



e-conference - 22 to 24 of September 2009

“Preparing the 2nd Preparatory Committee meeting: route to Geneva”

Project to establish a Multi-stakeholder Forum on Sustainable Banana Production and Trade (MSF)

FINAL REPORT

1. Introduction

The e-conference, which purpose was to clarify some issues relevant to the 2nd PrepCom meeting and to the Forum itself, lasted for three days: 22-24 September 2009.

The discussions arrived mainly in the last days, with an intense intervention exchange between European and American participants. In this brief report, we tried to capture some of the highlights...

e-conference website: <http://dgroups.org/fao/MSF-project>

2. Discussions on DS1: Scope, Mission and Objectives

Preliminary table

<p>Discussion Space #1</p> <p>Scope, Mission and Objectives</p>	<p>Some discussions about the scope of the Forum had been already held; these might be some the topics we would like to work with: workplace issues (labour standards, occupational health and safety, gender issues in the workplace, living wages...), environmental impact (biodiversity; soil, water and forest conservation; energy and emissions; agrochemical use; waste management...), sustainable productions systems (organic and integrated cultivation systems, research on new varieties, poverty alleviation, understanding existing standards...) and economic issues (including distribution of value along the chain, fair pricing, data collection, production ownership and organization, rural finance and technical assistance for small producers, optimal use of resources, development policy instruments...).</p> <p>Which other topics you would like to discuss about?</p> <p>How do you envisage the mission and objectives of the Forum?</p>
--	--

Discussions

Active participants: Alistair Smith; Eric Crisman; Gilbert Bermúdez; Iain Farquhar; Iris Munguia; MSF Secretariat.

Alistair, Iris and Gilbert expressed similar ideas about the urgent need to guarantee freedom for the trade unions of the banana sector. It was highlighted that previous experiences show that agreements between companies and trade unions are possible; these deals can lead to ensure employment income and stability for both, single workers and workers hired on groups. The same system could be and should be applied regarding the hiring of female labour force in the agroindustry sector, was stated.

It was said that the forum should be useful to solve proposals and issues that somehow attain to everyone. Iain pointed out that the mission of the forum should be to provide a space in which ideas (and information) can be exchanged, aimed at developing a more environmentally sustainable, socially just and economically fair system of international banana production and trade. He emphasized the objective of coming up with practical ideas, mechanisms, undertakings and agreements in order to realise this developmental aspiration.

In his participation, Gilbert explained that the forum is important for COLSIBA because it analyzes the interest of multiple stakeholders. For COLSIBA is also very important to study the problems related to trade unions freedom and group negotiations. He insisted, as Alistair did before, in the need to distinguish between "written law" and "applicable law". Gilbert stated that, in practice, only a few actors are supported in the farms but that doesn't change the trade unions persecution which is actually happening.

3. Discussions on DS2: Activities and future Working Groups

Preliminary table

<p>Discussion Space #2</p> <p>Activities and future Working Groups</p>	<p>This is the place for the Forum's participants to propose concrete activities and responsibilities to implement the list of objectives that will be discussed at the Forum meeting.</p> <p>An important aspect of this agenda item is to discuss about the number and composition of different working groups during the Forum and after the Forum (ideally participants who adhere to the WGs of the Forum will follow up those WGs later).</p> <p>We expect about 150 participants attending the Forum's opening day. We might need to split them into circa 10 working groups, so that everyone can find room and time to explain his ideas for the MSF. A possibility would be to create a few committees (maybe one for each main topic, see list of topics above, in Scope section) and within them, let space for discussion into different working groups or teams. The committees should possibly set goals and a timeframe to accomplish them.</p> <p>How many Working Groups should be constituted after the official launching of the Forum? Which activities do we expect them to carry out?</p>
---	---

Discussions

Active participants: Alistair Smith; Iain Farquhar; MSF Secretariat; Stephen Coats

Alistair suggested that the forum could create 5 or 6 working groups. He explained that Banana Link has been working in the area of pesticide reduction and more sustainable production systems. He affirmed that CIRAD, COLSIBA, Chiquita, Pesticide Action Network and others are very interested in developing work in this area.

