



Project for the establishment of a multi-stakeholder forum on sustainable banana production and trade (MSF)

Background

In 1998 an International Banana Conference was held to discuss the challenges facing the banana sector. This event was followed in 2005 by a second conference (IBC2¹) that brought together 250 representatives of all the key players in the banana sector - private, public and civil society². The IBC2 reached a consensus on the problems of the banana sector and the need to establish a permanent Multi-Stakeholder Forum (MSF) to seek collaborative solutions to these problems. Presently there is no place where all the stakeholders can meet, as the membership of the Intergovernmental Group on Bananas and Tropical Fruits (IGG) is restricted to governments.

The idea of establishing a multi-stakeholder forum was discussed again at a meeting held at the headquarters of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in October 2007 with the participation of the International Labour Organization (ILO), FAO, representatives from the governments of banana exporting and importing countries and NGOs. The meeting confirmed that there is broad consensus for the establishment of the MSF. UNCTAD held two follow-up meetings in January and July 2008 with an informal preparatory group of some 10 persons from NGOs, UNCTAD, the ILO and FAO to discuss the practical steps needed to design and launch the Forum. As the neutrality of the facilitator is critical, it was suggested that the MSF should be facilitated by the United Nations.

An informal preparatory committee including some 7 representatives of each stakeholder group was formed in October 2008. Its role is to make proposals for the mandate and structure of the MSF and to guide the preparations for its inaugural meeting where some 150 participants are expected.

Mission of the forum

The Forum will strive to work 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.
- Consumers are provided with good quality bananas and they understand the necessity 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 Forum aims to provide a space in which farmer organizations, exporter groups, trading companies, worker unions, retailers, governments and civil society organizations can meet to discuss ideas and proposals and engage in cooperation with the purpose of resolving issues.

¹ <http://www.abc2.org/>

² Farmworkers' trade unions and small producers, national and international groups of producers, trading companies, retailers, governments and international institutions.



Specifically, the Forum will serve 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;
- Assessing workplace issues and encouraging the adoption of practices that are consistent with the ILO's core conventions and recommendations and that guarantee gender equity;
- Suggesting strategies which correct inefficiencies in the banana value chain while guaranteeing fair prices and earnings for all the relevant actors.

The Forum will focus its activities on finding practical solutions to field problems. It will undertake projects that can rapidly generate gains for all stakeholders: producers, farm workers, traders, researchers, retailers and governments. An example could be the production and dissemination of integrated pest management techniques that reduce the cost of inputs for farmers, increase yields, enhance product quality, improve workers health and preserve the environment.

The Forum's outputs will be made available for free to everyone, but they should not be utilized to create mandatory standards or barriers to trade or to justify trade discriminations. The Forum will not deal with trade disputes.

Role of FAO

The Trade and Markets Division of FAO facilitates the discussions among stakeholders that are expected to lead to the creation of the Forum. It has received a grant from the United Kingdom's Department for International Development to organize the meetings of the informal preparatory committee and the Forum in 2009 and to facilitate participation from developing countries. The preparatory committee held two meetings this year with the active participation of some government representatives. These meetings were essential to build consensus among stakeholders, ensure their active involvement and prepare the Forum meeting.

The first meeting of the Forum will be held at FAO's headquarters on 7 and 8 December 2009, just before the next session of the Intergovernmental Group on Bananas and Tropical Fruits to take advantage of the presence of governmental delegates.

Contact info

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towards a Multi-stakeholder Forum on Sustainable Banana Production and Trade
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