

COFFTEA: A Sudanese success story

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SIDDIG M.S. IDRIS is a graduate in business, finance and economics of Leicester University. On joining Cofftea Trading in Sudan he led the sales and marketing team for seven years before becoming country manager of Cofftea Kenya. On returning to Sudan he oversaw the application of advances in the blending and packaging of COFFTEA's products. During his tenure Cofftea grew from 20 to 600 employees and has become one of the top white sugar importers in the world. He is also the Director of the Mohamed Salih Idris Foundation.

Visitors to Sudan will quickly learn of the importance of tea in daily life. If they have enjoyed a refreshing brew then it's very likely to have been blended by Cofftea, a company whose passion for quality has made it a household name for more than four decades.

The origins of Cofftea date back to the mid-1950s, when the current group Chairman, Mohamed Salih Idris, began trading, traveling throughout Sudan. In 1984, he set up Cofftea reflecting the company's core businesses of tea and coffee. Since then it has grown to become Sudan's largest blender, distributor and packer of the two beverages, supplying numerous sectors with a wide range of products. The company blends, packs and distributes some 30 million kilograms of tea per year and roasts, blends, packs and distributes around 20 million kilograms of coffee.

In 2003, the company set up the first specialised tea-packing factory in Khartoum, covering some 5,000 square meters, where it uses the finest Kenyan blends to produce its flagship Al Ghazaltain brand in loose and teabag formats. Its teabag range includes classic black tea, flavoured tea (cinnamon, cardamom, and mint), green tea and hibiscus.

Cofftea has now repatriated the core blending process from Kenya to Sudan to ensure quality control. It employs more than 600 people directly, as well as providing a livelihood for more than 60,000 tea and coffee growers, along with training and opportunities for development. The company prides itself on its committed and capable owner-managers.

In 2011, to meet growing demand for its premium products, two new factories were built in Sudan and Kenya with a combined capacity of 35 million kilograms of tea, along with fully automated and computer-controlled blenders and coffee roasters, able to produce three million kilogrammes a year. Rigorous quality assurance and control are applied at every stage in the process. The following year, a third factory was opened in Bahri, in northern Khartoum. The company now has 17 brands.

Cofftea's factories are ISO certified (ISO 22000 Food Safety Management System and ISO 9001 Quality management system) and are equipped with the latest machinery and equipment imported from Europe, Turkey, and India. These include testing laboratory equipment as well as fully automated blending and packing machines. Most importantly, Cofftea implements and adheres to the highest hygiene and working standards in its operations, not only to ensure the safety of its products, but also a safe, clean, and healthy working environment for its workforce.

Cofftea is committed to sourcing its raw materials on a large scale while promoting sustainability. Some 90 per cent of plantations where Cofftea sources its tea are ISO 22000:2005 certified (green leaf reception, processing, packing and dispatch of black CTC tea). Similarly, its fair trade tea is Rain Forest Alliance certified.

A commitment to the wider community

Aware of the leading role it plays in the country, Cofftea engages with the communities it works with through a range of initiatives that include providing school students throughout the country with bags, notebooks and winter clothes, as well as recognising the important role played by many people in the fields of education, sports and community service.

Cofftea co-sponsored Mashrouy for the last three years 2015, 2016 and 2017, which represents a set up in conjunction with the Sudanese Young Businessmen Association, the British Embassy and the British Council in Khartoum. The hit television programme has helped identify and support young Sudanese entrepreneurs and has attracted huge interest from Sudanese business people, some great ideas for new business ▶



Iftar conversation at sunset hosted by CoffTea during Ramadan

► proposals, wonderful contestants and a huge following for the presentations and selection process. It has showcased Sudan's entrepreneurial culture, showing that it can flourish if the economic environment allows it to and creating prosperity for all.

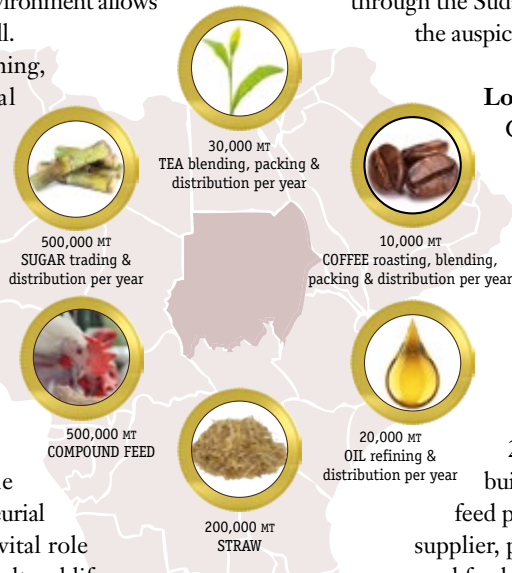
Cofftea also sponsors Chevening, the UK government's global scholarship programme that offers future leaders the unique opportunity to study in the UK. These scholarships are awarded to outstanding professionals to pursue a one-year master's degree in any subject at any UK university.

The company also supports the more than 8,000 tea ladies nationwide, who represent the best of Sudan's strong entrepreneurial spirit and have come to play a vital role in the country's economy and cultural life over the last three decades. Many of these women come from the lowest rungs of society – the immigrants and the displaced from regions in conflict. Cofftea has undertaken a range of initiatives to help formalise the situation of Sudan's tea ladies by providing kiosks and access to running water.

Further reflecting its commitment to Sudan's tea ladies, in late 2017, U.S. Embassy staff in Khartoum attended an Iftar, the evening meal with which Muslims end their daily Ramadan fast at sunset, with tea ladies hosted by Cofftea to share a meal and the Ramadan spirit in honour of some of Sudan's hardest working businesswomen.

Cofftea also co-sponsored the second International Peace Marathon in Khartoum in January this year organised by the Council for International People's

Friendship (CIPF) through the Sudanese-Kenyan Friendship Association and the Kenyan Embassy in collaboration with the National Olympic Committee, through the Sudanese Athletics Union, under the auspices of the Presidency.



Looking to the future

Cofftea has expanded its areas of activity in recent years, and also trades and distributes some 500,000 tons of sugar. It has a state-of-the-art refinery with a capacity of 70,000 tons per annum of cooking oil which will commission its production by mid of 2019. The company is also building a state of the art animal feed plant that will make it a major supplier, producing 500,000 tonnes of compound feed and 200,000 tonnes of straw each year. By the end of 2019, Cofftea's animal feed plant will be the largest in the country, with a capacity of one million tons a year.

Almost a year on from the lifting of US sanctions, there is clearly a mood of optimism within the Sudanese business community, with an awareness that a turning point has been reached. Growing numbers of countries are now looking closely at how to position themselves in Sudan, exploring opportunities and assessing potential partners in what is a huge domestic market, as well as a launch pad for investment and exports in the wider region.

Moreover, Cofftea is looking to expand its regional markets by targeting the East African markets as well as Gulf markets in the first place. With a vision to explore the opportunities in Europe through exports.

Sudan has an entrepreneurial culture that will flourish if the economic environment allows it to, creating prosperity for all

Left: The pick of the tea

Right: The CoffTea family in Khartoum

