

Press Release



Zameen Organic Director Gijs Spoor honoured with Ashoka Fellowship following groundbreaking work empowering marginalised cotton farmers

Gijs Spoor has been awarded the prestigious Ashoka Fellowship in recognition of his innovative approach to rural development as Director of Zameen Organic, a farmer-owned cotton marketing company. The announcement follows Outlook Business naming Mr Spoor as one of India's top 50 social entrepreneurs and comes just weeks after he helped secure 20m INR in funding and investment from Aavishkar and the Rabobank for the social enterprise.

Ashoka invests in individuals who are crafting new solutions to existing social problems across areas of development including health, gender and human rights, education and income generation. Mr Spoor demonstrated to a committee of Ashoka Fellows and other social entrepreneurs that his visionary approach is scalable and could be replicated nationally and internationally; inline with Ashoka's selection criteria. Ashoka believes that in order to drive forward social change, support must be given to entrepreneurial trailblazers, such as Mr Spoor, who bring fresh thinking to tired and ineffectual development models.

Ashoka felt that his new ideas, creativity, entrepreneurial skills and ethical fibre had already resulted in impressive social impact through the Zameen initiative, which aims to bring long-lasting sustainable development to rural economies. Ashoka recognises that the early years of any start-up pose many challenges and therefore invests in financial and non-financial resources to support innovators, whilst they launch and refine their

careers. Mr Spoor will receive a monthly stipend to cover living expenses and will have access to professional development services, expertise and resources from Ashoka's international network of leaders in public entrepreneurship.

Zameen Organic is a private limited company set up in 2006 by Mr Spoor and Mr Koshy, the Chairman of Delhi based NGO Agriculture and Organic Farming Group (AOFG) India. The project started out with an initial group of 300 farmers with the aim of improving market access for marginalised cotton producers through institutional development and organic and Fairtrade certification. The benefits of increased efficiencies, lower input costs and higher and more stable cotton prices now extend to over 4,000 farmers in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, with some farmers experiencing a threefold increase in earnings. As a farmer-owned company, the farmers also benefit from shareholder dividend payments as well as having input into the direction of the company.

Mr Spoor, originally from the Netherlands, has been working in organic agriculture in India for six years. "Zameen Organic works to bring small producers and ethical consumers together to deliver sustainability to society. Zameen has a 'trade not aid' mentality, which I believe is the only way to deliver long term change. The social, environmental and economic cannot be tackled separately if we are to be truly sustainable in the way we do business. We also need to bridge many cultural divides and confront many preconceived ideas about poverty, trade and inclusive growth."

Mr Spoor plans to visit other Ashoka Fellows across India and share best practice in all fields, from finance and HR to product development and marketing. He also hopes to explore partnerships with African cotton farmer organisations through Ashoka's African agricultural programmes.

Mr Spoor says “I know it sounds corny, but I feel privileged to get support to live my dream. I look forward to the connections I will make with likeminded people who are approaching development issues with a fresh entrepreneurial mindset and to learning how to better leverage the market to deliver social justice and motivate people to live in harmony with our planet.”

- Ends -

For more information, interview requests or for images please contact:

Paul May
Zameen Organic
Communications Manager
+91 990 875 7343
skype: onepaulmay
paulmay@zameen.org

Notes to Editors

1. Zameen Organic is certified by Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS), which guarantees organic textiles from harvest and socially and environmentally responsible manufacturing through to end consumer. Last season, Zameen farmers harvested 374 tonnes of organic certified cotton lint.
2. Zameen Organic is certified by Lacon Quality Certification, which certifies organic production and processing. Lacon certification means replenished soil fertility and the banning of toxic and persistent pesticide and fertiliser use.
3. The FAIRTRADE Mark is a certification mark and a registered trademark of Fairtrade Labelling Organisations International (FLO), Zameen Organic is a FLO licensed trader. Global sales for all Fairtrade certified products reached 2.9 billion Euros in 2008 with global Fairtrade cotton sales increasing by 94% on the previous year. The estimated retail value for Fairtrade certified cotton was 175,902,101 Euros in 2008, 19,813,249 Euros of which was Fairtrade organic cotton. The independent consumer label is now recognised by 70% of UK consumers and appears on products as a guarantee that disadvantaged producers are getting a better deal. More than 7.5 million people – farmers, workers and their families – across 58 developing countries benefit from the international Fairtrade system.
4. AOFG Delhi is involved in Zameen's operations at a strategic level. AOFG Board ensures all proceedings comply with Indian law and fall within the objectives of the Trust. AOFG National Project Office (NPO) is a coordinating hub for service provision to the Small Farmer Organisations (SFOs). Within NPO there are three departments covering major areas of operation: technical, organisation development (OD/ID) and certification/supplier compliance.