

**The IUF/COLSIBA – CHIQUITA framework agreement:
a case study**

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Acknowledgements

The author is most grateful to the Danish Council for Development Research, the Danish General Workers' Union and Roskilde University Centre as without their funding the fieldwork would not have been possible. The same goes to the Danish Institute for International Studies who funded the writing of the paper.

Special thanks go to the banana workers, banana unions and the Chiquita managers who participated in the investigative part of the work as well as to Peter Gibbon, Stefano Ponte and Jesper Nielsen for their continuous invaluable support and advice through-out the entire work.

List of acronyms and abbreviations

ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific
ATC	Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo (Nicaragua)
CC.OO.	Comisiones Obreras (Spain)
CGIL	Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro
CISL	Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori
COLSIBA	Latin-American Coordination of Banana Workers Unions
COSIBAH	Coordination of Banana Workers Unions Honduras
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
EC	European Commission
EIRO	European Industrial Relations Observatory On-line
EIRR	European Industrial Relations Review
EUROBAN	European Banana Action Network
EWC	European Work Councils
EWCB	European Work Councils Bulletin
FEMCA-CISL	Federazione Lavoratori Energia Risorse Chimica affini della CISL
FENACLE	Federación Nacional de Asociaciones de Campesinos e Indígenas Libres de Ecuador
FILCEA-CGIL	Federazione Italiana Lavoratori Chimici
FIM-CISL	Federazione Italiana Metalmeccanici

FIOM-CGIL	Federazione Impiegati Operai Metallurgici
GATT	General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs
ICEM	International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Union
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
IFA	International Framework Agreement
IFBWW	International Federation of Building and Wood Workers
IG BAU	Industriegewerkschaft Bauen-Agrar-Umwelt (Trade Union for Building, Forestry, Agriculture and Environment)
IG BCE	Industriegewerkschaft Bergbau, Chemie, Energie/ Mining, Chemical and Energy Industrial Union
IG Metall	Industriegewerkschaft Metall - metalworkers' union
IMF	International Metalworkers' Federation
ILO	International Labour Organization/Office
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
IUF	International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations
MNE	Multinational Enterprise
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NOPEF	Norwegian Oil and Petrochemical Workers' Union
NZDWU	New Zealand Dairy Workers Union Incorporated
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

OME-OTE	Federation of Greek Telecommunications Employees
SA	Social Accountability
SINTRAINAGRO	Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Industria Agropecuaria, Colombia
SITAGAH	Sindicato de Trabajadores Agrícolas, Ganaderos y Anexos de Heredia (Costa Rica)
SITRABI	Sindicato de Trabajadores Bananeros de Izabal
UGT	Unión General de Trabajadores
UIL	Unione Italiana del Lavoro
UILCEM-UIL	Unione Italiana Lavoratori della Chimica dell'Energia e del Manifatturiero
UILM-UIL	Unione Italiana Lavoratori Metalmeccanici
UNI	Union Network International
UNSITRAGUA	Unión Sindical de Trabajadores de Guatemala
US/LEAP	US/Labour Education in the Americas Project
WTO	World Trade Organization

Contents

	<i>Page</i>
Acknowledgements	iii
List of acronyms and abbreviations.....	v
Executive summary	xi
Introduction	1
Globalization, capital and labour.....	5
The end of the Cold War and the spread of the market economy	5
Changing market conditions and patterns of consumption – the rise of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).	6
Labour and CSR.....	8
The COLSIBA / IUF – Chiquita framework agreement: background	8
Evaluating the implementation of the agreement.....	12
Dissemination of and knowledge about the agreement.....	13
Agreement compliance in practice.....	14
Supplier plantations.....	14
Use of the Review Committee and the agreement	15
Concluding remarks	17
Bibliography.....	19

Executive summary

A rapidly growing number of international trade unions are signing International Framework Agreements with multinational enterprises (MNEs), securing their commitment to respect fundamental workers' rights. This paper explores the agreement between the global banana giant Chiquita and the Latin-American Coordination of Banana Workers Unions (COLSIBA) signed in 2001. To achieve the agreement the banana unions employed innovative tactics of regional coordination and of alliances with solidarity groups in the major consumer markets, using public campaigns against Chiquita targeting supermarket chains and consumers. This paper argues that such international agreements show a promising way to defend and advance workers rights within MNEs, allowing trade unions to develop a sophisticated multi-level response to the challenges of MNEs geographically dispersed production systems and outsourcing strategies. More broadly the strategies show innovative possibilities for unions to work *with* non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to secure respect for basic workers rights within MNEs.

Introduction

As noted by many observers there has been a marked worldwide decline in union density and bargaining power. Although often overstated and portrayed as the end of organized labour, the fact remains that during the last decades various globalization processes have to a certain extent eroded the foundation on which organized labour was traditionally built. The question that needs to be explored then is how can organized labour find a space within this new globalization context?

Alongside the decline of trade union power there has been a remarkable rise in the number and influence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) covering a diverse series of issues such as women's rights, the environment, and human rights – areas that have more or less obvious overlapping interests with the labour movement. In short, while in many countries labour declines in numbers and socio-economic influence, many NGOs are becoming household names and increasingly influential in national and international decision-making. For the future influence of organized labour it therefore seems crucial to ask whether the rise of NGOs offers new opportunities for unions? And if so what are the possibilities and the limitations?

There seems however to be a marked lack of literature that explores possible points of labour-NGO cooperation, as well as points of learning and conflict. One author that has made an initial attempt at identifying areas and conditions for NGO-union cooperation is Dan Gallin who identifies human and workers' rights as one obvious area of cooperation, but also of conflict:

A basic overarching principle is the defence of human rights and that issue does constitute a key point of contact for NGOs and unions. This requires acceptance on the part of the NGOs involved that, firstly, the rights of workers as workers are a human rights issue and that, secondly, workers' rights are a union rights issue because workers have no other way to express their collective interests except through independent and democratic trade unions. (Gallin 1999:14).

Here we touch upon one of the essential issues in discussing possibilities for NGO-union cooperation, namely that NGOs can be allies of labour in securing basic workers' rights, but potentially also generate responses that work against labour interests. An obvious example of this is code of conduct responses, where businesses in many cases have embraced code of conducts as protection against public opinion and as means to sidestep demands for unionization. The RUGMARK certification system for example guarantees that no child workers have been used in the production of the labelled blankets, but does nothing to secure the rights of the remaining workforce (Liubicic 2001). A 1998 ILO investigation¹ of 215 codes found that only around 15 per cent refer to freedom of association or the right to collective bargaining, and likewise a 1999 OECD investigation²

¹ Of the 215 voluntary initiatives 80 per cent were unilateral (ILO 1998).

