

[Abstracts](#)

Sustainable Coffee in an International Supply Chain: A Pilot for Costa Rica and the Netherlands

Paper by

Roberto Chacón (EMA, Costa Rica),
Myrtille Danse (Cegesti, Costa Rica)
Teun Wolters (EIM, The Netherlands)

Contact:

Dr. Teun Wolters
EIM Small Business Research and Consultancy,
PO Box 7001,
2701 AA Zoetermeer,
The Netherlands
Phone: +31 79 341 3634
Fax: +31 79 341 5024
E-mail: TWO@EIM.NL

Abstract

Sustainable development (SD) requires companies to change their processes and products so as to reduce their pressure on the environment. Such a change can only become reality if it is driven by different, often simultaneously operating, motives relating to ethical values, societal pressures and economic opportunities

This paper attempts to visualise this complex social process by focusing on the case of a consortium of seven Costa Rican coffee co-operatives who have embarked on the development of a sustainable coffee (The Suscof project)

Sustainable business has to overcome serious economic risks by internalising two factors which complement the external pressures to take sustainability seriously: increased eco-efficiency and competitiveness, and an ability to change one's organisational structure and culture.

Eco-efficiency is promoted by technical measures and the implementation of an environmental management system. Competitiveness comes into play as the co-operatives venture to directly approach potential overseas clients and tell them that the Suscof coffee can address the growing concerns of their consumers.

Organisational structure and culture confront the co-operatives with dilemmas which are common to organisational change: Topdown or bottom up (now managers need to share their responsibility for a better environmental performance with their co-workers); professional versus management (the available educated professionals should share the burden, but they as well as skilled workers are scarce); control versus commitment

(control is needed but insufficient to do the job, training and empowerment have to be on the agenda); efficiency versus effectiveness (efficiency may need behavioural change but effectiveness requires a sense of direction which should not be the prerogative of one or two managers; in particular eco-marketing requires a kind of product development that is to permeate the entire organisation).

The Suscof project integrates the different factors and promises to overcome the risks by which sustainable business does not get off the ground. It promises to be a model for sustainable commodities which could also be successfully applied in other countries.