

MOVING FORWARD THE AGENDA FOR TRANSFORMATION

BANANA LINK REVIEW OF 2021-2022



BananaLink 

EDITORIAL

THE GROUND IS SHIFTING FAST. WHAT HAS BEEN BANANA LINK'S ROLE?



Banana Link's small team has survived the pandemic to become a leading opinion-former on the need to design a just agroecological transition with as many industry players as possible. As the soil-borne TR4 disease has reached the Americas the need to transform the chemical-dependent monoculture model of tropical fruit production, placing biodiversity and people's livelihoods and health at the centre, has meant we are starting to break the taboo that has reigned for decades. Our small farmer partners are leading the way and some leading fruit companies are now making important steps on this journey into a new banana world.

More than a decade of advocacy work inside and outside the World Banana Forum on the right to living wages and incomes for all with fair prices being paid along the chain, especially by big retailers, is also starting to pay off. Over 20 European and UK-based international and national supermarket chains in four countries have committed to ensuring living wages are paid to all workers in their banana supply chains in the coming years; some of these big retailers understand that the most sustainable way to secure this is through collective bargaining between trade union and fruit companies. Aldi, denounced for years by Banana Link as leading the race to the bottom on banana prices, announced in 2022 a substantive reform to the way it buys bananas and is now paying growers nearly 50% more than in 2021.



Tesco, with whom BL has worked for 15 years now, is no longer alone on its public commitments to living wages and covering the costs of sustainable production, and has signed an agreement with trade unions worldwide to address gender equity across its global agri-food chains. The company took the lead on the BL-led multi-retailer initiative to close wage gaps in Côte d'Ivoire and also co-funds a women worker and small farmer empowerment pilot in Dominican Republic.

Compagnie Fruitière, Europe's biggest tropical fruit producing company, in an agreement with BL and the **International Union of Food & Agricultural Workers IUF**, is funding the training and empowerment of trade unions, women in particular, to bargain for better remuneration and safer work. The company is also sharing its strategies and agroecological practices with BL and our trade union and small farmer partners.



The France-based **Carrefour** supermarket group is rolling out plans for enhancing biodiversity through agroecological practices in collaboration with public research institute **CIRAD** following a deal facilitated by BL. In 2022, CIRAD and BL have joined **Max Havelaar (Fairtrade) France** in designing a French sustainable banana initiative with the inter-professional body **AIB** and our trade union partners in the Americas and Africa.

WITHOUT PARTNERS WE ARE NOTHING!



It may sound obvious but BL is all about linking: linking our partners in tropical fruit exporting countries with the major players in the global trade, be they companies, governments, funders, media or researchers. BL either channels their voices, their strategies and their realities or, when given their mandate, acts as their voice : to influence, to change, to explain, to question and, where necessary, to denounce.

