college, and my youngest sister has just started university.

And we too have been impacted by the floods. My father left 3 houses – our home and two smaller houses that we rented out. Here you can see the remains of one of those houses, and this white one has also been washed away now. So, we have lost our income from those houses.

So, for me, I am putting my plans for my own education on hold to get my sisters through their education. But the burden of the debt is a lot because I mentioned that one teacher's salary is not enough.

I have dreams though and I am focused on improving my own career to be able to support my sisters to finish their studies. In the future, I would very much like to set up a charity to support girls like me and my sisters who find it hard to get an education in my community in Malawi. We have so much to offer if we could only get there.

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Without the hope of a decent future, many girls just get married and have children, and boys can become involved in bad habits including alcohol and drug abuse. In my community at least. It's a big waste. We need farmers, teachers, doctors, business owners and all the rest.

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So my message is that Fairtrade has made a big difference to my family, to me personally by giving me an education, and to my community. Farmers supplying their crops to the general public work so hard and deserve a fair price. Fairtrade offers that to our farmers, and the premiums are a necessity.

There's more to do at Kasinthula to improve the yield, to diversity our income, to protect ourselves against climate change, to continue to sell on the Fairtrade market, and to increase the dividends paid to farmers. That way farmers can improve their lives and support their children to be educated.

As a farmer at Kasinthula this would mean a better life for my Mum, and then for my sisters and for me too.

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Thank you