² Of the 182 initiatives 98 were unilateral, 59 from business associations, 22 from stakeholder partnerships and 3 NGO model codes (Engels 2000).

shows that only around 20 per cent of the 182 investigated codes refer explicitly to the ILO conventions on freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining (Engels 2000).

Standards relating to social and environmental conditions of production are becoming increasingly widespread and as noted by several researchers a general move towards voluntary regulation types can be detected, making industry-friendly solutions even more common (Ponte 2002, Richter 2001, Haufler 2001, Messner, 2002). Mandatory regulation is here defined as legally binding obligations contrary to so called voluntary regulation that have no clear legal implications. As seen in the examples above one can seriously question whether most voluntary initiatives reflect NGO or business interests rather than workers' interests. Even where basic labour rights are included, the initiatives are most often formulated without worker consultation and do not give relevant worker representatives a place in monitoring compliance or provide effective complaint procedures. As a result it is important to differentiate between voluntary initiatives that are negotiated with labour and initiatives that are not (for a detailed typology on the broader field of standards see Messner, 2002).

One mechanism to secure workers rights that seems to overcome some of the difficulties mentioned are International Framework Agreements (IFAs). IFAs can be defined as agreements on minimum labour standards negotiated between international unions and multinational enterprises (MNEs). The IFAs include as a minimum freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining and provide unions with formalized representation at the corporate level of the enterprise.³ IFAs constitute a rapidly growing phenomenon. They doubled in number from 11 in early-2001 to 22 in mid-2002 and at the time of writing at least 25 such agreements had been signed (see chart 1) (EIRR 2002, EWCB 2002, Wills 2003, EIRO website at www.eiro.eirofound.ie, EWCB 2001, ICFTU website at www.icftu.org).⁴ Unfortunately empirical research on this area is extremely limited, so far consisting only of a study of the Accor-IUF agreement by Jane Wills (2003).⁵ This paper will argue that IFAs are fundamentally different from voluntary initiatives that are not labour negotiated and that they demonstrate that NGOs and trade unions can cooperate in certain areas such as advocacy for workers rights and corporate campaigns to the benefit of trade unions and workers.

³ IFAs are defined by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) as: "A framework agreement is an agreement negotiated between a multinational company and a global union federation concerning the international activities of that company. The main purpose of a framework agreement is to establish a formal ongoing relationship between the multinational company and the global union federation which can solve problems and work in the interests of both parties." (<http://www.icftu.org>)

⁴ The agreements have mostly been signed with European based companies and often with a global union federation (formerly known as international trade secretariats) as signatory or co-signatory from the labour side.

⁵ Wills' investigation shows how the Accor agreement has allowed the IUF to intervene successfully at corporate level against union hostile local managers in New York, resulting in the replacement of the management and local recognition of the union. But the study also shows examples of the IUF raising violations with local or regional management not resulting in improved opportunities for organization due to lack of consistent local organising activities. Wills concludes that to be effective the agreement needs progressive local organising (Wills 2003). Wills' study does not investigate dissemination, use and attitudes towards the agreement nor does it look at the union strategies leading to the agreement.

Chart 1: List of IFAs⁶

Company	Sector	Home country	Joint text	Date	Employee-side parties
Accor	Hotels	France	Agreement on workers' rights	June 1995	IUF
AngloGold**	Mining & energy	South Africa	Agreement on workers' rights	September 2002	ICEM
Ballast Nedam	Construction	Netherlands	Agreement on workers' rights	March 2002	IFBWW, FNV Bouw
Carrefour	Retail	France	Agreement on workers' rights	May 2001	UNI with EWC involvement
Chiquita Brands International	Fruit and vegetables	USA	Agreement on workers' rights (in Latin American banana operations)	June 2001	IUF, COLSIBA
Daimler Chrysler**	Automotive industry	Germany	Social responsibility principles	July 2002	IMF, world employee committee
Danone	Food	France	Various joint texts (e.g. on restructuring, union rights and equality)	1989-2001	IUF
Endesa	Energy	Spain	Protocol to institutionalise dialogue at international level	January 2002	ICEM, CC.OO., UGT
Eni*	Energy	Italy	Agreement on workers' rights	November 2002	ICEM, FILCEA-Cgil, FEMCA-Cisl, UILCEM-UIL
Faber-Castell	Writing products	Germany	Agreement on code of conduct	March 2002	IFBWW, IG-Metall
Fonterra	Food	New Zealand	Agreement on workers' rights and changes affecting employment	April 2002	IUF, NZDWU
Freudenberg	Non-woven and allied products	Germany	Agreement on cooperation, responsibility and social dialogue	July 2000, renewed January 2002	ICEM, IG BCE
GEA AG**	Electrical appliances	Germany	Agreement on labour standards	April 2003	IMF and EWC

⁶ Agreements have been signed between Air France - ETF & EWC and between Hyder – PSI but these are not published on either company or union websites and it is therefore unclear whether they still exist. A broader definition of IFAs could include agreements signed with European Works Councils such as the agreements with Club Méditerranée, Suez Lyonnaise des Eaux and Vivendi or agreements signed between national unions and MNEs covering the enterprise worldwide such as the agreement between three Italian unions and Artsana.

Hochtief	Construction	Germany	Agreement on code of conduct	March 2002	IFBWW, IG BAU, German works council
IKEA	Furniture retail/manufacturing	Sweden	Agreement on code of conduct	May 1998, revised December 2001	IFBWW
ISS	Business services	Denmark	Corporate policy statement on trade unions rights	August 1998	UNI
LEONI**	Metal production		Agreement on social rights and principles	October 2002	IMF, EWC
Merloni	Electrical appliances	Italy	Agreement on code of conduct	December 2001	IMF, Fiom-Cgil, Fim-Cisl, Uilm-Uil
OTE	Telecommunications	Greece	Agreement on code of conduct	June 2001	UNI, OME-OTE
Skanska	Construction	Sweden	Agreement on workers' rights	February 2001	IFBWW
SKF	Manufacturing	Sweden	Agreement on workers' rights	November 2003	IMF
Skog*	Paper	Norway	Agreement on workers' rights	June 2002	ICEM, NOPEF
Statoil	Energy	Norway	Agreement on the exchange of information and development of good working practices	July 1998, revised March 2001	ICEM, NOPEF
Telefónica	Telecommunications	Spain	Social protocol on international agreements and agreement on code of conduct	January 2000 and March 2001	UNI, CC.OO., UGT
Volkswagen	Motor manufacturing	Germany	Declaration of intent on common statement on social standards and cooperation	September 2001	IMF, world work council

Source: EWCB 2002, * EIRO website, ** ICFTU website.

