Towards a more Sustainable Banana - Limitations and strengths of a territorial approach

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Sustainable chains: challenges

- In addition to GlobalGAP, increased volumes of tropical fruit with organic, Fairtrade or Rainforest Alliance certifications ...

- **Important emerging issues**: Sustainable land and water use, biodiversity, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, management and recycling of solid and liquid waste, integrated pest management, reduction of agrochemicals, sustainable soil management ...

- (1) The existing certifications acknowledge these issues, *only partially*.

- (2) By definition, the existing standards *are uniform* and do not take into account: the *heterogeneity of contexts* and also of *opportunities*, to make progress in building up more sustainable chains.

- (3) The existing standards and certifications are focused on the farm, the product, or the organisation; *but not on the territory*, the water catchment areas, the surrounding agro-ecosystem and wider context.
The “Agriculture for Development” agenda: enormous challenge to feed a growing world population and alleviate poverty; to raise productivity in a sustainable and climate smart way; and to realise this all, simultaneously.

The territory: an important natural dimension and socio-economic space, with an appropriate scale for participation, to concretize this agenda:

- **Rural Territorial Development**: (1) “cooperate to compete” for the positioning of territories in dynamic markets; (2) address poverty and inequality as explicit goals; (3) participation, decentralization and institutional transformation to push forward this agenda.

- **Agro-Ecological approach**: scale up and enhance “sustainable agriculture practices” at territorial level: conservation of biodiversity, natural resources and habitats; waste management, recycling of nutrients, watershed management ..: (1) create “productive agricultural landscapes”; (2) that also offer important ecosystem services and climate mitigation.

Are these territorial approaches relevant for “banana regions” …?
The “savannah” or “desert” banana
Peru: Territorial study and case studies of banana farms, by local consultants and an environmental NGO (APECOINCA).

Setting: small farms (1 ha or less) organized in producer associations, in the arid zone in North Peru. Fairtrade organic banana – great impact on poverty alleviation and empowerment.

- Without doubt: access to irrigation water, water quality, appropriate water resource management are the main issues in the medium term.
- Soil degradation – close monitoring, appropriate measures and practices needed, to prevent erosion, exhaustion and salinization.
- Appearance of pests (thrips – red rust); search for biological control methods has high priority and is becoming very urgent.
- Risks related to climate change (stronger Niño events - flooding).
- Dry climate – no Sigatoka. “The most biological banana in the world”.
- Rapidly growing sector (two digits / year).
The “mountain” or “forest” banana

Ecuador
The producers and their territory (2): - the mountain banana from Ecuador

- Ecuador: Territorial study and case studies of banana farms, by an environmental NGO (Conservation & Development, member of the Sustainable Agriculture Network of Rainforest Alliance).

Setting: small farmers (3 – 10 ha) in agroforestry systems; intercropping with cocoa, fruit trees and forest, in the hillsides, semi-humid climate. Organized in producer associations.

- Fairtrade organic banana – very low use of external inputs.
- Greatly contribute to biodiversity, soil conservation and regulation of the hydrological system (environmental services).
- Low productivity and bad roads affect competitiveness (high costs) and long term feasibility – a big threat. How to increase their robustness?
- The Gros Michel variety (extinct in the lowlands by the Panama disease in the 60ties) survives in the mountains. ¿Could this be a specialty or gourmet banana ….? Highly appreciated on the local market (people willing to pay more).
“Sanannah grown” and “mountain grown” bananas in the marketplace …?

- Survey among 6 selected supermarkets (Netherlands, Belgium) by Schuttelaar & Partners:
  - Tendency: “mainstreaming” of sustainability. Improved corporate communication on multiple issues (climate, residues, wellness of animals ... ) and also on product level (ingredients, production and processing circumstances, certification schemes and labels).
  - Imposition of sustainability requirements to suppliers / supply chains. No compliance = exclusion.
  - Supermarkets want to promote their own sustainable house brands in the first place. Low interest for a special “sustainability brand” (like “savannah grown” or “mountain grown”), from outside.
  - Interest in investing in sustainability in “own” suppliers in a long-term commercial relationship.
  - Independent verification of sustainability claims: considered as crucial.
  - Fruit and vegetables: quite suited product group to improve the image of supermarket as a whole on the sustainability score.
Final remarks …

- Many emerging sustainability items not covered by certifications.
- Towards a more sustainable banana? Additional approaches needed, to address issues at territorial (or even global) level: water, soils, climate change, biodiversity, poverty, inequality ….
- Retail sector: not waiting for branding as carrier for complex sustainability messages.
- Consumer doesn’t want to choose each day – but expects the industry and retail sector to be decent, that is: sustainable.
- Corporate Social Responsibility policies: opportunity for retail sector and industry to show their commitment with certain territories.
- Rural Territorial Development and Agro-Ecology approaches: explore their potential to address urgent environmental and social issues at territorial level – also in “banana territories”.
- Sectorwide approach, chain approach and territorial approaches can come together to work on the “agriculture for development agenda”: also in the banana sector.