

**INTERVENORS INTERVENED: ORGANIZATIONAL
PREDICAMENTS AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTRADICTIONS
IN THE PRODUCTION OF EXPORT PLANTAINS IN THE
ATLANTIC ZONE OF COSTA RICA**

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Location of the study area.

PREFACE

General description of the research programme on sustainable Landuse.

The research programme is based on the document "elaboration of the VF research programme in Costa Rica" prepared by the Working Group Costa Rica (WCR) in 1990. The document can be summarized as follows:

To develop a methodology to analyze ecologically sustainable and economically feasible land use, three hierarchical levels of analysis can be distinguished.

1. The Land Use System (LUS) analyses the relations between soil type and crops as well as technology and yield.
2. The Farm System (FS) analyses the decisions made at the farm household regarding the generation of income and on farm activities.
3. The Regional System (RS) analyses the agroecological and socio-economic boundary conditions and the incentives presented by development oriented activities.

Ecological aspects of the analysis comprise comparison of the effects of different crops and production techniques on the soil as ecological resource. For this comparison the chemical and physical qualities of the soil are examined as well as the pollution by agrochemicals. Evaluation of the groundwater condition is included in the ecological approach. Criteria for sustainability have a relative character. The question of what is in time a more sustainable land use will be answered on the three different levels for three major soil groups and nine important land use types.

Combinations of crops and soils

| | Maiz | Yuca | Platano | Piña | Palmito | Pasto | Forestal I II III |
|----------|------|------|---------|------|---------|-------|----------------------|
| Soil I | x | x | x | | x | x | x |
| Soil II | | | | | | x | x |
| Soil III | x | | | x | x | x | x |

As landuse is realized in the socio-economic context of the farm or region, feasibility criteria at corresponding levels are to be taken in consideration. MGP models on farm scale and regional scale are developed to evaluate the different ecological criteria in economical terms or visa-versa.

Different scenarios will be tested in close cooperation with the counter parts.

The Atlantic Zone Programme (CATIE-AUW-MAG) is the result of an agreement for technical cooperation between the Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza (CATIE), the Agricultural University Wageningen (AUW). The Netherlands and the Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería (MAG) of Costa Rica. The Programme, that was started in April 1986, has a long-term objective multidisciplinary research aimed at rational use of the natural resources in the Atlantic Zone of Costa Rica with emphasis on the small landowner.

SUMMARY

The aim of this paper is to cast some light onto the nature of intervention processes. In particular, the article wishes to counter the view -popular in much of the literature on rural development- that there exists a implementation and outcomes. It is argued that this is a gross simplification since intervention necessarily comprises the struggles, negotiations and accomodations faced by all actors involved in the process.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to cast some light onto the nature of intervention processes. In particular, the article wishes to counter the view -popular in much of the literature on rural development- that there exists a one-to-one relationship between policy, implementation and outcomes. It is argued that this is a gross simplification since intervention necessarily comprises the struggles, negotiations and accommodations faced by all actors involved in the process. I will substantiate this assertion in the pages to come, showing how a specific form of planned intervention did not lead to the expected outcomes but was actually detoured, taking concrete form "en route". This experience, then, points to the insight that intervention (in this case by State agencies) itself calls into being a collage of locally-constructed practices reflecting the unique way in which different realities coexist, interpenetrate or enter in conflict with one another. It are these practices that form the locus of this study.

I will embark into the analysis of these practices from an actor-oriented perspective. As Arce (1991:36) rightly states, this approach sees actors participating in social change "... not as passive subjects of the economic, social or institutional structures, but rather as agents whose strategies and interactions shape the outcome of development." The approach, furthermore, rests on the assumption that the understanding of development processes entails an examination of agency, knowledge, and power, as well as their complex interrelations. Although it is not my intention to provide an authoritative illustration of these concepts, I will briefly try to summarize them.

Although there exists no cross-cultural definition of human agency, the notion "... attributes to the individual actor the capacity to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion." (Long, 1990:8). Agents, then, very well know what they do. According to Giddens (1982:9) agency refers to two components of human conduct: capability and knowledgeability. By capability he means there exists a possibility that the agent "could have acted otherwise". By knowledgeability he means all those things which the members of the society know about that society, and the conditions of their activity within it.

