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Dr. Fabien Gullmineau, Associated Principal Scientist, Kraft Foods Global Coffee R&D, Banbury (UK), in a mission with local coffee producers. (UNV programme, 2012)

Sharing knowledge of coffee production in a remote village of Guatemala

Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala: Having spent many years studying food science and technology in various European Universities, and in particular my experience with coffee processing technologies at Kraft Foods, has given me the chance to share some of that knowledge through the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme.

I thought this would be a great opportunity to put my skills to good use in a new context, and help those who could greatly benefit from it. My objective was to try and have a positive impact on the lives of coffee farmers in Guatemala, but also to get first-hand experience and hopefully gain a greater understanding of the lives they lead and the challenges they face.

It is probably too early to say whether or not the work I did with them has had a positive impact, but I am sure that it has opened some doors in the farmers' minds and planted some seeds that hopefully will grow and flourish.

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The mission took place in a remote village in the mountainous region of eastern Guatemala. It consisted of a blend of formal training sessions and more practical hands-on work to try and convey as much useful information as possible in the short space of time available. It was focused on providing the farmers with some tools that they could understand, improve and use effectively after the end of the mission. We tried to help them realise that they were perfectly able to improve their lives by themselves, using their acute common sense, rather than rely on external help to do so.

The most challenging part for me stemmed from the difficulties in communicating directly with the farmers since I do not speak Spanish. Despite the fantastic help of the interpreter, I wish I could have had some more direct and personal conversations with some of the people there, in order to directly experience the way they think and understand the world.

I am sure that my personal experience would have been considerably enhanced if I had spoken fluent Spanish. Nonetheless I have thoroughly enjoyed the time I spent on the mission and keep very fond memories of the warm and very welcoming people I met during the mission. It was a genuine and rare life experience and I would definitely recommend to anyone to apply to the UNV programme.



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