This paper explores the potential of IFAs to secure workers' rights. On the basis of a case study of the IFA between IUF/COLSIBA and Chiquita it is argued that the case shows new and promising labour strategies for obtaining workers rights within MNEs though not without problems. This IFA grew out of the banana unions' greater use of regional coordination and of alliances with solidarity groups in the major consumer markets, using public campaigning against Chiquita that targeted supermarket chains and consumers. In other words, instead of just trying to control capital's access to labour, the unions actively tried to control capital's access to the retail market, consumers and investors. Using a fieldwork study on the implementation of the agreement, the paper discusses problems associated with implementing IFAs and the broader potential of IFAs as means to defend and advance workers' rights within MNEs. The study reveals relatively poor use of the agreement's potential by the unions, due to a lack of experience and unity within COLSIBA. In spite of these difficulties, the agreement proved critical in supporting union organising efforts in Honduras and Colombia. This paper argues that such international agreements show a promising way to defend and advance workers rights within MNEs,

allowing unions to develop a sophisticated multi-level response to the challenges of MNEs' geographically dispersed production systems and outsourcing strategies.

In order to analyse the strategies employed by COLSIBA, it is necessary to understand some ongoing globalization processes and trends. This is needed to provide a framework for understanding the significance of the case study and its implications for the potential and limitations of IFAs. Having provided an outline of certain globalization trends the paper goes on to examine the specific background for COLSIBA achieving the IFA with Chiquita and analyses the labour strategies used. With a starting point in a field study of the implementation of the agreement the paper finally examines the potential of such agreements in defending and advancing workers' rights within MNEs.

Globalization, capital and labour

The end of the Cold War and the spread of the market economy

With the end of the Cold War came a narrowing of strategic possibilities for political and economical organization with capitalist economic relations as the norm. The last decades of intensive internationalisation of capital together with developments in transport and communication technologies have caused changes in the organization of capitalist production and with this, new geographical divisions of labour. With the spread of market economy and the lowering of trade barriers the market for labour has also opened and workers in different countries find themselves in more direct competition with each other than ever before. Central in the globalized capitalist world economy are the MNEs as a focal force in integrating national and local economies in global and regional production networks and in coordinating and controlling these production chains and networks (Dicken 2000, Tapiola 2000, Held & McGrew 2000).

One of the major competitive advantages of the MNEs is their reach, which enables them to exploit geographic differences in labour cost and regulation and thereby play off workers and governments in different countries, sometimes resulting in lower wages and non-enforcement of labour and environmental laws (or deregulation), a trend otherwise known as the race to the bottom. This development has been reinforced with the increased use of outsourcing (Moody 2001, Herod 1995, Dicken 2000, Ghadge 2000, Henk 1995). The extent to which these general trends prevail in particular sectors varies according to the latter's labour intensiveness, sunk cost requirements, and vulnerability towards labour action. The increased mobility of goods and capital while services and labour remain relatively confined within national borders has made it more difficult generally for labour to advance its objectives through traditional local industrial action or tripartite social contracts (Ghadge 2000, Munck 2000, Gallin 1999, Moody 2001, Tayler 1999, Henk 1995). Capital is no longer as bound by the traditional social compromise and in many countries the power of the state to defend social rights has declined. Labour therefore needs to look beyond the state for complementary strategies to defend labour rights.

But the last decades have also brought new possibilities for labour. The end of the cold war has meant that organized labour has been able to turn its focus from geopolitical east-west concerns to the need for international labour coordination and cooperation (Ashwin 2000, Moody 2001). Together with enhanced communication possibilities this has greatly facilitated international labour cooperation, something that is evident in a

regional coordinating body like COLSIBA covering unions from both sides of the old political communist/liberal divide. In many developing countries the end of the cold war also meant a move towards greater independence from political parties, facilitating labour cooperation and pointing toward labour strategies that look beyond the state as sole guarantor of labour rights.⁷ At the same time the new scenario after the cold war has made a better climate for labour-NGO cooperation. The end of the cold war and the spread of the neo liberal agenda have also meant a greater diffusion of western labour strategies - in other words a greater diffusion of labour models that promote labour-employer cooperation (Frundt 2002, Koonings et al 1995, Moody 2001). Some see the consequences of these developments primarily in terms of more concessions from labour. However it is also clear that they include new labour-negotiated regulation mechanisms, such as IFAs.

Changing market conditions and patterns of consumption – the rise of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

A dominant feature of today's market for consumer goods is the spectacular spread and significance of brands as the dominant product value factor (Gad 2001, Jacobsen 1999, Klein 2000, Kunde 2001). In increasingly saturated markets brands are what differentiate a product. Since brands sell images of consumption as well as products, it is essential for businesses to incorporate values that are important to consumers and this increasingly includes CSR. Activism by NGOs, media coverage of corporate misbehaviour and calls for product boycotts by consumer associations have all contributed to a higher level of consumer awareness and helped mobilize the public to use its purchasing power in favour of socially responsible business conduct. As noted by marketing researcher Thomas Gad,

For most companies it can be said that they won't necessarily get more customers by being socially responsible, but they definitely risk losing customers by not being socially responsible (own translation, Gad 2001:94).

The same processes underlay the spread and significance of international social accountability standards such as SA 8000⁸. As Sandra Waddock et al. argue, a movement exists towards incorporating socially responsible business behaviour, within a broadened definition of the generally accepted quality imperative, as a potential source of competitive advantage for companies (Waddock et al. 2002). This is part of a more general trend where standards and classifications have gone from being instruments to reduce transaction costs within homogeneous markets to becoming strategic instruments of competition in differentiated markets (Giovannucci & Reardon n.d., Reardon et al. 2001, Gibbon & Ponte 2004). In the food retailing sector this process has been driven by leading supermarket chains. In a context of rising consumer demands and the growing number of leading companies adopting voluntary standards such as ISO 14000⁹ and SA 8000, such standards can become de facto criteria for market access, integration into global value chains and

⁷ In many developing countries unions have traditionally been strongly politicised and often strongly tied to left, centre or national independence parties and were often incorporated in state dominated structures especially in connexion with import substitution regimes (Henk 1995).

⁸ Certification with auditors introduced by Social Accountability International covering workers rights.