By power I mean "something" which cannot be possessed by individual actors, but which is constituted in interaction. As Latour (1986:264) suggests, power must be treated as a consequence, not as a cause of action. In his model power is the transient recruitment of a number of people who supply the dominant with their energy in the latter's endeavours. Power, in other words, can only be "obtained" by enrolling many actors to take part in a specific definition or redefinition of a situation. Hence power points at its negotiated character, and thus entails some notion of competing definitions of the situation at hand. This suggests that ceaseless struggles are fought out about who obeys and who is obeyed. In order to comprehend the way power is exerted, then, one needs to refer to the discursive practices and sets of strategies of social actors.

By knowledge I understand a localized rather than a universalized accomplishment. It is highly context-specific and may have different meanings for different (groups of) people, hence the effects of knowledge may be different for disparate actors (see in this line Fardon 1985:14-15). Furthermore knowledge is not acquired through the abstraction of an autonomous subject from a separate object. Rather knowledge is constituted (along with subjects and objects) collectively through discursive forms. Knowledge itself can be (re)produced and transformed through the interaction of different contexts of knowledge (e.g. scientific, applied, local). Since I take knowledge not to be objective but socially constituted it follows that knowledge is ultimately interest-bound.

Agency, power, and knowledge are closely interrelated. Each one presupposes the other two. For example agency as such is logically linked to the notion of power, since "to be able to act otherwise means being able to intervene in the world, or to refrain from such intervention, with the effect of influencing a specific process or state of affairs" (Giddens 1984:14). In the same vein, there can be "...no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations." (Foucault 1979:27, quoted in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982:115).

But let me return to the main proposition of this paper: that the outcomes of intervention are shaped by the dynamic interaction between intervenors and intervened. I develop the argument by chaining together a number of chronologically connected micro-episodes related to a clash of three different sets of interests involved in an instance of intervention in the Atlantic Zone of Costa Rica. The first set of interests concerns that of the Ministry of Agriculture (MAG) which aims to bring about "progress" along the lines of government policy. This is reflected in different attempts to establish and control a farmer's organization marketing export-quality plantains through a multinational company. The second set of interests is that of this transnational which intends to increase export revenues by boosting plantain production. This requires the introduction of a sophisticated technical package demanding a significant expenditure on behalf of the farmer's organization. The third set of interests is represented by the farmer's organization, which strives to reduce price instabilities through a contract with the multinational.

2. THE PHYSICAL, SOCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL SETTING OF THE CASE

The material for this report was collected in Yesenia, District of Bribri, Costa Rica from May to November, 1990. The District is situated in the lower part of the county of Talamanca in the Province of Limón on the Atlantic Coast zone. Yesenia itself lies in the Sixaola Valley, which is some 50 kilometers long and has a variable width of 2-10 kilometers. On the North, Yesenia is surrounded by hills with an altitude of no more than 300 meters. These steep hills represent a legal and agricultural limit since the upper part has recently been declared an indigenous reserve. To the South, the Sixaola river (the second-most copious river of Costa Rica) marks the international boundary with Panama. East and West of Yesenia we find a number of communities which, as in the case of Yesenia, were founded by the Chiriquí Land Company earlier this century.

Yesenia is situated on fertile soils developed on recent,

alluvial deposits. Differences in soil composition do exist: close to the Sixaola river we generally find clay-loam soils with good drainage (in fact, these soils are considered the best in Costa Rica); further inland heavy clays with a lower drainage capacity dominate the landscape. From November to May, trade-winds carrying heavy rains from the Atlantic bring about occasional floodings, and from time to time gales cause huge losses to crops. The altitude above sea level ranges from 5-9 meters on the adjacent parts of the Sixaola river, to 10-50 meters on the parts leaning on the hills. The mean annual temperature in Yesenia oscillates between 24°C and 27°C, and the average annual rainfall may vary between 2,200mm and 2,700mm, with only a slight decrease in rainfall during the months of September and October.