Iain showed his support to the topic suggested by Alistair; afterwards, he took the lead in the discussion and explained his point of view regarding:

a) number of working groups during the forum;

He suggested the adoption of a procedure similar to the one used in the Amsterdam Industry Workshop; according to this, in a first session each of the 10 (to 15) groups would consider each of the 4 main categories (as indicated by the Secretariat in "Discussion Space 1"). Each group would propose one or more specific themes or topics for each of these categories. After they had made suggestions for these categories they could continue to add suggestions for "other topics" (i.e. a 5th "miscellaneous" category). The aim would not be to have a consensus. Only one person might be interested in a topic

but that person could still suggest it.

The second session would be a plenary. The proposals from all the groups would be compared. If two or more groups had proposed more or less the same thing, these proposals would be combined. The aim would be to minimise the number of proposals. However any participant would be allowed to insist that his/her proposal was retained as a separate theme if s/he felt that the proposal needed to have its own separate working group.

The third session would be divided into three short sub-sessions. There would be a group for each of the proposals. Participants would choose one of the groups in order to follow up the particular proposals, refining it further, and drawing up objectives and a timetable if they felt able to do this. As this session is itself divided into three short sessions, each participant would be able to move onto a second and third proposal/group, in order to contribute to the more precise formulation of at least three topics. Participants should also be allowed to drift freely between groups if they preferred to make short interventions on a larger number of proposals.

The fourth session would be a plenary. In this session all the proposals would be presented by the facilitators. The titles of the proposals would be posted; each participant would sign up to as many workshops as he/she liked and also indicate which workshops he/she would like to follow passively (i.e. the participant would like to see the results of the workshop even though he/she could not participate actively in it).

b) working groups after the forum

Iain indicated that the results of the fourth session (see above) would be used to decide which working groups should be financially supported after the forum. His view is that there should be no limit to the number of working groups after the forum ("if three or more people want to form a working group on a particular topic, they should be allowed to do so and they should be offered a very minimal support"). Small working groups like this would have to either arrange their own translation or remain mono-lingual. Possibly if a small working group wanted to set up a side event, possibly in the evening, at a subsequent forum, then they could be allowed to do so.

He continued explaining that while anyone should be allowed to form a working group, the more popular groups (identified in session 4 above) should be given financial and logistical support. A mechanism needs to be agreed for making the final decision as to which of the working groups is supported and the number of groups which can be supported would depend on the availability of funds. At least 5 groups should be supported ideally. Probably there should be at least one group for each of the 4 categories (referred to by the Secretariat). Subsequent forum meetings should review the progress made by each of the most active working groups and decisions could be made to cease supporting one group and to start supporting another, in the light of the practical progress being made.

The process described could be carried out in the afternoon of Day 1 and the morning of Day 2 of the forum, more or less fitting into the provisional draft Agenda proposed by the existing Scope and Mission WG. Iain explained that the Working Groups which follow after the forum meeting will be the element of the overall on-going forum process and that forming the post-forum working groups will be the most important outcome of the two day Forum in Rome.

Stephen Coats appreciated Iain's contribution, indicating that it would need some further reflection.

4. Discussions on DS3: Expected Outputs

Preliminary table

<p>Discussion Space #3</p> <p>Expected outputs</p>	<p>What do we want from the Forum as the main output? Maybe we could expect to have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) working groups formed and ready to work on the topics that the Forum has decided to address;b) decisions that can be implemented by the different stakeholders participating in the Forum;
---	---

	c) recommendations on issues internal to the Forum (not addressed to external partners).
--	---

Discussions

Active participants: Anne Gautier; Eric Crisman; Iain Farquhar; MSF Secretariat; Stephen Coats

Iain started the discussion explaining that given the shortage of time available at the forum, we will only be able to make a small amount of progress. It was said repeatedly that the forum has to be something practical; Iain thinks that these practical results will come not from the forum itself but from the working groups which are set up at the forum. Iain recalled the idea of a permanent MSF (initially proposed at IBCII) and he explained that the working groups can lead to it.

He also said that the forum will probably not be able to make "decisions" as stated in the table above. However he envisages "recommendations" regarding the way the forum will operate in the future.

