

Ian Wood's charity brews up profit for African tea farmers

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Sir Ian Wood said his foundation aimed to end the exploitation of small farmers
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An Aberdeen-based charity has expanded operations in Rwanda and Tanzania intent on creating profitable businesses for 16,000 smallholder farmers.

The Wood Foundation Africa has been working in east Africa since 2012 and has had a dramatic effect on the rural economy. It is estimated that 60,000 small farmers have seen their incomes treble.

The billionaire Sir Ian Wood, who established the tea production initiative, said his brand of “venture philanthropy” had helped to end the exploitation of tea growers by large tea companies.

getting a fair deal, working with tea estates who were exploiting them. These are lifestyle farmers, who were producing the family food crop - to keep the family alive - and the little bit over they sold to get the money to pay school fees. They didn't look ahead.

"We started introducing ways for them to improve yield, to get better quality, to help negotiate a better price, all the things you do over time. We also introduced the concept of a service company, so all our farmers have agronomists and other people they can call on to get help as they go along."

One of the first commitments was to acquire 60 per cent of the Mulindi and Shagasha tea factories in north Rwanda through EATI, a charitable company owned by the Wood foundation and Lord Sainsbury's Gatsby foundation

At Kibeho-Munini in southern Rwanda, 6,000 farmers will supply a tea factory employing 2,000 people and at Rugabano, in the west, the same numbers will benefit in a partnership with India's Luxmi tea company. Last week about 5,000 people joined Sir Ian at Mulundi in a celebration.

In Njombe, Tanzania, the foundation has allied with Unilever to help 3,500 farmers and create 4,000 factory jobs.

"It is thoroughly sustainable, because the farmers' knowledge and experience is vastly improved and you can't take that away from them," said Sir Ian. "The land is also very significantly enhanced."

Forbes magazine estimates that Sir Ian's family trust, established in 2007, has distributed £142 million.



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