⁹ Certification with auditors introduced by ISO covering environmental aspects.

qualification as local suppliers (Liubicic 2001, Ponte 2002, Messner 2002). Large food MNEs are well aware of these tendencies:

In 1999, we compiled a list of European customers (mostly retailers) who had either inspected our farms or asked us to respond to questions about our social and environmental performance. We concluded the volume sold to these customers was "at risk," because they may have changed suppliers if we were unable to demonstrate our achievement of high social and environmental standards ... these same customers represented 54 per cent of the total volume we sold into key European markets in 2001. (Chiquita 2002:29)

Increased popular participation in corporate shareholding and the corresponding rise in institutional investors like pension funds and investment trusts, a development especially marked in Anglo-Saxon countries (Gibbon & Ponte 2004), adds to these processes¹⁰. In the light of the growing phenomenon of political investment, the increased significance of institutional investors increases pressure on companies to adopt CSR initiatives. The increased interest from consumers can be expected to some degree to be indirectly reflected in the supplier choice of the big retail chains so that to a higher degree they avoid using suppliers that can obviously be connected to practices such as the use of child labour (Andersen & Tobiasen 2001). A similar assumption can be made about the political investors in that many pension and investment funds will protect against potential dissatisfaction by avoiding companies with obvious unethical behaviour. The same can be said about business leaders who to some extent have to count with the possible reaction of customers, retailers and investors. The pressure on companies and thereby their incentive to incorporate environmentally and socially responsible practices is further amplified by the increased spread and significance of 'best practice' awards and 'best of' rankings where companies are evaluated on their performance in different areas - areas that increasingly include social aspects, as for example 'Best Corporate citizen' from Business Ethics or Fortune's 'America's most admired companies' (Fortune Magazine website at <http://www.fortune.com/fortune/>, Waddock et al. 2002). At the same time CSR has also been put on the agenda of some powerful international organizations like the World Bank, OECD and the European Commission (EC), yet another factor that adds to the business incentive (Richter 2001, Engels 2000, Diller 2000, EIRO website at www.eiro.eirofound.ie).

The pressure on companies to adopt CSR initiatives and the degree to which they can differentiate products by CSR differs markedly from company to company especially in relation to product, outlet market and brand dependency. Although 'consumer politics'¹¹ is almost exclusively limited to products sold to western markets and more influential with brand dependent companies, most researchers nevertheless seem to over-emphasise the 'brand dependency' of consumer politics (see for example Liubicic 2001, Karliner 1997, Andersen & Tobiasen 2001). On the basis of the developments described above, it is

¹⁰ Many European-based companies are dominated by banks rather than institutional investors – but CSR is slowly seeping in to the banking world as well.

¹¹ Consumer politics is here defined as political influence through private consumption with includes buying or abstaining from buying certain products with the intention of furthering a political goal (likewise this includes investing or abstaining from investing in certain companies). Thereby the political consumer and the political investor differ markedly from the consumer and investor normally reckoned with within economic theory i.e. who per definition have as sole motivation maximizing their own profit and are not concerned with the aggregate consequences of their consumer choice or investment (Andersen & Tobiasen 2001).

possible to advance a more nuanced position. The major retail chains are increasingly powerful players with the potential to put pressure on all of their suppliers whether brand dependent or not¹² – a potential that increases with the saturation of markets, the concentration of retailers and the increased spread and significance of standards. In addition the growing phenomenon of political investment, a mechanism that doesn't necessarily have anything to do with vulnerable brands, means that consumer politics has implications for business generally. Of course, this still leaves open whether specific initiatives make a concrete difference in the production process, how to monitor compliance and how to avoid the phenomenon of 'corporate greenwash'. Still, political consumption and worker-negotiated voluntary regulation seem a promising alternative in limiting the effects of a very substantial economic concentration of power, particularly in the absence of convincing alternatives (Andersen & Tobiasen 2001).

Labour and CSR

While corporate adoption of CSR is mainly a question of profitability and damage prevention, the new climate also makes it possible to identify overlapping interests between employers and workers and thereby cooperation through negotiated voluntary initiatives. At the same time the increased demands of CSR together with the new possibilities for union cooperation across geographical and political boundaries have given labour new powerful tools in terms of publicly discrediting corporations in their outlet markets and in relation to potential investors, thereby combining their bargaining power with that of NGOs, consumers and investors.

Despite being a relatively new field for discussion it is surprising that most literature concerning consumer politics and CSR in connexion with labour rights, completely ignores labour as a potential force for elaborating and implementing voluntary initiatives or as an agent that can actively use changes in market conditions and patterns of consumption to further workers objectives. Rather, most researchers within these fields see CSR only as something through which consumers, investors and NGOs can influence how MNEs behave in relation to issues such as the environment and working conditions (see for example Bendell 2000, Richter 2001, Haufler 2001 & Liubicic 2001). So far NGOs and businesses on their own have been far superior in defining how to incorporate CSR but as we shall see in the following case study, workers *can* take advantage of the new climate to secure respect for basic workers' rights within MNEs.

The COLSIBA / IUF – Chiquita framework agreement: background

In June 2001 a COLSIBA/IUF-Chiquita framework agreement was signed following a damaging international campaign accusing the banana giant of violating workers' rights on Chiquita owned and supplier plantations in Latin America. This was the culmination of several years of coordinated union-NGO effort and one of a series of CSR initiatives adopted by Chiquita.

¹² One needs though to differentiate between the different interests of budget and higher-class chains.

The international banana industry is dominated by five companies covering more than 82 per cent of world exports (Chiquita Brands (USA) 25-26 per cent, Dole Standard Fruit (USA) 25-26 per cent, Del Monte Fresh Produce (USA/Chile/Arab Emirates) 16 per cent, Noboa (Ecuador) 10 per cent and Fyffes (Ireland) 6-7 per cent) (Van de Kastelee 1998, SiD 2001). The leading companies are involved in production, packing, transport and ripening which gives them a high degree of control over the production end of the commodity chain, both in terms of setting quality and price demands with suppliers but also in terms of pressuring host countries concerning taxes, labour regulation and environmental laws (Van de Kastelee 1998, Chambron 2000, Alfaro 2001). At the retail end of the commodity chain the leading companies are in fierce competition due to saturated markets and oversupply and under pressure on price from the highly concentrated retail sector (New Internationalist 1999, Rabobank 2001). Latin America accounts for more than 72 per cent of total exports but in 1993 as a continuation of the Lomé conventions the EC introduced a banana regime favouring “non-competitive” bananas from former European colonies (the ACP countries = African, Caribbean and Pacific states). Several Latin American countries and the US (under pressure from Chiquita) challenged the regime in the GATT and later in the WTO leading to a reformed regime in 2001 that still favours ACP bananas although to a lesser degree (Van de Kastelee 1998a+b).