The character of its soils, temperature and rainfall make the Sixaola Valley an optimal environment for the cultivation of a number of crops, such as banana, cocoa and plantain. Indeed, the history of the Sixaola Valley¹ and Yesenia has been heavily influenced by these characteristics.

Starting at the beginning of the 1890's, the regions of Almirante Bay and Changinola in Panama (adjacent to the Sixaola Valley in Costa Rica) were converted into one of the most productive banana farms in Latin America. After being in production for over 13 years, this plantation (called the "Bocas Division"), which was owned by the Chiriqui Land Company², started developing a root and stalk fungus (or "Panama disease", occasioned by fusarium oxysporum var. cubensis). As the disease spread, and in order to find new, disease-free land the Company started banana production in the near-virgin tropical forests of the Sixaola Valley by 1908 and expanding into the Talamanca Valley in the 1910s. The Panama disease, though, also spread into Costa Rica, reaching the Talamanca Valley in the 1920s and hampering production. In addition, the Talamanca rivers started changing their course destroying bridges, railroad tracks and plantations, so that by the late 1920s banana production had been drastically curtailed in the Talamanca and Sixaola Valleys. As a consequence the more fertile portions of the infected banana lands such as, for example, the entire Sixaola District, were planted in cacao by the transnational company.

By the mid-1930s, the Bocas Division of the United Fruit Company boasted of being the largest cacao plantation in the world. Nevertheless, when West African countries began flooding the world market with cheaper cacao in the late 1930s, the United Fruit Company lowered its expenditures for the upkeep of its Sixaola District cacao farms. With the exception of abacá-cultivation during World War II, land was virtually abandoned and small, independent farmers squatted on the Company's territory³. This situation prevailed until 1958 (Roseboom et al 1990:4), when cacao production was terminated and 870 hectares of cacao were left to tenants. As it left the exhausted, depleted and infested soils, the Company took with it all of the

¹ Sixaola derives its name from the Miskitu words sixa=banana and awala=river.

² The Chiriqui Land Company is a subsidiary of the United Fruit Company, which merged into United Brands in 1971 and was renamed Chiquita Brands in 1987.

³ These squatters were charged rent by Company supervisors as a means for the United Fruit to retain a legal claim on its holdings.

infrastructure it had created (bridges, telephones, railroads, etc.) in order to hinder would-be competitors from taking up production on a smaller scale. Today, cannibalized rests of railway and sleepers can still be seen functioning as electricity posts or fence poles.

During the 1960s through the 1970s, large numbers of squatters (precaristas) took hold of the abandoned portions of land. This circumstance was altered somewhat as a result of the development of disease-resistant varieties of banana and the subsequent interest in this potentially interesting region by both Panamenian and Costa Rican governments. Indeed, in the 1970s nationalist pressures from both governments obliged the Company to allow five private producers and two state companies (COBANA on the Panama side of the border, and PAIS⁴ in Costa Rica) to cultivate bananas. Accordingly, PAIS planted some 3,100 hectares of bananas, african palm, cacao and timber-yielding trees in Sixaola and Daytonia. The remaining 11,402 hectares of PAIS-owned land remained idle (Roseboom et al 1990:5; for a fuller treatment of the history of the Sixaola Valley see Bourgeois 1989:3-23).

Each one of these major fluctuations affected the ethnic composition of the region as waves of new immigrants arrived during periods of high labor demand only to be forced to emigrate, once again, during subsequent depressions. Indeed, the region today exhibits what is probably Costa Rica's only truly multi-racial society with Blacks, Amerindians and Hispanics from different origins coexisting next to each other in each community.

