Road to Sustainability:
Challenges in Getting Small Banana Growers
in the Philippines Fairtrade-Certified

Marvin Louie G. Orbeta*, **Larry N. Digal,**
Ivi Jaquelyn T. Astronomo, and Carol Q. Balgos

University of the Philippines Mindanao

*Correspondence

School of Management,
University of the Philippines
Mindanao, Mintal, Tugbok District,
Davao City 8022, Philippines

E mgorbeta@up.edu.ph

Abstract

Environmental concerns and the distribution of benefits along the Cavendish banana value chain in the Philippines continue to be an issue even as the primary agricultural export of the country has grown to be a multi-billion-dollar industry. Fairtrade Philippines seeks to improve trading and socioeconomic conditions in the industry. The study aims to examine the present context of the smallholder banana growers to gauge the possible demand and challenges for Fairtrade certification. We focused on small Cavendish banana producers in Davao del Norte, where 57% of the volume is produced. Given the current industry standards and Fairtrade requirements, individual small banana growers are not competitive within the value chain. Using quantitative evidence and a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and survey data, we have identified significant challenges faced by small banana producers. Low production, price, profit, export requirements, and the current policy environment put small producers in Davao del Norte at a disadvantage. Certifying small growers under Fairtrade will have challenges such as reliability of supply, lack of human capital, weak organizations, farming technology, and the preference of regional markets for other certifications. The Fairtrade campaign can explore strategies that encourage collaboration with multiple stakeholders to build the capacities of growers first. Our study reveals challenges that first need to be addressed before the good intentions of the Fair Trade movement are realized.