Faced with the EC banana regime, oversupply and falling prices the banana companies responded with different coping strategies. All companies restructured their operations by increased outsourcing of the production process, but while Dole and Del Monte invested massively in production in the EC and APC countries, Chiquita devoted its resources to demanding the abolition of the EC regime (Van de Kastelee 1998b, Roche 1998, Lewis 2000). With the continuation of the regime Chiquita lost market shares especially in the lucrative German market and experienced severe economic difficulties culminating in a Chapter 11 filing in 2001 (though successfully completed in March 2002) (Van de Kastelee 1998b, Roche 1998, Financial Times 2003).

In addition to outsourcing and rationalising the production process another important strategy for Chiquita has been to strengthen its market position through campaigns directed at consumers and retailers, especially in Europe. Promoting the Chiquita name as a logo signalling high quality bananas is a strategy Chiquita has followed for many years to earn a premium, but through adding environmental and social responsibility to the Chiquita image, Chiquita has in the 1990s sought to promote brand awareness of Chiquita as the industry’s leading CSR company (Van de Kastelee 1998b). In pursuit of a ‘responsible’ image Chiquita adopted a range of CSR initiatives starting with environmental certification through the Better Banana Project in 1995, followed from 2000 by adoption of a company Code of Conduct, SA 8000 certification, joining ETI¹³, the publication of annual CSR reports and, finally, the signing of the COLSIBA/IUF agreement. This range of initiatives has been adopted not only because of pressure from stakeholders but also as a strategy of product differentiation and to defend market share (see quote p. 6). According to Chiquita itself, its efforts to incorporate socially responsible business practises, and committing to a framework agreement with the Latin American banana unions, is not just an image-booster but also a strategy to lower production costs through good labour relations – thereby facilitating the implementation of new practices and decreasing the risk of strikes (Chiquita 2002). Although there is logic to this argument, it is clear that the trigger for the COLSIBA/IUF agreement was a damaging international campaign starting in 1998 where

¹³ Ethical Trading Initiative, an alliance of companies, NGOs and unions operating in the UK that has developed a code of labour practices and is working with different monitoring systems.

the banana-giant was publicly denounced in the US and Europe as anything but responsible. As Steve Warshaw, then president of Chiquita noted,

In the wake of particularly damaging media coverage, we embarked on a disciplined path toward corporate responsibility. (Cited in Bendell 2002).

Behind the campaign was a transatlantic network of different organizations and networks sympathetic with the cause of the banana workers who in the form of their regional coordinating body COLSIBA, formed part of the campaign network.

COLSIBA dates back to 1993. It has members in seven different countries¹⁴ and represents 42 unions covering around 45,000 workers. The majority of the COLSIBA members are affiliated to the IUF. The organization was formed as a response to the EC banana regime and the related industry crisis, with the purpose of exchanging experiences and developing a coordinated regional strategy that would make the unions better equipped to overcome the crisis and to confront the multinationals (COLSIBA 2001).

The problems facing most Latin American banana workers have grown with the industry crisis and the coping strategies of the multinationals. One of the biggest threats of the unions is the relocation of production to non-union, low pay supplier plantations especially in Ecuador and the pacific coast of Guatemala (see figure 1). This ever-present threat, together with the flow of cheap bananas from these non-organized plantations undermines the general bargaining position of the workers. Further to this, rationalisation has meant a move towards looser contract forms and anti-union policies such as discrimination, firing and blacklisting, as well as continued support for the 'solidarismo' organizations¹⁵ introduced by the employers in the 1980s to replace the independent unions (Bermúdez 2000, Human Rights Watch 2002, Quesada 2001).

The regional coordination of banana workers' unions in 1993 was a milestone. As noted by German Zepeda coordinator of COLSIBA,

before this we had never explored the international market, we were simply workers. We didn't know anything about the transnationals, about the market, about costs (interview 10.05.02).

Coordinating internally and being able to exchange information and coordinate strategies gave the unions a much better basis from which to confront the MNEs. One of the innovative strategies adopted by COLSIBA to counter the challenges of the MNEs was cooperation with solidarity groups¹⁶ in the major consumer markets of USA and Europe,

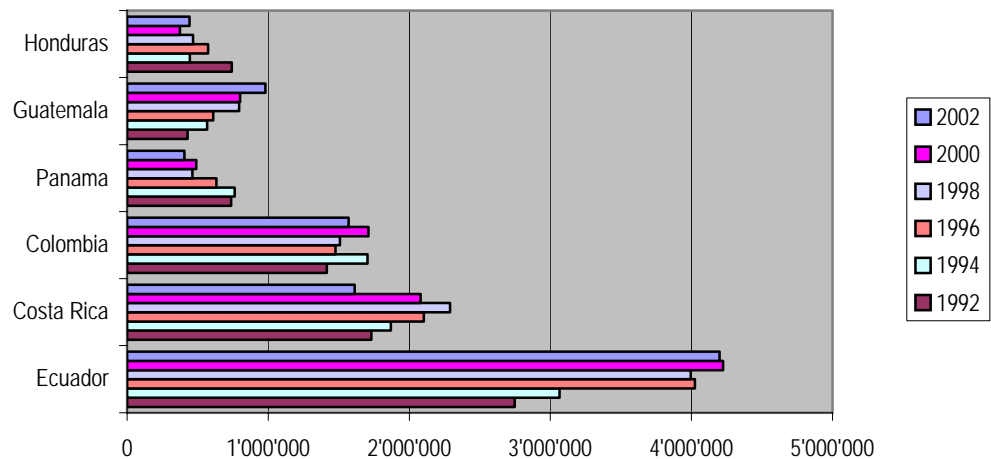
¹⁴ Ecuador, Colombia, Costa Rica, Panama, Nicaragua, Honduras and Guatemala (before the obliteration of Banderas Unidas COLSIBA also covered organised banana workers in Belize).

¹⁵ The solidarismo organizations are partly financed by the employer partly by the workers. They offer amongst others credit opportunities and social activities but they do not defend workers' rights and they do not recognize the right to negotiate collective agreements (Bermúdez 2000).

¹⁶ Since the mid-1990s a range of networks and organisations have emerged fighting for better working and environmental conditions within the banana industry. Networks such as Banana Link and EUROBAN campaign for decent conditions within the industry e.g. by publicly exposing working conditions and advocating for fair trade products.

and employing public campaigning in these markets that targeted supermarket chains and consumers. Another innovative strategy was to try to compel the multinationals to sign international framework agreements on workers rights, a tactic that succeeded with the signing of the Chiquita agreement in June 2001.

