



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

BUILDING RESPONSIBLE  
GLOBAL VALUE CHAINS  
**FOR SUSTAINABLE  
TROPICAL FRUITS**



## TECHNICAL BRIEF

# The opportunities for multistakeholder initiatives to support sustainability in the tropical fruit sector

### Introduction

Multistakeholder initiatives are collaborative mechanisms that bring together diverse stakeholders to address sustainability challenges. By fostering inclusive participation and cooperation, multistakeholder initiatives provide a space for stakeholders to collectively address economic, social and environmental issues with greater effectiveness than when addressed by a single group of actors.

Multistakeholder initiatives in agriculture can be organized by commodity groups. This brief emphasizes the potential of multistakeholder initiatives to benefit producers and companies by fostering sustainability and resilience within tropical fruit value chains. The tropical fruit sector faces many risks, including pests and diseases becoming resistant to phytosanitary products, hazardous labour practices, deforestation, and vulnerability to external shocks, such as climate change and economic downturns. These risks are too complex for individual actors to effectively address them in isolation.

In the context of the tropical fruit industry, multistakeholder initiatives may encompass all participants involved in a value chain. This includes producers and their associations, as well as packers, processors, exporters, importers, distributors and retailers. Multistakeholder initiatives also involve groups who either support or are affected by the value chain, such as governments, worker unions, civil society organizations and communities.

By fostering collaboration among these diverse stakeholders, multistakeholder initiatives create a platform for collectively tackling the industry's challenges and securing long-term prosperity. Multistakeholder initiatives can help develop sustainable practices, address economic, environmental and social concerns, and build resilience against external shocks. Ultimately, these initiatives present opportunities to drive positive change and ensure thriving and sustainable tropical fruit value chains.

## Possible benefits of multistakeholder initiatives for the tropical fruit industry

Multistakeholder initiatives can offer several benefits that can contribute to sustainable development, resilience and long-term business performance.

### Exchange of knowledge and expertise

Multistakeholder initiatives facilitate the sharing of knowledge, technical expertise, and good practices among diverse stakeholders. This allows cross-learning, enabling participants to acquire new insights, innovative approaches and practical solutions. By co-generating knowledge, multistakeholder initiatives can promote higher productivity, quality, and sustainability along value chains.

### Capacity development

Multistakeholder initiatives can provide capacity development and training programs tailored to the priorities of stakeholders. This can help enhance the skills and capabilities of participants, enabling them to adopt more sustainable practices and technologies, and implement effective management strategies. This capacity-development aspect of multistakeholder initiatives can empower stakeholders to address challenges more effectively.

### Improved access to markets

Participation in multistakeholder initiatives allows producers and companies to demonstrate their commitment to sustainability and responsible business conduct. By adhering to the standards and guidelines developed or recommended by the initiative, stakeholders can improve their reputation as responsible actors. This can help attract conscious consumers, build trust, and create opportunities for strengthening access to markets with high sustainability requirements and possibly sell products at higher prices.

### Partnership opportunities

Multistakeholder initiatives foster collaboration and partnership among diverse stakeholders. By engaging in joint initiatives and pooling knowledge and resources, participants can tackle common challenges more effectively. Shared knowledge, expertise, and resources can enable stakeholders to collectively address complex issues, such as sustainable management of pests and diseases, natural resources and supply chains, climate change adaptation, and human rights protection. The collaborative nature of multistakeholder initiatives allows for collective problem-solving and the identification of innovative solutions that might not be achievable individually.



## Help stakeholders fulfil their commitments

Multistakeholder initiatives do not replace the primary responsibilities of governments or corporations in ensuring sustainable value chains. However, they provide an important space for stakeholders to engage, share knowledge, and align policies, regulations, and corporate strategies with diverse needs and interests.

## Inclusive policy development and implementation

By bringing together actors with different perspectives, multistakeholder initiatives generate insights that can inform policy development and implementation processes. The inclusive and participatory nature of these initiatives can help ensure that policies align with the diverse needs, interests, and concerns of different stakeholders. The inputs from multistakeholder initiatives can help governments develop more effective and responsive policies that address social, environmental and economic challenges.

## The World Banana Forum, a multistakeholder initiative that tackles industry-specific sustainability challenges

Multistakeholder initiatives can have different purposes, such as establishing standards, facilitating dialogue and addressing shared challenges. The most effective approach varies depending on the situation, and there are numerous examples of successful multistakeholder initiatives to draw inspiration from.

Examples of multistakeholder platforms in agriculture include the **Committee on World Food Security (CFS)** and the **World Banana Forum (WBF)**. FAO hosts secretariats for these platforms and supports them as a neutral facilitator and provider of technical support.

As a commodity specific multistakeholder initiative, the WBF is particularly relevant for the tropical fruit sector. The WBF addresses sector-wide sustainability challenges in the banana value chain, including the use of agrochemicals, fighting diseases, health and safety at work, labour rights issues, challenges for small growers, conflicts between stakeholders, and downward price pressures from the retail industry. The WBF serves as a collaborative platform that brings together producers, exporters, importers, retailers, trade unions, civil society organizations, research institutions, governments and international organizations to find sustainable solutions.



