



Intervju med inspektör på FLO-Cert

Murughia Rajasingham

FLO-CERT Auditor Interview

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Name: Murughia Rajasingham

Age: 54

Country: Sri Lanka

Family: married, 2 kids (girl 24, boy 18)

Education: accountant, organic auditor

Auditor since: 2002



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

I got to know Fairtrade via TransFair when I was visiting the Biofach fair in 1996.

Becoming an auditor was rather accidental: they were looking for an auditor and I was chosen. I worked for the organic certification body before, so I had the experience for this job.

How would you explain roughly what you are doing?

The work as an auditor is very interesting. Basically Fairtrade is a lot of people to people contact. I would say Fairtrade is more interview based than organic auditing. You have to talk to people and you have to get to know the people you're talking with. You have to win their confidence if you want them to give you the correct answers to your questions. Of course there's always this doubt: is the person you are talking with telling you the truth. But you can get the information you need if you win their confidence. So one of the jobs we as inspectors have is to win the confidence of the people, starting from the manager right down to the worker.

How many cooperatives are you inspecting in Sri Lanka?

My work as a Fairtrade inspector is not only limited to Sri Lanka (1 cooperative), but I'm also inspecting in India (only hired labour), Indonesia (3 cooperatives), in the Philippines (2 cooperatives) and Thailand (1 cooperative).

Can you give a short description of an inspection? What are the first steps?

Your first step within the cooperative will be meeting the promoting body of the cooperative. They will usually introduce you to the board of directors or the committee members of the cooperative. Before you start interviewing them you go through all the documents with them. Later on you try to talk to the farmers which you randomly select. Normally the interviews with the farmers are done in a group.

Are there any special challenges in interviewing?

The most challenging part of the interviews is a cultural phenomenon – the interviews with female farmers alone. Especially in Indonesia sometimes it is a problem because there always has to be a male person with the woman. But in countries like Sri Lanka or India it is possible.

How many days do you usually spend in the cooperative? And do you sometimes experience some animosities on the side of the farmers?

The days I spend on one cooperative depends on the number of members, normally three to four days. Basically what I do as an inspector is to break the ice between the farmers and Fairtrade. I basically say: "Look, I am not here as a policeman so please don't treat me like one. I am here to establish your credibility as a reliable Fairtrade partner. So you got to help me do that. If you don't I cannot do it for you." So that helps them. I also always try to learn some greetings in their mother tongue and try to sit and eat with them. Because during meals many things can be said. I always try to mingle with them. But at the same time when I go to an office I wear a tie for the interview. You see it is very important to adapt to the people wherever you're going.

Which abilities do you need to work as an auditor?

Well, you must have a cool head. You cannot afford to lose your temper. And you have to know what you're talking about, for example the Fairtrade standards. You also have

to have a background about the group you're inspecting. And last but not least you have to present yourself as a person who has come to help them rather than to point out their mistakes. To me that is the most important.

What was the most extraordinary situation at your job so far?

Well, I have experienced situations where I've been threatened, like: "We kill you if you don't do this kind of story. " But I had very satisfying situations as well. Especially in the Philippines they accept me as a member of their family. So it is very nice, they treat you well, they look after you, they are very open and don't hide anything. In Sri Lanka they are quite proud that I come to inspect because I speak the language. And the fact that I was born on a tea estate means a lot to them. They think: "Okay – it's one of our guys so we can be free with him."

What are your expectations of this auditors training?

Of course there will be new standards being introduced, so you get some sort of knowledge out of that. And also: the biggest challenge is interpretation of the standards should be uniformed throughout at least the region, never mind worldwide. So this is something where all of us can agree on how to interpret the standards. And of course it is very nice to meet other inspectors and to share experiences.