Figure 1: Latin American main exporters (Mt)



Source: FAO 2003

Leading up to the signing of the agreement were several years of work targeting the banana company. In May 1998 a series of revelations about Chiquita appeared in the Cincinnati Enquirer, Chiquita's home town. Chiquita was accused of political corruption, owning secret companies, poisoning workers by crop-dusting while they worked in the fields and squashing trade union activity. COLSIBA along with its European and American collaborators took advantage of the publicity and in September 1998 began a coordinated media and consumer campaign targeting amongst others, Asda and Tesco in the UK insisting that these supermarkets demand that Chiquita addressed problems with pesticide use and trade union rights (Bendell 2002, Fisker 1999, Quesada 2001, COLSIBA 1998). The coordinating communication structure in the campaign consisted of COLSIBA in Latin America, US/LEAP¹⁷ in the US and EUROBAN¹⁸ in Europe. At a campaign planning meeting in August 1998, the importance of taking advantage of the attention surrounding Chiquita after the allegations in the Cincinnati Enquirer was stressed, together with the need to target Chiquita in both its most important markets, demanding the right to organize, the right to collective agreements and protection of the environment on both Chiquita and supplier plantations (the advantage of connecting the environmental question to that of workers' rights was recognized as this was seen as widening appeal in the consumer countries) (COLSIBA 1998). During the campaign the transatlantic coalition held press conferences, COLSIBA leaders spoke in several European countries, organized a letter storm on Chiquita, opened a website on the campaign and demonstrated in front of supermarkets selling Chiquita bananas (COLSIBA 1998). An example of the effect of this strategy was seen in Denmark, where the supermarket chain FDB (sole retailer of Chiquita in Denmark) was strongly encouraged to investigate the allegations against their banana

¹⁷ US/Labour Education in the Americas Project.

¹⁸ European Banana Action Network is a network consisting of European NGOs and the IUF.

supplier. FDB reacted and has since financed three NGO reports on environmental and working conditions on Chiquita plantations (Tybjerg 2001, Fisker 1999).

In November 1998 Chiquita agreed for the first time to meet with COLSIBA. At the meeting they refused COLSIBA's proposal to negotiate a regional agreement but the two parties continued the dialogue while Chiquita launched a unilateral code of conduct, a corporate responsibility report and joined SA 8000. In 2001 Chiquita, COLSIBA and IUF started a new set of meetings and negotiations, which after six months culminated in the signing of the framework agreement (SiD 2001).

At this time the agreement was praised throughout the international labour movement as a historic achievement and path-breaking step in industrial relations (the agreement is the first of its kind in agriculture, and the first IFA negotiated and signed with a coordinating body of unions from developing countries). The agreement affirms the right of each worker to choose to belong to and be represented by an independent and democratic trade union, and to bargain collectively. It commits the company to respect ILO core conventions¹⁹ plus Convention No. 135 on protection and facilities guaranteed to workers' representatives. The agreement requires *suppliers, contract growers and joint venture partners* to comply with these standards. A Review Committee, composed of representatives designated by the IUF, COLSIBA and Chiquita, will meet twice a year to review the agreement's application, and an extraordinary meeting can be convened at the request of either party. The agreement contains guidelines on the procedures to be invoked in the event of changes or transfers in production and as an ill-concealed reference to the campaign that led up to the signing, the parties agreed to

...avoid actions which could undermine the process spelled out in the Agreement, such as public international campaigns or anti-union retaliatory tactics... (Chiquita, COLSIBA & IUF, 2001)

Evaluating the implementation of the agreement

As with every agreement, the proof is in the application. The success of the agreement will ultimately be measured by the degree to which unionization at Chiquita and its suppliers advances, and the living and working conditions of the banana workers improve. To test these propositions the author conducted a fieldwork investigation of the implementation of the COLSIBA/IUF-Chiquita agreement in 2002, involving structured and semi-structured interviews (61 in total) with banana workers as well as union and Chiquita representatives at both local, national and regional level, in Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. These covered on-the-ground knowledge of the agreement, compliance with the agreement on Chiquita's own and on supplier plantations

¹⁹ Forced labour (ILO c. 29 & 105), freedom of association and right to organize and collective bargaining (c. 87 & 98), discrimination (c.100 & 111) and child labour (c. 138 & 182).

and the use of the agreement's Review Committee procedures (for details about research methods see Riisgaard 2002, 2003).²⁰

Dissemination of and knowledge about the agreement

In the agreement the parties commit to publicizing the agreement in all the company's banana operations in Latin America. But at the time of the investigation the parties had not lived up to this. Particularly Chiquita showed a bad record, since none of the workers interviewed had been informed about the agreement by Chiquita management. The extent to which the unions had publicised the agreement varied a great deal between countries, from Honduras where there was an extensive dissemination through regular radio programs, workshops and leaflets, to Guatemala where the diffusion of information to workers and local union representatives was sporadic and very limited in scope. In both Costa Rica and Nicaragua dissemination was also sporadic and took the form of short informal meetings and the distributing of a few leaflets. In these two countries the union representatives also experienced difficulties in getting access to plantations. In all COLSIBA member countries, except for Guatemala, donor-financed national workshops about the agreement were held. In general, information about the agreement came exclusively from the unions. The unions themselves disseminated information almost solely to union members, thereby severely limiting the potential of the agreement to be used as a lever for non-organized workers to join unions. All in all the insufficient diffusion of the agreement poses a serious problem for using the agreement to promote local unionizing.

An exception is Honduras where the agreement, combined with progressive local organizing efforts, led to a new union at the Buenos Amigos plantation (a Chiquita supplier)²¹. The organizing efforts at this plantation started almost a year before the signing of the agreement and as representatives from COSIBAH (coordination of banana unions in Honduras) were denied access to the plantation, they sought out workers after hours. As the regional negotiations advanced and it was announced that an agreement was to be signed, COSIBAH used this as an argument and gained access to the plantation. They continued with weekly visits explaining workers' rights under the new agreement. A negotiation process was initiated with the company about creating a union and in January 2002 an application was formally presented to the labour ministry.

²⁰ The investigation was conducted in cooperation with SiD (Danish General Workers Union) and COLSIBA who facilitated all plantations visits. This meant that no unorganized plantations were officially visited since the unions' requests of access were denied (thereby excluding all of the pacific coast of Guatemala). In both Nicaragua and Costa Rica interviews with workers were also conducted outside plantations due to lack of access. In Nicaragua no plantations were visited since access was granted only after several months whereby weather conditions made the plantations inaccessible. Due to the limited number of informants and plantations visited, the results from this study are not necessarily representative, but on the basis of this fieldwork it is possible to identify and analyse relevant problems in relation to the implementation of the agreement.