Stephen showed agreement with Iain's "realistic expectations for the forum". To Stephen, realistic outputs would be to clarify the focus, purpose, next steps and potential of the MSF.

Regarding the issue of "decisions" he indicated that unless forum participants are all decision makers for their respective organizations, unions, etc, then we would be talking about recommendations or agreements that would need to be ratified and approved by the decision makers and decision making bodies left behind.

Anne Gautier spoke on behalf of the WG on Status and Governance. According to them, it is not certain that "decisions" could be expected from the MSF, since participation of the forum is on a voluntary basis. "Recommendations" seem more convenient. Anyway, they would not necessarily stay internal to the forum: some recommendations could indeed be communicated (i. e. about organic and integrated cultivation systems).

Apart of the clarification mentioned above by Iain and Stephen –Anne said- one of the expected outputs could be the implementation of a debate at a double level: between the members of the MSF, but also through internet. We would decide which topics and documents can or need to be circulated. Anne wondered: "Is a working group an expected output or a tool that we could use in order to reach some objectives"?

Eric Crisman spoke on behalf of the WG on External Communications. They have prepared a 100 word draft summary to capture essence of Mission (and Outputs) ensuring "practical results" while keeping "realistic outputs". According to Eric, pragmatic outcomes will be achieved in WG's, not during the forum itself.

5. Discussions on DS4: Membership and Governance

Preliminary table

<p>Discussion Space #4</p> <p>Membership and Governance</p>	<p>Here we shall address matters like: meeting frequency, e-communications, procedures for decision making, role of governments and intergovernmental organizations, governing structure...</p> <p>It was said that if the Forum is to be too formal (institutional, official), that could slow the process and will render the Forum something different than what is needed. On the grounds of this thinking, it is expected that the Forum will not be placed at a high institutional level, but it could rather work on a more informal basis, playing the role of an observatory and advisory body. If that will be the case, every stakeholder of the Forum would have pretty much a similar weight, being all of them considered "participants". What is your opinion?</p>
--	---

Discussions

Active participants: Anne Gautier; Iain Farquhar; MSF Secretariat

Iain indicated that it will be needed from the Secretariat a clear briefing regarding the constraints which the FAO would inevitably impose on the Forum [if it were located there]. He showed concern about the need to know which kind of limits the forum could face. Iain also expressed that in multi-stakeholder processes it is important to get a clear Governance right from the start (pointing out that this applies more to standard setting processes; something that is not in the mission or competencies of the forum).

Anne Gautier, speaking now on behalf of the WG on Membership and Governance, agreed with Iain on the need to clarify the rules affecting the MSF. She sent a document showing different status solutions for the MSF (basically, three options: an informal approach [current], UN multi-donor trust fund or NGO). The WG thinks that the most suitable solution would be to create an NGO and prepare detailed by-laws that would allow every stakeholder to know clearly what he's committing in. She expressed that it might take some time to write these by-laws and that this work could be carried out by one of the future working groups.

When speaking on behalf of the WG on Status and Governance, Anne said that it is not sure that a loose institutional level would facilitate the process of the forum. She insisted on the importance of setting clear rules.

annex I

e-conference AGENDA

Timetable expressed in Central European Summer Time: UTC/GMT +2 hours

Tuesday, 22nd September

10.00 Opening of the e-conference

Start your contribution by giving your views on the main issues proposed above. You will find a space for these discussion threads in our dedicated website.

13.00 Lunch break

15.00 Afternoon session

Participants are expected to participate in one or several of the discussions that will be available in our website.

18.00 End of 1st day

Wednesday, 23rd September

10.00 Opening of the e-conference 2nd day

Participants are expected to participate in one or several of the discussions that will be available in our website.

13.00 Lunch break

15.00 Afternoon session

Participants are expected to participate in one or several of the discussions that will be available in our website.

18.00 End of the e-conference

Friday, 25th September

The MSF Secretariat will circulate for comments and corrections among the PrepCom members a first draft of the e-conference outcomes.

Tuesday, 29th September

Last day to receive comments to the e-conference draft report sent on Friday by the MSF Secretariat.

Thursday, 1st October

The MSF Secretariat will prepare and disseminate to the PrepCom for internal use the final version of the e-conference outcomes.