The original inhabitants of the Talamanca lowlands, the Bribris and their Amerindian neighbours, were decimated by Spanish conquerors and the arrival of European diseases in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. From the late 1600s through the mid-1800s, repeated raids from the Nicaraguan-based Miskitu obliged all the Amerindian peoples residing along the Atlantic coast from Honduras down to Talamanca⁵ and

⁴ PAIS stands for Proyecto Agro-Industrial de Sixaola, S.A. According to Bourgeois (1989:240), United Fruit Company officials founded this "national corporation" as a joint venture with the Costa Rican government (through the Asociación Bananera Nacional or ASBANA) when president Daniel Oduber threatened to expropriate over 8,000 hectares of uncultivated territory in the Sixaola District. In return for "donating" the land to the government, the United Fruit Co. received 40 percent of the shares of PAIS. As a national agricultural corporation, the new corporation qualified for subsidized capital from international financial institutions that promote agricultural development projects. According to a long-term contract, all the bananas produced by PAIS had to be sold to the United Fruit Company for subsequent commercialization. In this manner, the transnational was guaranteed a steady supply of bananas without having to provide the initial capital investment. Furthermore, since PAIS is a national company, it could use more repressive tactics in evicting the hundreds of small farmers who had invaded the uncultivated portions of its territory. In addition to this, Bourgeois (ibid., p.42) mentions that prior to "donating" the territory to PAIS, United fruit managers made sure that an agreement was obtained from the Costa Rican government that they would, in return, agree to assist in effecting the removal of squatters from other Costa Rica-based United Fruit holdings.

⁵ In fact the very name of Talamanca means "place of blood" in Miskitu.

Bocas del Toro to flee up the rivers into the highlands, abandoning their coastal lands and communities. When the United Fruit Company started planting the Sixaola District in the early 1910s, consequently, there was virtually no local population left to displace⁶ (Bourgeois 1989:27-28). It would not be until the late 1950s and 1960s that Amerindians began to enter the local labour force in large enough numbers to replace Central American immigrants as the cheapest source of labour (ibid., p.188).

By the late 1800s, the digging of the Panama Canal, the construction of the trans-Atlantic railroad in Costa Rica and the operations of the banana transnational all coincided in the generation of a massive demand for wage labour, which was largely supplied by Blacks from the Caribbean Islands. Tens of thousands of Black labourers immigrated to Costa Rica through 1920, and represented the backbone of banana industry.

The black labour force began to be gradually supplanted by Hispanics in the 1920s. The first Hispanics arrived to the Sixaola District during labour confrontations from 1919 through 1921, when the United Fruit brought in large numbers of strike-breakers. Later on, and as a consequence of the consolidation of huge cattle-haciendas from the late 1800s through the 1920s and 1930s in both Provinces of Rivas (Nicaragua) and Guanacaste (Costa Rica), the original Hispanic strike-breakers were followed by thousands of landless labourers from these regions. In addition, other Costa Rican Hispanics ventured into the United Fruit plantations during the 1920s, as wages in the coffee orchards in the Central Highlands were dropping relative to those paid in the banana plantations, it therefore becoming easier for the transnational to recruit Hispanics (Bourgeois 1989:45-65; see also Fallas 1986, for an excellent account of life in one such a plantation in the 1920s).

During World War II, a large sector of the labour force left the cacao plantations to work in the Panama Canal where wages were considerably higher. At the same time, the United Fruit's demand for labour was rising dramatically because of its 1942 U.S. Army contract to grow abacá. As a consequence, there began a massive migration of Hispanic Central Americans (primarily Hondurans and Nicaraguans) that lasted through the early 1950s (Bourgeois 1989:187-188).

During the 1970s, when the banana industry in the Sixaola Valley was rehabilitated by the introduction of disease-resistant varieties, a new flow of migrants from Guanacaste, San Carlos, and the Southern Zone in Costa Rica and from war-ridden Nicaragua came to the region, either to work on the PAIS-owned plantations or to squat on the abandoned territory. Another sizeable group of settlers were ex-RECOPE⁷ labourers who preferred to stay in the region in the beginning of the 1980s, as the government company no longer needed them for test-drillings for oil in the Sixaola and Talamanca Valleys.

