

TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE BANANA SYSTEMS

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Background

In the banana producing countries involved in the world market, systems have developed that can be characterised as a banana industry. These systems include a whole series of legal, production, technological, logistical, financial and commercial elements which, on the one hand, result in the creation of large global monopolies that dominate the industry and, on the other, leave little space for small- and medium-scale operators who have less capacity to participate and compete in the globalised market.

In this context, the participation of small- and medium-scale producers in the conventional banana industry as a whole takes place in conditions of absolute disadvantage, because these producers do not have the economies of scale, efficiency and therefore competitiveness and market access that big companies like Dole, Chiquita, Del Monte etc enjoy.

For these reasons, over recent years there have been attempts in different parts of the world to implement innovative policies and strategies that link small- and medium-scale producers with differentiated production and marketing systems, notably certified organic and fair trade products.

Although these experiences are still in their early days, they nevertheless constitute a body of potential strategies and an alternative system for the product that can be developed further by small- and medium-scale producers in collaboration with associated operators.

Considerations on sustainable banana production

In our understanding, in order for the banana industry to be sustainable in the long term, it is necessary to achieve fundamental balances and adjustments in the components of the chain from the environmental conditions of production, through marketing to consumption.

Specifically, it is essential to consider and include requirements for the participation of – and equity between – social actors (in terms of their access, responsibilities and rights along the whole chain from producer to consumer), for economic justice for every stakeholder involved, and for compatibility between – and/or responsibility towards – production and the natural environment. All these factors should be subject to policies, strategies and a framework of standards that are both reached through consensus amongst banana industry stakeholders as well as legislated and monitored through national public bodies, international treaties and relevant specialised entities.

However, the current free market model permits production, labour, environmental management and trading practices which are far-removed from what we conceive of as a sustainable banana industry in which small- and medium-scale producers could play the role of real protagonists. Having said that, it is a challenge for us – indeed our duty – to participate in any fora and bodies necessary to promote and gradually bring about a functioning alternative model of production and trade at local or international level.

The challenges for small- and medium-scale producers in building a sustainable banana system

In order to move towards a sustainable banana economy, it is necessary to draw up a **road-map or agenda** both at **national** (specific) and **international** (general) levels which allows us, in the short- and medium-term, to debate, design and implement feasible policies, strategies and actions. This road-map or agenda should aim to:

1.- Achieve a rapprochement at national and international levels between all the actors and operators involved in the chain – production, technical, commercial and standard-setting/legislative – **through banana fora in each country and an annual forum at international level** so as to discuss points of common interest with a view to implementing collaborative strategies and actions.

2.- Institutionalise a **“sustainable banana system” at national and international levels** as an indispensable prerequisite for a viable and successful initiative. This implies:

- Moving from a situation of isolated specific cases to a systemisation of specific cases so as to configure the common framework for a sustainable banana system in organisational, political, programmatic and operational terms.

- Establishing inclusive fora and/or levels of organisation that are both respectful of each other's specificities and coherent with overall requirements.
- Facilitating the advocacy and/or negotiating potential of different social actors on regulatory, technological, financial and redistributive issues both at national and international levels.
- Facilitating successful and efficient negotiations concerning the marketing of products (organic, fair trade, conventional), the contracting of services (shipping, ripening etc) and access to technology and inputs.
- Leveraging and/or managing of coordinated services such as finance, infrastructure, certifications, brands, storage, transport, training and advice in order to ensure efficient production and trading systems.
- Promoting and developing sensitivity towards the social and cultural identity of producers' organisations.
- Establishing a dynamic enabling framework for the monitoring and verification of commitments, agreements and contracts in order to guarantee the sustainability of the kind of industry advocated by small- and medium-scale producers and associated operators

3.- Set up **legal frameworks** in each country that are favourable to the sustainable banana system promoted by small- and medium-scale producers; at the same time, forge **agreements and/or alliances between public and private sectors** concerning strategies and joint actions in the spheres of marketing, logistics, inputs, credit, production infrastructure, production standards, tariffs and development finance.

4.- Create a **Sustainable Banana Investment Fund** in order to finance programmes, projects and joint initiatives that contribute towards building a sustainable banana system. This Fund should be created with monies channelled from the tariff income generated on banana imports (mainly into the EU), from international development cooperation and national governments.