



The World Banana Forum (WBF)

Working together for sustainable banana production and trade

Background

Bananas are the world's most exported fresh fruit both in volume and value. They are exported primarily from developing countries to industrialized countries, the latter accounting for close to 90 percent of world net imports. With global exports estimated at over US\$ 7 billion in 2008, bananas are an essential source of income and employment for hundreds of thousands of households in developing countries, notably in Latin American, the Caribbean, Southeast Asia and West Africa. However, agrochemical-intensive banana production on large-scale plantations, distortions along the value chain and declining producer prices have given rise to environmental and social challenges. Meeting these complex international challenges requires the involvement of all stakeholders of the banana sector worldwide.

Two international conferences¹ were held to discuss these challenges and how to address them. The second one in 2005 gathered some 250 stakeholders of the banana sector² and reached consensus on the need for establishing a permanent multi-stakeholder forum. This consensus was reaffirmed in a series of meetings and workshops held from 2006 to 2008 with the participation of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the International Labour Organization (ILO), FAO, representatives from the governments of banana exporting and importing countries and NGOs. As the neutrality of the facilitator was deemed critical, it was suggested that the forum should be facilitated by the United Nations.

In 2009 FAO, with co-funding from the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom, implemented the Multi-stakeholder Forum project (MSF). The MSF facilitated a preparatory committee composed of a balanced number of representatives from the banana industry, civil-society organizations and national governments whose role was to lead the organization of an international forum on sustainable banana production and trade ("*World Banana Forum*"). The forum was held at the FAO's headquarters in Rome in December 2009. Over 150 representatives from the banana sector throughout the world attended the meeting. The participants reached a common understanding of the key issues facing the industry and prioritized them. They formed 5 **specialized working groups** to carry out activities to address these issues. Most importantly, they decided to establish the **World Banana Forum (WBF)**, a permanent forum that facilitates the sharing of information, ideas and best practices among the stakeholders of the banana sector and coordinate the working groups.

Mission of the Forum

The Forum works towards a world where:

- Banana production and trade are sustainable from the environmental, social and economic perspectives.
- Every actor in the supply chain from producer to retailer receives a fair price that covers its costs and ensures a reasonable profit margin.
- All actors, including sub-contractors, respect the core international labour conventions and pay decent wages.
- The impacts of banana production on the environment are understood, quantified and optimized.

¹ For more information on the International Banana Conferences, please see: <http://www.abc2.org/>

² Producers, their organizations, trade unions, cooperatives, exporter groups, private companies (including major banana marketing companies, traders and retailers), public agencies, governments, research institutions and civil society organizations.



- Consumers are provided with good quality bananas and they understand the need to pay a sufficient price that ensures sustainable livelihoods for all actors of the industry.
- Divergence of views and interests within the sector are resolved through dialogue and collaboration.

Objectives of the Forum

The WBF provides a space in which farmer organizations, exporter groups, trading companies, trade unions, retailers, governments, research institutions and civil society organizations can discuss the various problems facing the banana sector and jointly seek solutions through collaboration. Specifically, the Forum serves for:

- exchanging information on best practices and sustainable development projects (e.g. techniques and systems for sustainable banana production);
- jointly designing and implementing field research projects to produce best practices in banana production (these projects will be based on collaboration in the field among all relevant actors, including governments and their technical agencies);
- assessing workplace issues and encouraging the adoption of practices that are consistent with the ILO's core conventions and recommendations and guarantee gender equity;
- suggesting strategies which correct inefficiencies in the banana value chain while guaranteeing fair prices and earnings for all relevant actors.

The Forum focuses its activities on finding practical solutions to field problems. It undertakes projects that can rapidly generate gains for all stakeholders. An example is the production and dissemination of integrated pest management techniques that reduce the cost of inputs for farmers, increase yields, enhance product quality, improve worker health and preserve the environment.

The outcomes of the WBF will be made available for free to everyone, but they should not be utilized to create mandatory standards or other barriers to trade. More generally, the Forum's outputs should not be used by any government to justify trade discriminations.

Role of FAO

As an intergovernmental organization, FAO is trusted by all stakeholders to play the role of a neutral facilitator. It can give the Forum the objectivity, independence and credibility that are prerequisites for its success. Its technical expertise in banana production and trade is widely recognized. FAO's *Trade and Markets Division* has worked on banana trade policy and markets for decades. It has played an active role in this multi-stakeholder process for years and has led the establishment of the Forum since January 2009.

Contact info

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