The possibility to squat has been exacerbated since 1978 with the completion of the road to Limón, the provincial capital, to the banana plantations. Thousands of landless Hispanic immigrants began entering the region in search of employment. Many of these would-be banana workers became squatters instead and settled on the uncultivated

⁶ By 1880, only some 800 Amerindians resided in all of Limón Province (Hall 1984:73) and in the mid 1880s there were only 200 inhabitants in the Sixaola Valley (Gabb 1981:100).

⁷ Refinería Costarricense de Petróleo.

PAIS-owned land in the periphery of the plantation or on the Talamanca Indian Reservation founded in 1976 (Bourgeois, 1989:39). PAIS unsuccessfully tried to evict the squatters, and gradually resigned in its attempt. This was due, in part, to the intervention of IDA (Instituto de Desarrollo Agrario), which resolved the conflict between PAIS and the squatters by negotiating some 3,500 hectares with the former (Roseboom et al 1990:5) and "guaranteeing"⁸ land titles to the latter. On the other hand, the negotiation was made possible only because of the corporation's inability to obtain the capital means for bringing into production the thousands of hectares it owned.

In Yesenia, IDA's negotiations have led to a certain stabilization of land rights. Most original precaristas received land titles⁹ through the late 1970s and 1980s, and have subsequently sold their plots to newcomers from Guanacaste, San Carlos and Nicaragua. These newcomers (and the remaining, "legalized" squatters) initially started or continued cultivating cacao for export, and maize and beans for own consumption. They also made a start with the cultivation of plantain, a crop for which there existed a national market and which was introduced in the area in the 1950s.

A major shift in the land-use pattern took place around 1979/80. The appearance of a new cacao-disease (moniliasis) caused by a fungus (Moniliophthora roreris) all but wipes out cacao production in the Atlantic Zone of Costa Rica. In Yesenia, most farmers responded by felling some of their unprofitable cacao trees and supplant them with plantains. The economic impact of "moniliasis" means outright disaster for most farmers in Yesenia who are already living in precarious conditions, and many farmers are compelled to sell their properties. Little by little, farmers come to terms with the new situation. Although an NGO tries to introduce new, resistant varieties of cacao into the lower Talamanca, the crop never makes a full comeback¹⁰. Instead, plantain starts to dominate the scene, and with it farmers start reaching incomes comparable to those prior to the advent of "moniliasis".

Nature strikes again in 1988 when the Sixaola River floods the entire valley of the same name. In Yesenia, nearly everybody lost their homes and crops. Although some help is given by the Red Cross and the Swiss, German and Costa Rican governments most of it arrives too late, and a substantial number of farmers is again obliged to sell their plot, and signs of some initial land-concentration appear. Old cacao plantations are replaced by more plantain.

⁸ According to Guimaraes and Ocampo (1990:6), out of this total number of hectares only some 7.3% is actually backed by a land-holding title.

⁹ The land titles issued carry the name of título de propiedad, which is not the same as IDA's carta de adjudicación (the only land title recognized by law).

¹⁰ This was partly due to the untimely introduction by ANAI (Asociación de Nuevos Alquimistas) of a cacao-cultivar (developed at an experimental farm by CATIE, Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza) which was said to show a high degree of tolerance to "moniliasis" whilst retaining a high production of cacao-pods. However, within a "real" environment, the cultivar did not live up to the expectations.

Although some farmers have not been able to recover fully from the 1988 floodings, agricultural development has since brought an overall increase in prosperity levels and a concomitant growth in capital investment. This new pattern of communal development can be seen by the large amount of new houses, the 6 tractors (of which there was none in 1988), the number of pulperías (small grocery shops of which there is a total of 11), cars (6, two of which are lorries), 3 repair shops for domestic appliances, a small restaurant and a new hardware shop. In addition, Yesenia boasts electricity (installed a year ago) and running, potable water (the installation of which was paid for by the community itself). In my opinion this new prosperity was brought about, most of all, by plantains sold to the national market through intermediaries. The price for this crop, which remains subject to market instabilities and the erratic will of intermediaries, certainly leaves farmers with a substantial capital surplus.

