



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

## World Banana Forum African Regional Commission

Working together for sustainable banana production and trade

### WEBINAR

The requirements and responsibilities of producers, distributors, certifiers, trade unions  
and civil society with respect to shared responsibility and due diligence  
in the African banana industry

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Report of the African Regional Commission of the WBF  
Thursday, 20 October 2022

#### Moderator:

- **Victor Prada**, World Banana Forum (WBF) Secretariat, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

#### Panelists:

- **Joseph Owona Kono**, Afruibana and Banana Association of Cameroon (ASSOBACAM)
- **George Kporye**, Banana Producers Association (BPA) of Ghana
- **Jean-Marie Kakou-Gervais**, Organization of Producers and Exporters of Bananas, Pineapples, Mangoes, and other Export Fruits of Cote D'Ivoire (OBAMCI)
- **Thomas Hildebrand**, Central Organization of Pineapple-Banana Export Producers (OCAB)
- **Kate Nkatha Ochieng**, Fairtrade Africa
- **Marianne Naudin Ait Said**, LIDL France
- **Luc De Lapeyre De Bellaire**, Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD)
- **Alistair Smith**, Banana Link
- **Oscar Ngome Eboule**, National Federation of Unions of Workers in the Banana Sector of Cameroon (FENASYTRAFBACAM)

## 1. Welcome by the WBF Secretariat

On behalf of the World Banana Forum (WBF) Secretariat, hosted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), **Mr Victor Prada** welcomed participants to the first webinar of the African Regional Commission, recently established under the framework of the WBF. This new regional commission hopes to not only highlight the specific issues faced by the industry in the region, but also to coordinate fruitful discussions between the various regional stakeholders.

By bringing together key actors along the African banana supply chains, the African Regional Commission aims to provide support to the industry, particularly in light of the increased importance for a shared responsibility. This importance is amplified by forthcoming due diligence legislations in the European Union, which will have direct repercussions on the operations of banana industry actors in the African region. This webinar therefore aimed to identify and address the particular problems and sensibilities of the sector, as well as highlight important steps that are being undertaken by regional and global stakeholders to begin resolving these issues.

The European Commission's proposal for a directive on corporate sustainability due diligence concerns not only the issue of living wages, but also other social and environmental threats to supply chain sustainability, such as child labour and carbon emissions. Compounded by recent global events, such as the war in Ukraine, the COVID-19 pandemic, transportation complications, inflation, and the risk of spread of Fusarium wilt TR4, banana producers and workers in the African region are under growing pressure. By coming together and committing to cooperation and dialogue, they can better formulate strategies to persevere through these hard times and increase the sustainability of their operations.

However, addressing these challenges has costs. Actors throughout the supply chain must understand the need for shared responsibility to adequately cover these costs, as well as the need for honest and respectful communication and cooperation.

Mr Prada then gave the floor to **Mr Joseph Owona Kono, president of Afruibana**, for the opening remarks, whose organization was elemental in the coordination and preparation of this first webinar of the African Regional Commission of the WBF.

## 2. Opening remarks by the President of Afruibana, Mr Joseph Owona Kono

Mr Owona Kono began with an introduction of Afruibana, which is a pan-African association of fruit producers and exporters working in various fruit sectors, including but not limited to, bananas. It was founded in 2017 when various associations from Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon and Ghana came together to collectively pool their knowledge and resources. Mr Owona Kono praised the organization's hitherto success, but acknowledged the serious challenges facing not only Afruibana, but the entire African banana industry.

The challenges facing the African banana industry are three-fold, Mr Owona Kono asserted. The first issue facing the sector is the falling prices of bananas. Though this issue is prevalent throughout the globe, it is



indeed particularly significant for African stakeholders. The causes of this fall in prices, Mr Owona Kono asserted, include oversupply, deepening seasonal lows, and the absence of any sort of regulating mechanism. Second, the issue of rising costs threatens the sector. Shipping costs have climbed over 60 percent and purchasing costs have gone up over 20 percent, particularly for key production components such as packaging, agricultural inputs (e.g. fertilizers), and wages of workers, especially as living wage initiatives are increasing in prevalence. Additionally, foreign exchange rate and inflation issues are further applying pressure to the production end of the value chain. Finally, the third issue facing the banana industry is the rapidly evolving regulatory framework for the sector, including the European Union's Green Deal and Farm-to-Fork Strategy, the European Union's carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM), corporate due diligence and accountability requirements, and the ramifications of unfair trading practices.

