



# Intervju med inspektör på FLO-Cert

Felipe Arango

## FLO-CERT Auditor Interview

Bonn 30 okt 2007



**Name:** Felipe Arango

**Age:** 29

**Country:** Columbia

**Auditor since:** 2003

**Education:** Bachelor degree in political science and business administration, Boston University; investment banking analyst for JP Morgan (New York), currently acts as lead for Fairtrade inspectors for FLO-CERT in the Latin American region, as inspector trainer and consultant for certification system development

Family: married, no kids

### **How did you get to know Fairtrade and what made you become an auditor?**

First I was working as a banker. With this knowledge I started my own NGO and from there I got to know Fairtrade. That's when I got interested in becoming a Fairtrade auditor. My first inspections I did in Brazil, now I do inspections in many more countries. I like this job a lot and find it very important, because I believe in the power of the market and that everybody can benefit from it if they get a fair chance.

### **How would you explain roughly what you are doing?**

Very roughly: I promote the credibility of the Fairtrade label in making sure the economic and social standards of Fairtrade are being fulfilled in the cooperatives or plantations.

**How many cooperatives do you inspect?**

Well, at first I was a jet inspector, traveling to different countries where there were no inspectors in reach. Today I do audits in Peru, Brazil, Bolivia and Columbia. Altogether I deal with about 70 to 80 cooperatives.

**Can you give a short description of an inspection?**

My first job is to explain the managing board or board of directors what I will be doing for the next days. Transparency is just as important for me as a Fairtrade inspector as it is for the board of the cooperative. I also try to bring the farmers together for an initial meeting to explain why I am here, what my job is and that I am in the position of helping them to establish better living conditions for themselves and their families. It is very important to build up a climate of mutual trust between the inspector and the farmers. When you are able to get to this point your visit at the cooperative is most effective.

**When you're done with the inspection how long does it take until a cooperative becomes officially certified?**

After the inspection we have a closing meeting with the board. There we discuss the results of the audit, what could be done better or what measures they still have to undertake in order to become Fairtrade certified. When everything is okay it takes about 2 months after the closing meeting that the cooperative gets notice of their certification.

**What do you think what abilities are most important to work as an auditor?**

I think the most important thing is to be able to build up an environment of trust. You have to make sure that the people you are visiting do not feel threatened, forced or observed. You also need to have communication abilities to both speak with the well educated board of directors on the one hand and the sometimes poorly educated farmers on the other hand. You have to listen closely to both groups, take their objections seriously but also bring the message and the importance of complying with the Fairtrade standards across. It also helps a lot to have ecological and financial knowledge.

### **So you can't work as an inspector if you don't bring the financial knowledge?**

Well, you can. FLO-CERT offers workshops for inspectors in financial concerns and in traceability. There you get a good overview and preparation for the job.

### **What was the most extraordinary situation at your job so far? Are there any success stories that really flashed you?**

There are a few success stories that really touch me personally. One example: in the Yungas region in Bolivia the coffee production of the indigenous farmers was completely in the hands of intermediaries for the longest time. They simply couldn't make a living of their harvest and were totally dependent of middlemen who earned a huge amount of money by paying the farmers way to little money for their coffee. After establishing the Fairtrade system in one single coffee cooperative in Yungas the word spread rapidly. After a real short period of time all the farmers in this region are organized in cooperatives and are also Fairtrade certified. Today we count 14 cooperatives there. It was amazing what Fairtrade did to the people: it gave them back their pride and helped them building up schools, infrastructure and a medical supply. Another example is a banana plantation in Columbia. With the Fairtrade premium they were able to establish a housing project for the poorest workers who could not afford a proper home. Or another plantation in Brazil: the people were hired farm workers first. With the Fairtrade premium they were able to acquire land and to become a small scale farmers' cooperative. They are now in the process of being certified as an independent Fairtrade cooperative. This is a great development. For me it shows that Fairtrade is a key for peace.

### **What are your expectations of this auditors training?**

I am really happy to have the opportunity to meet with different experts of Fairtrade – may it be inspectors from other parts of the world or the colleagues of FLO-CERT in Bonn. By listening to each other we learn a lot, share experiences and motivate the new inspectors that came here for their first training. After all this training is a good way to explore new tools and formats of the inspection work and to strengthen the Fairtrade system as a whole.