3. BACKGROUND: THE CREATION OF A FARMER'S ORGANIZATION

In 1987, spurred by the poor socio-economic conditions of the Lower Talamanca, the Costa Rican Government launched a program designed to alleviate poverty in this region¹¹. To this end, the agricultural sector (composed of MAG, IDA, JAPDEVA, CNP and CONAI) was instructed to carry out an appraisal of the different possibilities available for agricultural development. Emphasis was placed on plantain production, firstly because it was the most widespread crop in the region and, secondly, because plantain had traditionally been in high demand by Central American consumers. On top of this, plantain had developed a great potential as an export crop, notwithstanding a diminishing supply in recent years due to a fungus disease ("black sigatoka" caused by Mycosphaerella fijiensis).

Soon, an inter-institutional commission was formed. Its main objective was to "promote the technical and organizational participation of farmers in the process of plantain production, so that an improvement of the quality, yields and commercialization of plantains can be attained" (Comisión Comercializadora de Plátano 1987:4-5). Specific working goals were the improvement of the socio-economic level of plantain producers of the region; the increase of farmer efficiency in the productive process; a heightening of the awareness and knowledge about organization, planning and farm administration; an improvement of the commercialization channels; better utilization of resources

¹¹ Yet, and despite the new, relative wealth of people in Yesenia Talamanca is the poorest area in Costa Rica by any measures: per capita income, infant mortality, health services, roads, telephones, and educational level (IUCN, 1988). Until the end of 1989, the Talamanca county indeed showed a very poor institutional presence: Banks, MAG, IDA, INA, ANAI, CATIE, JAPDEVA, CNP, MOPT, ICE and MSP only sporadically ventured into the snake- and malaria-ridden communities of the region. A change of Administration which took place in May, 1990, has changed this situation somewhat, and I could myself observe how President Calderón's promise to provide more institutional backing to the entire Limón Province materialized to a certain extent. However, and as a result of a recent agreement between the Administration and the IMF, thousands of agricultural-sector employees will be laid off shortly. It remains to be seen, then, whether this increased institutional effort will endure.

available to farmers and the forming of a joint agricultural enterprise that responded to farmers' needs (ibid.).

The institutions involved in the study clearly had their grounds for intervening. As stated in the final report, "... because of the multiple problems afronted by plantain producers in the Lower Talamanca, and on the basis of farmers' petitions to the Ministry of Agriculture concerning technical assistance and the bringing about of specific projects in the area of product commercialization, we will intercede in the realization of a project comprehending the commercialization and technical aspects of the crop" (ibid. p.3; emphasis mine). However, next to the institutions and, purportedly, the farmers, one more party was also very interested: BANDECO (a subsidiary of Del Monte, an agricultural transnational owned by the J.C. Reynolds Tobacco Holding) which had already proposed the commission to buy and export plantain prior to the execution of the study.

BANDECOS's concerns, moreover, were also manifest in the final recommendations of the report. For example, for Yesenia the conclusion recommended the agricultural sector and other institutions to "offer immediate support to organization, capacitation, technical assistance, marketing and financing to start a project as soon as possible. With it, farmers can be stimulated to produce export-quality plantains, thereby relieving the national market and, hence, raising the prices intermediaries offer national producers. Emphasis should be given to the plots of these farmers since they are situated within the area acquired by IDA¹² [from PAIS]. This could prove advantageous for possible credit, since financing would be necessary to execute the project. Financing should be at least ₡6'000,000.- to be able to obtain export quality and quantity within 5 months" (ibid. p.23, emphasis mine)¹³.

In order to implement such projects in the envisioned communities IDA proposed to start working with already established, organized peasant groups. However, the only such groups in the area were heavily committed to strong local unions (UPA Nacional; USATA). In order to negotiate the project with the institutions, these unions "charged IDA substantial amounts of cash. Personnel from IDA and, especially, MAG, did not want to play the game and the projects were called off. It is not until the unions lose their power after the floodings of 1988¹⁴

¹² In Yesenia, IDA's negotiations have led to a certain stabilization of land rights. Most original precaristas received land titles through the late 1970s and 1980s, and have subsequently sold their plots to newcomers from Guanacaste, San Carlos and Nicaragua.