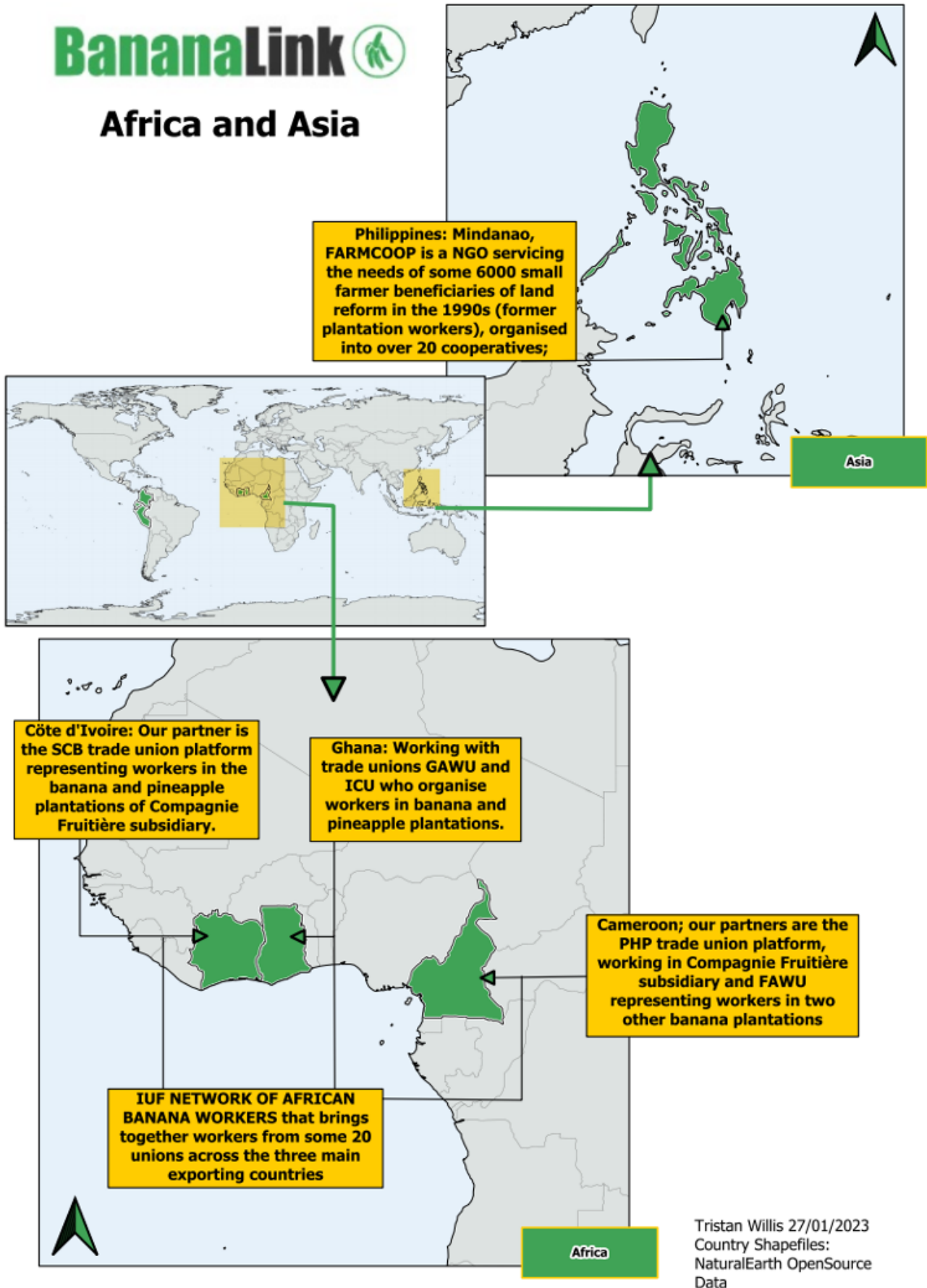
After over two years where this proved impossible, we were also finally able to link our partners together, enabling them to meet, to understand each others' struggles, and to develop or refine strategies and work plans together. In October 2022 we brought a group of 19 people from 11 exporting countries to Spain and Germany for meetings with fruit and retail companies, producer associations, NGOs, governments, certifiers and other industry players, a forum on « shared responsibility » co-organised by the World Banana Forum and the Latin American Banana Industry Task Force inside the Fruit Attraction Trade Fair in Madrid.

We also developed work plans together for the international banana civil society network EUROBAN, and for the International Alliance for Sustainable Family Farming. Trade unions, small farmers' organisations and NGOs produced a joint agenda that will shape BL's work until 2026.

Over the two years we channelled funds for work led by trade unions in Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Côte d'Ivoire, Dominican Republic and Cameroon, as well as to support urgent human rights defence work in Peru. We supported publications produced by COLSIBA with the University Paolo Freire in Nicaragua (28 years of banana trade union history) and by unions in Guatemala and SITRAP. We also raised funds through a crowd-funding platform for small farmers' organisations in Ecuador and Peru.



Africa and Asia



STRATEGIC AGENDA TOWARDS 2026



Until very recently, retailers in Europe and North America have been locked in competition to offer the cheapest banana to their customers- at times being sold below the cost of production. This squeeze on price ripples back through the supply chain with increasing impact, until it reaches the worker and the plantation itself. Years of unethical purchasing practices have had a devastating impact on both the environment and banana plantation workers. Without meaningful change on purchasing practices and the price paid per box, it is impossible to remediate the damage done to the environment and the underdevelopment of banana workers and their communities.