The WBF operates through three working groups:

- **Sustainable Production Systems and Environmental Impact.** This group addresses issues related to climate change through measuring carbon and water footprints, increasing transparency and traceability of emissions, and promoting climate change adaptation, impact mitigation, biodiversity conservation, and reduction of plastic use.
- **Distribution of Value.** This group facilitates discussions among the main supply chain actors for a fairer distribution of value along the whole banana chain.
- **Labour Rights.** This group focuses on health and safety at work, gender and freedom of association and collective bargaining. This working group has developed manuals on labour rights and occupational health and safety that are being applied in large banana producing countries.

Furthermore, the WBF coordinates global efforts to combat Fusarium Tropical race 4 (TR4), a soil-borne fungus that threatens global banana production. By gathering all stakeholder groups along global banana value chains and mobilizing resources and expertise, the WBF has helped limit the spread and negative impact of TR4 on the banana industry.

Overall, the World Banana Forum's efforts in promoting sustainable practices, addressing social and environmental challenges, and fostering collaboration contribute to the advancement of sustainability and resilience in the global banana value chains.



## Factors that contribute to successful multistakeholder initiatives

Multistakeholder cooperation can be challenging, but when multistakeholder initiatives are designed well, they can yield great results. Several factors contribute to the success of multistakeholder initiatives.

### Inclusive environment

Successful multistakeholder initiatives address power imbalances among stakeholder groups and promote inclusivity. By creating an atmosphere that encourages collaboration and decision-making, these initiatives facilitate effective cooperation. This can be achieved by seeking equitable representation through membership conditions that draw in a broad range of stakeholders.

Multistakeholder initiatives encompass a diverse array of groups that either participate in or are impacted by the industry or thematic focus of the initiative. Multistakeholder initiatives may for example include small and large producers and companies, producer and trade associations, governments, civil society organizations, communities, academia and intergovernmental institutions. This distinguishes them from industry initiatives that only involve private sector actors along value chains, and private-public partnerships that solely engage government and private sector entities.

Balanced representation and mechanisms to ensure that all stakeholder groups are heard help enable the consideration of various perspectives, which enhances problem-solving and fosters a shared vision among members.

### **Clear goals**

Clear and well-defined goals provide a common direction for stakeholders, aligning efforts and fostering a sense of purpose. Initially, members can prioritize challenges that are important for all stakeholder groups and that can be addressed with limited effort. In the long-term, the initiative can also address complex issues that require more resources and dialogue between members.

### **Effective leadership**

Multistakeholder initiatives are often established by visionary leaders with an interest in a specific sector or set of sustainability challenges. Existing multistakeholder initiatives can also aim to identify leaders within all stakeholder groups to facilitate cooperation and drive action.

### **Accountability and enforcement**

Establishing robust mechanisms for accountability and enforcement of agreed-upon standards can increase the credibility and effectiveness of multistakeholder initiatives. This can also increase trust among stakeholders.

### **Conflict resolution and collaboration**

Multistakeholder initiatives involve multiple stakeholders with diverse perspectives, interests and priorities. Successful multistakeholder initiatives proactively address conflicts and seek to achieve agreements through collaboration and compromise. Transparency, accountability and formalized conflict resolution mechanisms can help foster open dialogue, negotiation and cooperation and thereby help solve complex issues.

### **Sustainable financing**

Adequate financial resources from external sources and members are essential for the success of multistakeholder initiatives. Securing long-term funding helps multistakeholder initiatives to carry out their activities. Co-funding from the members of the initiative encourages active participation and commitment. Membership fees can be scaled to ensure that smaller actors such as small civil society organizations and businesses are not excluded.

### **Neutral facilitation and technical support**

Many successful multistakeholder initiatives are facilitated by a neutral partner such as an intergovernmental organization. In the cases of the WBF and the CFS, FAO facilitates meetings and provides technical support based on its extensive expertise on sustainability challenges facing agriculture and food systems.

## Conclusion

Multistakeholder initiatives have the potential to drive sustainability and resilience in tropical fruit value chains. By fostering cooperation between diverse stakeholders, multistakeholder initiatives provide a platform for addressing social, environmental and economic challenges. The benefits of multistakeholder initiatives include the exchange of knowledge and expertise, capacity development, improved access to markets, partnership opportunities, and helping stakeholders fulfill their commitments. Successful examples demonstrate the effectiveness of collaborative approaches in the agricultural sector. To ensure the success of multistakeholder initiatives, factors such as inclusivity, accountability, neutral facilitation, sustainable financing, conflict resolution, and effective leadership with clear goals are crucial. By focusing on these factors, multistakeholder initiatives can enhance their effectiveness, build trust and legitimacy, and contribute to long-term sustainability. By leveraging the collaborative nature of multistakeholder initiatives, stakeholders can advance sustainability and resilience in tropical fruit value chains, creating a more inclusive, responsible and prosperous industry.

## GET IN TOUCH

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