²¹ Buenos Amigos is believed by the unions to be about 20 per cent Chiquita-owned, but in the agreement suppliers, contract growers and joint venture partners (less than 50 per cent ownership) are grouped together with the same obligations.

As indicated the study revealed sparse dissemination of the agreement in Costa Rica, Guatemala and Nicaragua (and none at all by Chiquita). The level of information about the agreement amongst workers was consistent with this picture, showing widespread ignorance or limited information about the agreement in the plantations especially amongst non-unionized workers generally and even amongst unionized workers in Guatemala. Amongst union representatives and management there was often no knowledge about commitments over and above the basic workers' rights which again severely limited the potential of the unions to, for example refer to the agreement in order to secure access for union representatives or to demand the sharing of information by management. Adding to these concerns is the fact that the top management in only two out of the three suppliers visited, had been informed about the agreement or its implications for suppliers. This finding together with conflicting information from Chiquita representatives suggests that many suppliers were still not informed.

Agreement compliance in practice

All of the interviewed management representatives thought that the core labour rights were being respected but workers and union representatives reported violations. The most frequently reported violations concerned short term contract workers being denied the rights to affiliate, even though this was guaranteed by law (Costa Rica and Nicaragua), discrimination against affiliates or threats against prospective affiliates, discrimination against women and denying union representatives' access to workers at the worksite. By far the biggest proportion of mentioned violations came from Costa Rica and Nicaragua. The interviews indicated that basic workers' rights were generally respected on Chiquita-owned plantations in Honduras and Guatemala but that there was a lack of respect for the right to organize and discrimination against affiliates on Chiquita-owned plantations in Costa Rica. Concerning supplier plantations the opinion of informants was that, in general, rights were respected in Honduras while there were indications of widespread violations of basic workers' rights in Nicaragua (Riisgaard 2002 & 2003).

To give an indication of development over time, informants were asked whether they felt that general working conditions had improved or declined during the last year. Responses indicated an improvement of the general working conditions on Chiquita-owned plantations (generally in terms of better management-worker relations) but unchanged or worsened conditions on supplier plantations. This suggested that the biggest problems both with violations and with lack of improvements were found on supplier plantations, while at the same time it suggested that Chiquita itself was making a real effort to approach the unions and implement the agreement on its own plantations.

Supplier plantations

Unsurprisingly, the fieldwork indicated worse conditions on supplier plantations than on plantations owned directly by Chiquita – a situation common to many other industries and a source of growing concern with the tendency to increase outsourcing of the production process. For the same reason the inclusion of suppliers in the COLSIBA/IUF – Chiquita agreement can be seen as one of its greatest strengths. But so far the results have been limited except for the Buenos Amigos case mentioned before.

There are several difficulties surrounding suppliers, one being the vagueness of the agreement in stipulating what Chiquita's obligations are in securing suppliers' respect for

core workers' rights. Chiquita agreed to require its suppliers, contract growers and joint venture partners to provide reasonable evidence that they respect national legislation and core labour standards. But the provision is dependent on Chiquita's relative degree of influence over its suppliers and the availability of appropriate and commercially viable supply alternatives (Chiquita, COLSIBA & IUF 2001). The Review Committee is to evaluate the implementation of the agreement by suppliers and it is therefore essential that the unions have a clear policy on how to deal with the issue of noncompliant suppliers. At the time of this investigation such a policy did not exist, giving Chiquita a good excuse to rely only on appeals, not sanctions.

The supplier issue poses a dilemma for COLSIBA as a coordinating body. If COLSIBA demands strict enforcement of the agreement this implies Chiquita withdrawing contracts in the event of continued non-compliance from suppliers. This in turn is likely to lead to loss of jobs, member unions and even the whole industry in Nicaragua since Chiquita is the sole buyer.

As COLSIBA coordinator German Zepeda put it,

what is COLSIBA to do when the agreement is not respected and the medicine in a way is worse than the disease? (Interview 10.05.02).

At the same time it is essential that the supplier issue is resolved because the current situation with cheap non-union bananas is undermining the bargaining position of organized workers. The biggest challenge lies in formulating a strategy in relation to supplier plantations that is sensitive to local needs. One suggestion (actually put forward by Chiquita itself at the first Review Committee meeting) is inscribing the agreement in all new supplier contracts.

Use of the Review Committee and the agreement

Resolving the supplier issue is impeded by internal problems in COLSIBA, something that is also true in respect of union monitoring of the agreement's implementation and of its complaint procedures, which brings us to the nature of internal communication and coordination in COLSIBA. One of the most important aspects of the agreement is the Review Committee that gives access to the corporate leadership of the company and thereby potentially makes it possible to override union-hostile local management. CHIQUITA and IUF/COLSIBA each appoint up to four members to the Committee, which meets periodically to oversee the application of the agreement and to discuss other areas of mutual concern (Chiquita, COLSIBA and IUF 2001). But there have been several problems hindering the work of the Committee. Two of the local unions interviewed (ATC and SITAGAH) sent complaints to the Review Committee but several months later had still not received any form of reply, even though these had actually been discussed at the Review meetings (COLSIBA 2002). Further none of the six General Secretaries interviewed had received the reports of the two Committee meetings held, and many affiliates were unaware of the purpose or function of the Committee. The lack of communication in relation to complaints and to the general work of the Committee is very problematic if the local unions are to have trust in the ability of the Committee to supervise implementation of the agreement and settle conflicts. Communication about the Committee meetings have since improved with summary reports of the meetings being posted on the IUF website as of March 2003.

The strategic use of the Committee by COLSIBA appears to have been relatively poor in that there was no preparation for the first two meetings, either internally in COLSIBA or between COLSIBA and the IUF, apart from the union Committee members meeting one day before the Committee meetings. Therefore there was no strategic prioritising of complaints or issues, no overview of the extent of violation, or any suggestions on how to solve the problems. Related to the poor use of the Committee lies a more fundamental problem concerning the organizational structure of COLSIBA. COLSIBA started out as a coordinating body acting only on issues where all member unions were in consent. With the Chiquita agreement a need has developed for COLSIBA to be able to bind its members to comply with the agreement and as unions everywhere, the COLSIBA members have difficulties with entrusting negotiating authority to a supranational organization.