The key to confronting these challenges is through cooperation and good social practices. Mr Owona Kono pointed out that, in recent years, Afruibana has implemented initiatives on various important priorities in the industry related to freedom of association and active social dialogue, housing needs, electricity, road and hospital constructions, primary education, training programs, promotion of local agrifood entrepreneurship, zero child labour, provision of transport, and women's empowerment. Afruibana also nurtures good environmental practices, including green energy transition, biodiversity protection, prevention of deforestation, and sustainable agriculture and agroecological transition, which encompasses weed control, fertility and soil management, combatting Black Sigatoka and land-based parasitism. Mr Owona Kono hopes that Afruibana can provide a positive example for other stakeholders to follow, and that together, initiatives such as these can permeate best practices throughout the industry.

Mr Owona Kono then reviewed the broader international framework. He reviewed the five ways businesses can prepare for a European Union corporate sustainability due diligence directive, namely by: mapping the supply chain to identify and mitigate human rights and environmental impacts; integrating due diligence into corporate strategies and policies; developing plans to prevent and mitigate potential adverse impacts; creating a clear climate change policy consistent with the Paris agreement goals; and, providing an easily accessible grievance mechanism for those affected by key supply chain risks. Relevant international agreements were also identified, including: the Convention on Biological Diversity, considering the Cartagena Protocol; the Nagoya Protocol; the Stockholm Convention; the Vienna Convention for the protection of the Ozone Layer; and the Montreal Protocol.

Mr Owona Kono concluded by highlighting the concept of shared responsibility, defining it as an approach where risks and value are distributed fairly along the supply chain, allowing farmers to share costs with buyers and be rewarded for their efforts towards more sustainable agricultural practices. He ultimately stressed that this is closely linked to the concepts of fair prices and living wages.

### **3. Insights from African Producers on the Concepts of Shared Responsibility and Due Diligence**

**Mr George Kporye (Banana Producers Association of Ghana, BPA)** followed with a review of Ghana's role in the African banana industry. Mr Kporye highlighted that Ghana's commercial banana production and exports are much more recent than those of Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire. The beginning of the banana industry in Ghana started with Volta River Estates Limited in the 1990's when they took the initiative to start a commercial banana plantation, with Golden Exotics then joining in 2005, followed by Musahamat. These three Ghanaian producers and exporters then came together in 2018 to form the Banana Producers



Association (BPA). Today more than 90 percent of total banana production in Ghana is Fairtrade certified. The remaining 10 percent or less, is in the process of being certified which will soon make 100 percent of Ghana's production Fairtrade certified. The Ghanaian banana industry is a small one, but the amount of hectares devoted to farming are growing, benefiting from favourable conditions along the Lower Volta River, such as good soil, limited pest pressure, abundant sunshine, limited rainfall (which prevents Black Sigatoka), and access to irrigation water from the lake and river. However, strong winds can cause damage. The industry has been greatly boosted by the arrival of Golden Exotics Limited: from 4 200 tonnes exported in 2005, production has risen to over 80 000 tonnes in 2021. Productivity has been rising for the Ghanaian banana industry and currently stands at 50 tonnes/ha on average, with a range of 40 to 55 tonnes/ha depending on whether it is organic or conventional production.

Mr Kporye noted that there have been challenges with weather conditions in recent times, caused by climate change and the corresponding changes in rainfall patterns. With most exports going to the European Union, representing nearly 80 percent, shared responsibility will be key to future success. Mr Kporye concluded with a poignant statement: the future sustainability of the banana industry will only be possible with shared responsibility among all stakeholders in the global supply chain and the term will not be just a cliché or empty buzzword, but an ideal that will invigorate and revitalize the global banana industry.

**Mr Joseph Owona Kono, Banana Association of Cameroon (ASSOBACAM)** also reviewed the banana industry in his country. In Cameroon, the banana represents the country's third most exported product in terms of volume after wood and oil. It is therefore a strategic sector for the country. ASSOBAACAM was created in 1988 after the dissolution of the former Cameroonian Banana Organization. It brings together and represents the interests of industrial banana producers in Cameroon, both nationally and internationally. Despite the changing context, the sector has nevertheless evolved towards a more concentrated organization where three Cameroonian operators involved in production are: Plantations du Haut Penja (PHP), the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC), and the private company Boh Plantation Limited (BPL). Together, the volumes exported, representing nearly 200 000 tonnes, are mainly directed towards the European Union. This amounts to over 95 percent of exports. The main importing countries are France and Belgium, which serve as platforms for re-exports, as well as the United Kingdom and Italy. Exports to diversification markets are developing, such as the Maghreb and more recently the CEMAC sub-region, with Chad in particular. The export of Fairtrade-labeled bananas continues to develop thanks to the emergence of certification in the country. Mr Owona Kono concluded by highlighting the industry's efforts that have also focused on social aspects, through the establishment of a corporate social responsibility approach, as well as committees or forums allowing for discussion on the new European directive.

