

The “Tavolo Equobio”(Network of Organic and Fair Trade Organizations): Synergies between organic agriculture and fair trade in international cooperation for development projects

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Abstract

The “Tavolo Equobio,” (Network of Organic, Fair Trade and International Cooperation for Development Organizations) was created in Bologna (Italy) in late 2003 to facilitate and stimulate the synergies between organizations working in the areas of international cooperation for development, organic agriculture and fair trade. A convergence of visions and a need of collaboration among the aforementioned sectors strongly emerged in the last few years, and the “Tavolo Equobio” has been created to encourage the collaboration and the partnerships among different actors.

Objectives and characteristics

The Tavolo Equobio is an independent and self-financed network hosted and coordinated by ICEA, the Institute for Ethical and Environmental Certification, and it works to promote the adoption of organic agriculture and fair trade systems in the formulation and implementation of sustainable cooperation projects. The Tavolo Equobio has about thirty members, all sharing the opinion that the systems and the practices of organic agriculture and fair trade can find a valuable and sustainable application in the field of international cooperation for development. The members are NGOs, universities, local institutions, associations representing the organic agriculture and fair trade movements, private sectors, and organizations involved in ethical initiatives for sustainable development.

Areas of intervention

The network is working in the following areas:

- Formulation and implementation of international cooperation projects focused on organic agriculture and fair trade.
- Technical assistance to support the local development of organic agriculture in developing countries (e.g. support to local certification bodies and support to develop national organic regulations).
- Support to the creation of fair and organic chains for small producers of coffee, tea and cocoa, and other products.
- Development of sustainable tourism initiatives linked to NGOs cooperation projects.
- Analysis of the opportunities to develop cooperation projects focused on non-food products (e.g. natural herbs, essential oils for cosmetics, organic fibers, and textiles).
- Participation in relevant events and fairs to promote organic and fair trade initiatives and projects.
- Gathering of best practices; the Tavolo Equobio has developed a database collecting best practices of international cooperation projects focused on organic agriculture.
- Stimulate the debate on the synergies between international cooperation and organic agriculture. The Tavolo Equobio works to define the strategies and guidelines for implementing cooperation projects focused on organic agriculture. This work gave a substantial input to the realization of initiatives inside the 16th IFOAM World Congress. (e.g. seminars, workshops, and poster exhibition of cooperation projects focused on organic agriculture).

The way forward

The Tavolo Equobio wants to be a pilot experience in facilitating the coordination of the organic agriculture movement with the fair trade and international cooperation for development organizations. The synergies could lead to the adoption of consistent strategies and adequate tools (e.g. joint inspections for organic and fair trade certification). Hopefully, this experience could be strengthened and replicated, in order to promote a broader adoption of sustainable approaches in international cooperation for development projects.

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