In general the fieldwork suggested relatively poor use of the agreement's potential. One reason for this was a lack of experience in inter-union cooperation arising from differences in political outlook and old cold war divisions. This means that in addition to the obvious suspicion between unions and employers, suspicion between unions prevailed, e.g. in Guatemala, where UNSITRAGUA was against involving the IUF and very reluctant to attach importance to the agreement.²² That UNSITRAGUA, which had strong connections with the leftwing guerrilla movement during the civil war, finds itself now in a federation with SITRABI, traditionally associated with the rightwing in Guatemala, and forms part of an agreement that has the IUF as co-signatory – while illustrating some of the new labour possibilities after the end of the Cold War – also suggests a likely residue of scepticism and reluctance to give the agreement priority. A more obvious problem is that after a century of labour exploitation and union busting many find it hard to accept that Chiquita is really working to improve labour relations. Another factor is the general lack of tradition for unions and employers to cooperate amongst many of the more progressive unions, that earlier had agendas of overturning society and revolutionizing industrial relations. This is linked to a lack of experience in functioning as a professional partner in an international agreement, illustrated for example in the inability to elaborate an effective communication structure and to oversee implementation. On the other hand these internal problems can be expected to diminish with time, as COLSIBA gains experience. What also remains to be seen is the willingness of Chiquita to turn its words into deeds. However, the potential is there for a continuous and constructive dialogue between unions and employer that could help guarantee core workers' rights.

Given the problems on the union side it is all the more impressive that they actually succeeded in organising at a regional level, in devising common international strategies, in bringing Chiquita to the bargaining table and in obtaining an agreement. Furthermore, in spite of the poor use of the agreement's potential, it has actually had some very concrete positive consequences. As noted it has been used in Honduras to form new unions. In Honduras this was in a supplier plantation that before the agreement was very hostile towards attempts at unionising. This seems to indicate that in a context of progressive local organising activity, the agreement can help to enforce local recognition. It has also led to ongoing dialogue between unions and Chiquita in Costa Rica at a national level, resulting in a significant decrease in the number of disputes that end up in the Labour Ministry. At the corporate level COLSIBA and Chiquita have initiated cooperation on workplace health

²² The relation between UNSITRAGUA and the regional IUF office was so strained that any involvement of them in the negotiations was impossible. The historical reason for this were differences in politics and method. As late as 1999 the IUF affiliate CTC admitted a so called "yellow" (employer induced or controlled) banana union from a Dole plantation, that had accused UNSTRAGUA representatives of sabotage leading to committal orders on over 100 people (Cerigua Weekly Briefs 1999).

and security issues and there are clear indications of improved union-management relations on Chiquita owned plantations within a year of the signing of the agreement.

Since the termination of the fieldwork the author has been made aware of other important developments. According to Guillermo Rivera Zapata, president of Colombia's SINTRAINAGRO union, the Chiquita accord helped his union to recruit 2,000 new members and to sign three new collective agreements in the country's Magdalena region (interview with Guillermo Rivera Zapata conducted by ILO officials in September 2003). Additionally the agreement has led to dialogue between unions and suppliers in Ecuador where an informal meeting took place between the IUF, Ecuador's FENACLE union, Chiquita and the Chiquita-supplier REYBANPAC in July 2003 (COLSIBA 2003). So far no concrete results have been reached in Ecuador but channels of communications have been opened (interview with Sue Longley from the IUF 28.11.03). But not all developments have necessarily been positive as expressed by a written statement from UNSITRAGUA in September 2003. According to UNSITRAGUA, Chiquita did not respect the international agreement when in September this year they announced the closure of four unionized plantations on the Atlantic coast of Guatemala without prior consultation with the unions.²³ UNSITRAGUA further claims that the closure is part of Chiquita's strategy to transfer production to non-unionized supplier plantations in Ecuador and on the Pacific coast of Guatemala (UNSI TRAGUA, 2003).

Concluding remarks

The insights obtained through the Chiquita case study reveal important lessons and cast light on the new but rapidly growing issue of IFAs. The study highlights the very simple but also extremely relevant problem of how deficient dissemination hinders the use of an IFA as a lever for greater local organizing activities, for affiliation, and more generally, for demanding the rights guaranteed by the agreement. It also shows how problems concerning communication, coordination and lack of unity between unions hinder progressive use of access to the corporate leadership. On the other hand it illustrates how such an agreement, by covering all Chiquita and supplier plantations in Latin America, can contribute to answering the often real threat of moving production to further exploit differences in labour costs. Still the supplier problem is a difficult one and one of the biggest challenges for COLSIBA. In summary, the case shows an agreement with potential in relation to supporting local organizing. In practice this potential has been exploited only to a low degree, but after merely a year it has still achieved several positive results such as the forming of a union at the Buenos Amigos plantation and improved union-employer relations on Chiquita-owned plantations.

Seen in relation with the internationalisation of capital and the need for alternative labour strategies IFAs represent a promising device. At the same time as many of labour's traditional strategies have been undermined, the innovative tactics used by the banana unions illustrate how a new globalization context has brought new possibilities for workers

²³ Part II of the framework agreement contains guidelines for procedures to be invoked in the event of changes or transfers in production. Here Chiquita commits to: "*Consult those local trade unions that have been duly appointed as the representatives of the affected workers, which discussions should occur as soon as possible, especially when the change affects a significant number of employees such as in a partial or total closure*" (Chiquita, COLSIBA & IUF, 2001).

to secure rights within MNEs.²⁴ The increased demands of CSR together with the new possibilities for union cooperation across geographical and political boundaries have given labour new powerful tools in terms of publicly discrediting corporations in their outlet markets thereby combining their bargaining power with that of NGOs, consumers and investors. This new climate creates common interests between employer and workers and thereby space for cooperation through negotiated voluntary initiatives. The study further shows an important alternative to NGO and business defined voluntary regulation initiatives that exclude workers. IFAs, although not without problems²⁵, allow worker empowerment, and give worker representatives a place in monitoring compliance.

²⁴ The possibility for other workers to cooperate with NGOs on using consumer politics to pressure their MNE employer depends on the potential benefit of product differentiation by CSR and the brand vulnerability of the company (although as mentioned the strategy's dependency on brand vulnerability is overstated). Another consideration is the possibility of finding NGO partners and mobilising around workers rights. Even though there is an increased interest in business behaviour especially concerning the production of western consumer goods in developing countries, there are some issues (and products) it's easier to mobilize around than others e.g. child labour and export processing zones. Also of course the existence of coordinated partners on the workers side is a prerequisite for the kind of collaboration that lead to the Chiquita IFA.

²⁵ For example IFAs could potentially further the segregation of casual workers in countries where they are not allowed to be represented by unions.

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