**Mr Jean-Marie Kakou-Gervais, Organization of Producers and Exporters of Bananas, Pineapples, Mangoes, and other Export Fruits of Côte d'Ivoire (OBAMCI)**, then provided an overview of the banana sector in Côte d'Ivoire, where commercial banana cultivation developed later compared to countries such as Guinea and Cameroon. Since 2009, the Ivorian banana sector has improved its production, quality and marketing, actively supporting small producers in their development, claims Mr Kakou-Gervais. On the production side, the Ivorian banana sector is represented by two associations, OBAMCI and OCAB. Overall, the country exports nearly 334 000 tonnes to the European Union and sells a total of more than 65 000 tonnes within Africa. These bananas are produced on nearly 8 500 hectares by the diligent work of more than 13 000 employees. In 2021, OBAMCI exported 247 000 tonnes of bananas from almost 4 500



hectares. This production could not be done without the more than 7 100 people workers, of whom 1 200 are women. Mr Kakou-Gervais foresees a time of profound change and transformation ahead, particularly regarding the extraordinary agricultural potential of the country. He then concluded with the quote: “A miracle, like a bet, needs to be prepared, conditioned, measured, decided and achieved through willpower and perseverance.”

**Mr Thomas Hildebrand, Central Organization of Pineapple-Banana Export Producers (OCAB)**, continued by introducing the second banana association in the country. Combined, they export nearly 155 000 tonnes of bananas, of which nearly 20 percent are conventional Fairtrade certified and 10 percent Fairtrade organic certified. Like many of its counterparts, OCAB and its members are invested in a corporate social and environmental responsibility approach, with continuous improvement planned out in concert with local and international partners. OCAB’s members also attribute great importance to the development of regional markets, with the desire to provide African consumers with a level of demand and quality parallel to that of the European market. Finally, it is also important to note that all the members of Afruibana participate in the stability of the supply of African markets, in full awareness of their responsibility in the supply chains structuring sub-regional food security. This initiative began almost a decade ago and continues in parallel with OCAB’s historical dynamic of supplying the European market.

#### 4. The Perspective of Key Stakeholders on the Concept of Shared Responsibility and Due Diligence

**Ms Marianne Naudin Ait Said (Lidl France)** opened the second session of the webinar with a presentation of Lidl France’s approach to sustainable fruit and vegetable supply chains. She stated that the company hopes to develop a fruit and vegetable purchasing strategy that is robust both economically and technically. By working on priority supply chains in-depth, such as with banana supply chains, Lidl France can better support an agro-ecological transition in a way that guarantees the long-term supply of such food products. To meet the growing expectations of consumers, NGOs, and society more broadly, stakeholders within the banana value chain must work together to achieve a shared strategy.

Ms Naudin Ait Said then elaborated on what the prioritization of the banana industry means in concrete terms. By 2022, Lidl aims to ensure a commitment to better remuneration for producers and an improvement of working conditions for employees. By 2025, Lidl France’s commitments to the banana supply chain include: the optimization of plastic use of suppliers; implementation of measures to reduce and recover food loss in supply chains; engagement with suppliers to develop the rights of local communities; protection and responsible use of freshwater; engagement with suppliers to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; contributions to the protection and restoration of biodiversity on each farm at the beginning of the value chain; protection and improvement of soil quality with the principles of regenerative agriculture; and, protection of natural environments and forests on all farms. By 2030, Lidl France aims to have implemented a pesticide plan. This year, she added, Lidl France has partnered with Banana Link and CIRAD to achieve these sustainability goals. Ms Naudin Ait Said concluded with an optimistic outlook towards the future, where further cooperation will achieve a more sustainable banana supply chain in the years to come.

Next, **Ms Kate Nkatha Ochieng (Fairtrade Africa)** outlined Fairtrade Africa’s role in and the challenges facing the African banana industry. The organization supports producers in the region to achieve resilient



and sustainable banana production, despite a number of obstacles. Ms Nkatha Ochieng outlined the environmental problems facing producers in the region; while west Africa should be an ideal region for banana production, climate change has induced erratic weather patterns, which threaten the sustainability of production. The COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to its ramifications for health, has had a number of economic effects. Supply chain disruptions, higher transport costs, higher input costs, and consumer purchasing habits have also had a negative effect on banana producers, and Fairtrade Africa has tried to alleviate their struggles. Ms Nkatha Ochieng pointed out that the Fairtrade minimum price has been raised in response to the current situation. Despite this, bananas remain a product utilized to increase consumer traffic in retail stores, leading to a 'race to the bottom' in price as retailers compete for consumers. By encouraging diversification, sustainability, and supply chain transparency, Fairtrade hopes to boost the value of bananas in the long-term. Ms Nkatha Ochieng concluded by highlighting the key role of communication, especially with the consumers, so that prices, and thus the producers' incomes, increase.