Banana Link is committed to promoting fair prices that not only cover the cost of production, but also pay for the investment that is needed to bring banana producing regions back from the brink of ecological collapse. Years of monocultural production systems, and increasing use of a variety of agrochemicals, has

not only drastically impacted the biodiversity levels of producing regions and polluted ecosystems and water supplies, but has also left the banana plant itself vulnerable to disease and infection- not least from the devastating impact of TR4. Investment is critical in order for the pilot projects to be implemented and the research to be carried out that will provide a new methodology and practical guide for how we can continue to produce the world's favourite fruit in the face of this existential threat. Banana Link views sustainability as both a social and an environmental ideal. We believe that ethical purchasing practices are based on long-term buying relationships, where collaboration is the tool used to solve problems, rather than a situation where issues are covered up out of fear. While we believe in accountability, it benefits nobody when workers lose their jobs and the opportunities for learning and improvement are missed.

We believe that agroecological transformation is the best option for bringing banana production for the international market to a position of strength and longevity - a position where workers are valued as knowledgeable collaborators in the production of fruit in a safe and healthy ecosystem.

We are committed to pursuing opportunities to learn and invest in agroecological transformation - from large scale, plantation level possibilities to smallholder farmer integration in the international market. Ultimately, we believe that small farmer-led agroecological transformation is the sea change required to make banana production for the international market fair and sustainable.

Fair prices must also be able to cover the cost of investment in gender sensitive occupational health and safety. Plantations have overwhelmingly been designed around the male worker, during a time when it was understood that a woman's place was at home. With the average proportion of employees on



banana plantations and farms who are women being below 12%, a lot of work is needed to ensure that rural women in banana producing regions - who are often the sole provider for their families - are not excluded from the only local labour market available to them. Banana Link is committed to continuing our work developing gender sensitive occupational health and safety guidelines and disseminating best practice across banana producing regions. This includes looking at not only the physical aspects of plantations themselves, but also the workplace culture. We collaborate with trade union partners on women's empowerment projects that are designed to bring about meaningful change to the culture of workplaces- and at times, unions- that have traditionally been dominated by men.



Banana Link is committed to working towards a world where it is the norm for banana plantation workers and farmers to receive living wages and living income - an income that is sufficient to live a dignified life, based on impartial, third-party data sources such as the Anker living wage reference values. We work with retailers and trade union partners to validate wage data. This is becoming increasingly significant to ensure that workers are being paid a fair price and that buyers on the other side of the world are complying with binding business, human rights and environmental due diligence legislation. Where legislation is not yet enacted, we support the formation of sector wide retailer alliances to tackle systemic issues of worker underpayment and the violation of workers rights (human rights).

We believe that collaboration with independent trade unions is the most sustainable and effective way to ensure that workers are receiving a fair wage and working under fair conditions. We work to promote and support social dialogue and collective bargaining as the best tools to negotiate and balance the needs of workers and their employers. We work to support trade unions in banana producing regions with training and capacity building to ensure that they are able to engage with the latest discussions around banana trade, production and certification.



HIGHLIGHTS

CÔTE D'IVOIRE - PREPARING TO CLOSE LIVING WAGE GAPS

Banana Link, with support from the public-private funding body, Sustainable Trade Initiative IDH, and six European retailers, is working with an independent research team in Abidjan to gather reliable data on workers' remuneration in the four biggest companies operating in Côte d'Ivoire and all the trade unions operating in these plantations. In a country with rampant inflation and low agricultural wages the commitment by retailers to fund bargaining for better wages will prove critical for tens of thousands of people who depend on the industry.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC- EMPOWERING WOMEN WORKERS AND FARMERS FOR LEADERSHIP

Banana Link is working with the new trade union in the banana export sector to help them strengthen their work with women working in plantations and women who have benefited from land reform and have small farms. With support from Tesco and fruit trader Fyffes, BL is working with a local expert trainer on gender issues and a team of Kreyol-speaking interpreters to ensure that women's role in the new union is taken into full account and that good working relationships are built between women working in plantations and women small farmers.