**Mr Luc Lapeyre De Bellaire (CIRAD)** then spoke in detail about the agroecological transition of the African banana industry. He described the current state of African banana production, which is generally characterized by intensive monocultures, a narrow range of highly productive but pest-sensitive cultivars, the degradation of soil fertility, massive use of fertilizers, and significant pesticide use. Pesticides are particularly important to consider, as they are used most in the humid tropics at the cost of long-term soil fertility and consumer safety. He pointed out that herbicides, insecticides, and fungicides all play a key role in the production process today. The objectives of the agroecological transition, then, is to reduce the use of pesticides and sustainably increase soil fertility. Mr Lapeyre De Bellaire then outlined actions CIRAD has supported and carried out in Cameroon, including: research into the evolution of resistance to fungicides, highlighting the role of untreated banana plantations; monitoring the resistance levels of various biological threats to banana production to guide treatment strategies; evaluating control strategies excluding mancozeb; improving fallow land quality; replacing the use of glyphosate with white desuckering; implementing effective weevil trapping in the fallow and production phases; biological testing for the sanitation of fallow land; surveillance of sanitary quality of tissue culture plants in nurseries; and, other actions toward zero insecticide and zero nematicide objectives. Mr Lapeyre De Bellaire concluded by underlining the importance of stakeholder cooperation toward agroecological innovation and the need for proper research into key aspects of banana cultivation.

**Mr Alistair Smith (Banana Link)** followed with a review of the African banana industry's progress on social issues, praising the exemplary progress in Cameroon, Ghana, and Côte d'Ivoire, particularly with regard to women's participation. However, due to connectivity issues, **Mr Jean-François Billot (Afruibana)** then presented Mr Smith's main points of discussion, which Mr Smith had shared with him. Firstly, freedom of association is widely respected and exercised in the region with respect to other regions, leading to a greater level of social dialogue development and cooperation. Second, a pilot initiative in Cote d'Ivoire resulted in the identification of gaps in remuneration between actual and living wages, which will be closed from 2023 onwards through higher prices linked to verified remuneration data. Furthermore, the role of government in wage setting is vital, just as it is in facilitating support for agro-ecology at scale in their countries. Certifiers must support these processes while avoiding the duplication of efforts. Finally, all partners face the long-term challenge of working together to make agro-ecological transition at scale a reality, though Africa is ahead of the curve.



**Mr Oscar Ngome Eboule (FENASYTRAFBACAM)** concluded the second session by delving into detail on the role of banana workers, particularly their often overlooked role in shared responsibility. Mr Ngome Eboule stressed that African trade unions want to be integrated into multilateral talks regarding sustainability, so that the workers, who are at the very start of the value chain, have their own representation. After all, without worker participation and representation, concrete shared responsibility objectives cannot be achieved. The role of workers and trade unions cannot be overstated, Mr Ngome Eboule said, and he further emphasized that negotiations and collective agreements are the only real way forward towards shared responsibility.

## 5. Discussion

Opening the discussion section, Mr Prada first addressed a question posed by the audience inquiring into why Cameroon is lagging behind Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire in Fairtrade certification. Mr Hildebrand responded, saying that in his opinion, most commercial farms in Africa are in fact ready for Fairtrade certification, but only part of African production is sold within the Fairtrade 'value'. He pointed out that there is not sufficient market request for Fairtrade bananas as is. **Dr Jonathan Lanidune (Fairtrade Africa)** then added that Fairtrade Africa is beginning to offer greater support to Cameroon, and that specific efforts will be rolled out in 2023.

Mr Prada then highlighted another question: if only twelve percent of full-time employees in the Ghanaian banana industry are women, what is the situation in other exporting countries? What plans are there to boost women's participation, both from an employer perspective as well as within trade unions? Mr Kporye responded that though he does not have statistics for other countries on hand, from the Afruibana perspective, women's participation is of major importance. There are multiple projects underway by Golden Exotics Limited to grow employment numbers as well as increase the range of activities for women.

## 6. Conclusions and final remarks

Mr Prada concluded the session by expressing his belief that the forthcoming due diligence legislations are an opportunity for true progress towards sustainability in the global banana industry, and especially so in Africa. He then thanked all of the participants, attendees, and staff that supported the creation of this webinar and expressed his hope that more valuable meetings similar to this will be held in the future.

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### CONTACT

To discover the benefits of becoming a member of the World Banana Forum and to take an active role towards a sustainable banana sector, please visit:

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World Banana Forum Secretariat  
Markets and Trade Division - Economic and Social Development stream  
WBF@fao.org

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations  
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla



00153 Rome, Italy