ECUADOR - BUILDING BLOCKS TO SOCIAL DIALOGUE WITH INDUSTRY

For decades there has been no tradition of social dialogue between representative workers' organisations and the vast majority of banana companies in Ecuador. Most attempts at creating trade unions in recent years have failed in the face of hostility and the lack of a sustained effort to build dialogue. In 2022, the new trade union federation SINUTRABE has made a first proposal to the « Banana Cluster » that brings together producers and exporters which we will be building on, with German government and retailer support, in 2023. Important training work with women employed in plantations has also meant that the obstacles to women's participation are gradually being broken down.

COSTA RICA - ORGANISING DESPITE OBSTACLES

In the face of systematic anti-union policies and practices by most banana producing companies, our long-term partners SITRAP have managed to continue to increase their membership, despite the permanent threats of dismissal for workers who choose to join and psychological tactics to discourage them from doing so. Support from British trade union UNISON has enabled them to consolidate the work of the union, build their legal defence team and mark the union's fiftieth anniversary at the end of 2022. BL has also worked with SITRAP and other Costa Rican unions to develop a programme on health and safety with a gender focus, using guidelines and a training module we have developed during the period.

GUATEMALA - TRAINING WORKERS TO LAUNCH A NEW UNION

In the recent past, trade union leaders have found themselves in the firing line in both exporting regions of the country, so the challenge of organising a new union in the plantations of the Pacific South goes with serious risks. With help from British TUC Aid, our partner SITRABI has been able to train groups of workers and prepare them to launch a new organisation to tackle the multiple challenges of low pay, long working hours and poor conditions in many of the plantations in the region.

AGROECOLOGICAL BANANAS - THE NEW FRONT-LINE

Banana production for export has depended on high levels of chemical fertiliser and pesticide use for many decades, but the prevalence of the sigatoka (leaf-streak) fungal disease and Fusarium Wilt diseases has now reached levels which threaten the commercial monoculture model. Introducing the principles and practices of agroecology has increasingly become a necessity, rather than a luxury, but the challenge is to design ways of doing this at larger scale.

Small farmer pioneers in South America and the Philippines with whom BL has worked for many years retain a foothold in the international market but have requested support in finding stable and fair markets that recognise their efforts to innovate. BL has continued to support the development of the Alliance for Sustainable Family Farming founded in Ecuador in late 2019 and hosts its website: <https://aiafs.org> and in October 2022 secured funds for its first physical meeting in Germany.

In 2021 BL established a nine member international Agroecology Advisory Group to help guide the organisation in our work on agroecology. In 2022 we organised, with IUF, a trilingual webinar to explore the question of what agroecology at scale would mean for workers, with participants from all continents. A project to undertake a base-

-line study to document all relevant agroecological banana production experiences has had to be put on hold until funding is secured.

The activity to which BL has devoted the most energy in the period however is the preparation of an initiative to launch the first ever agroecological banana in the UK market. In 2021, a team from the Leicester University Business School produced a market feasibility study the conclusions of which led us to seek partners for the introduction of an agroecological banana in the British market. In 2022, we have worked with two leading organic wholesalers, the largest importing and ripening company and a tropical fruit distributor into primary schools to introduce « A Different Banana » produced by Peruvian cooperative partners Agroperu as soon as possible. The initiative attracted pre-finance from Ollema Fairer Farming Ventures. We are also working with an Italian start-up to put a QR code on the fruit, allowing consumers to access information directly on the growers through their smartphones.

After three years of developing our work on agroecology with very little dedicated funding, the challenge now is to develop a longer-term funding partnership with an organisation that understands the strategic value for both small farmers and the wider industry. We are confident that in 2023 this will come to fruition.

OUR MEMBERSHIPS



**Ethical
Trading
Initiative**



GLOBAL DEAL
TOGETHER FOR DECENT WORK
AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH



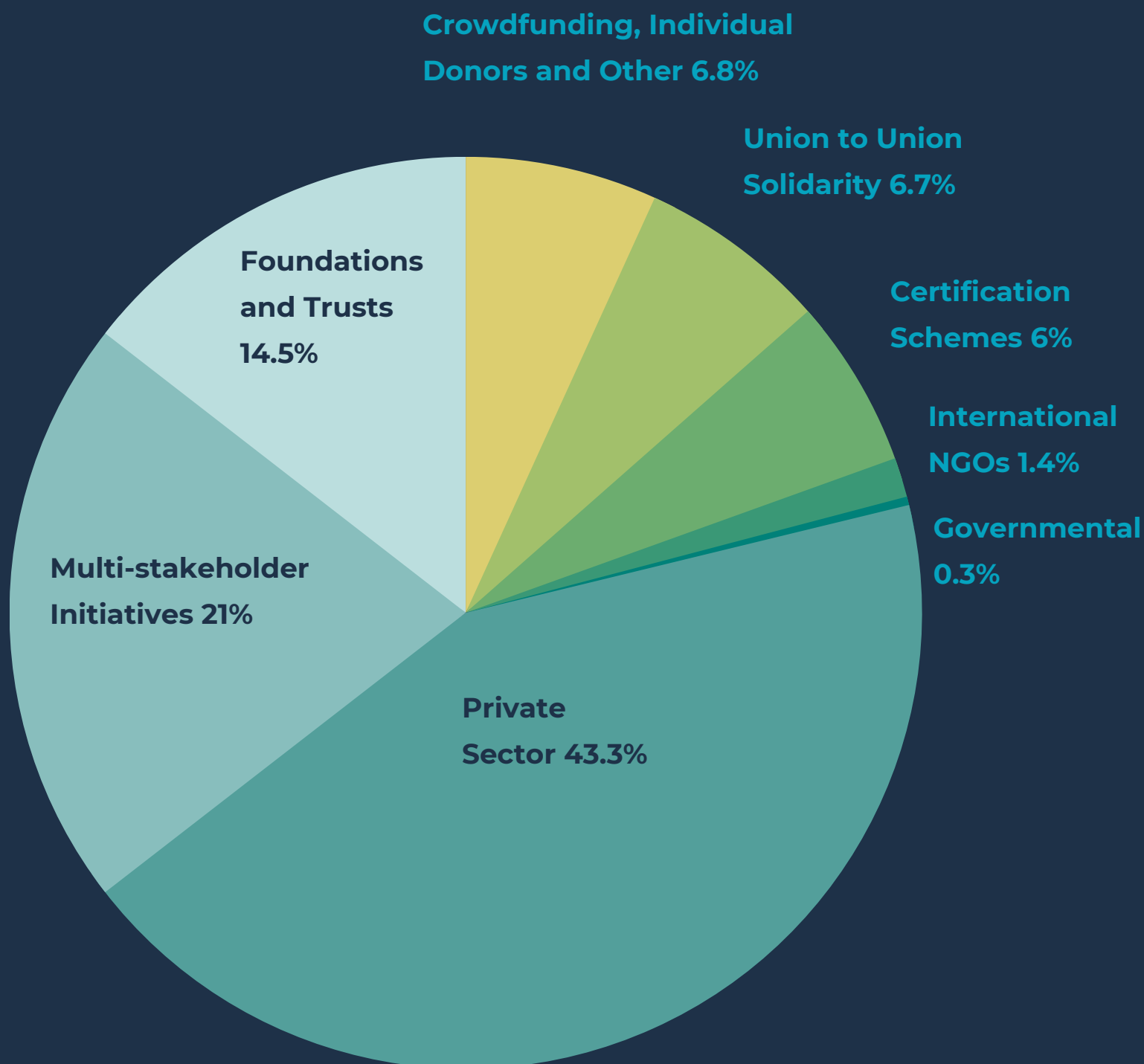
**WORKERS
RIGHTS
ADVISORY
COMMITTEE**



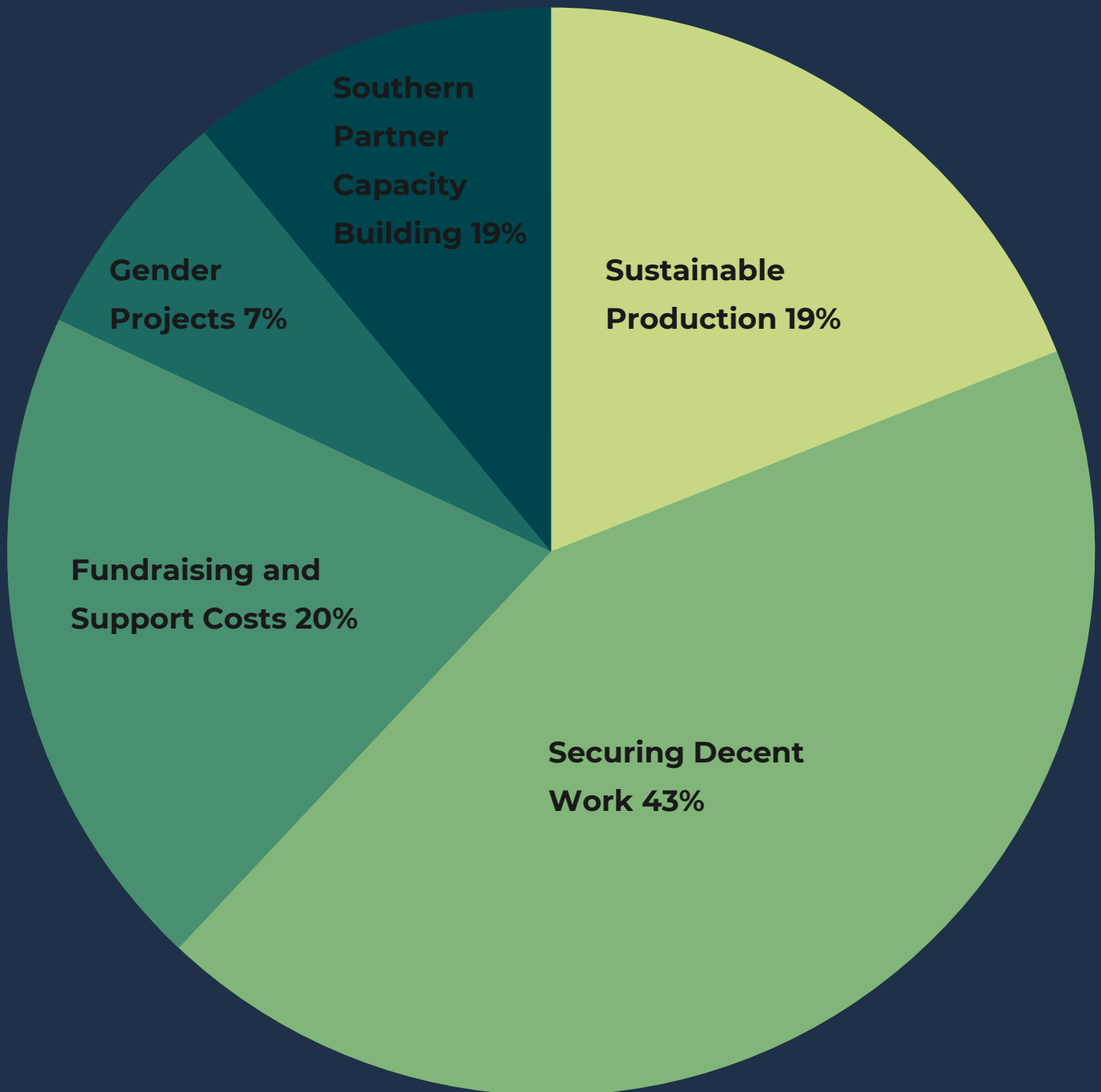
OUR FUNDING SOURCES 2021-22

FUNDING SOURCE	AMOUNT (GBP)
PRIVATE SECTOR	£138523
MULTI-STAKEHOLDER INITIATIVES	£67088
FOUNDATIONS AND TRUSTS	£46213
CROWDFUNDING, INDIVIDUAL DONORS AND OTHER	£21890
UNION TO UNION SOLIDARITY	£21296
CERTIFICATION SCHEMES	£19091
INTERNATIONAL NGOS	£4521
GOVERNMENTAL	£1017
TOTAL	£319639

BANANA LINK FUNDING SOURCES 2021-2022



BANANA LINK EXPENDITURE 2021-2022



OUR FUNDERS



Ethical Trading Initiative

bāma



OXFAM



Ollema
Fairer Farming Ventures



FAIRTRADE
INTERNATIONAL



Brot
für die Welt



COMPAGNIE
FRUITIERE



Deutsche Gesellschaft
für Internationale
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH



FAIRTRADE
FINLAND



TESCO



Carrefour

M&S
EST. 1884



UNIVERSITY OF
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