¹³ Similar recommendations were made for two of Yesenia's neighbouring communities.

¹⁴ UPA Nacional and USATA had a strong platform of wage labourers in the banana plantations of the Sixaola Valley. When the unions started penetrating into the smallholder area the situation changed, probably as a consequence of the different smallholder "mentality". The demise of the unions in the area was completed after the catastrophical floodings of 1988. After the deluge a compensation was negotiated between farmer unions, government and international aid. When the money was finally disbursed, the unions purportedly "charged" some 5% of "negotiation expenses" out of a total of 80 million colones (at that

that the institutions show a renewed concern for the development of plantain export-projects. The first intervening institution was IDA, which offered to help establish an organized producer's group. To this end IDA send a rural promotor to Yesenia to give a course on organization- capacitation, and eight months after the course (March 1989) an official patent was issued to the "Society of Agricultural Producers of Yesenia" (hereafter referred to as SAPY).

Although the above summary embodies a general interpretation of the historical outline that led to the creation of SAPY, it is interesting that different accounts of its foundation exist. These varying accounts concern not so much the history of the association per sé, but the role each of the main actors involved in its creation accord themselves, and which seems to be more important than the role attributed to him by the others.

One of the main actors in the creation of SAPY was Antonio, Regional Director of MAG for the Limon Province during the Arias administration (1986-1990). Antonio was responsible for carrying out the projects recommended by the "Comision Comercializadora de Platano" in the Sixaola Valley. This was nearly impossible to achieve in the first instance due to the presence of corrupt union leaders in the area. After the 1988 floodings, however, Antonio was more or less compelled to help canalize State intervention in the affected areas. According to Antonio, he and the Minister of Agriculture (José Maria Figueres, son of the late ex-president Jose Figueres) once again picked up the Commissions' idea of establishing a farmers' group which could export plantain through a multinational company. With Antonio being a close friend of Arturo (executive president of BANACOL Costa Rica), it was only natural that BANDECO was side-stepped when plans were made. Antonio:

"So it were the three of us [Antonio, the Minister of Agriculture and Arturo] who practically created SAPY. Of course, it was not a matter of donating them [the farmers] the whole thing. Things don't work that way. It was a matter of finding someone that would be enthusiastic and wish the project a warm hart."

During a visit that Antonio and the Minister of Agriculture paid to Yesenia, this "someone" was found. The person in question was Ramiro, a decisive individual in his mid-40s. Devoted to his crops, his wife and his children and with a long record organizing people, Ramiro seemed the appropriate, fervent peasant-leader Antonio, the Minister and BANACOL wished to work with.

Ramiro, however, has another version of his part as a founding father of SAPY. A man with an enormous rhetoric ability and a matching, remarkable arsenal of metaphors, Ramiro (present General Manager of SAPY's Board of Directors and de-facto boss of the association) had been encouraging fellow producers in Yesenia to organize themselves for at least some 5 years before the floodings. According to Ramiro, Antonio had never been a strong supporter of starting an organization

time roughly some U.S. \$1,400,000)the total. When news of this broke out angry farmers ousted the unions. In the time of my research, the only union-like organizations in the area were pro-management, "Solidarity Unions" working within the banana companies.

in the Sixaola Valley - a place he hated since the day he had nearly been beaten by furious union members some years before. After the floodings, Ramiro tried to convince Antonio that the situation was different since the unions had withdrawn from the area. Antonio was persuaded and a visit to Yesenia with the Minister of Agriculture was arranged. Only then was the go-ahead signal given by MAG. After this, Ramiro contacted Johnny (local director of IDA in Bribri) and asked him what steps should further be taken. Johnny then entrusted Melquíades, a rural promotor of IDA, to impart a management course to SAPY's Board of Directors. Thus, from the point of view of Ramiro, his capacity to convince all parties involved about the imperative of SAPY's creation was crucial.

Yet another interpretation was given to me by Bartolo, an extensionist appointed to work in the region (which at that time was actually a "punishment zone") by MAG only three days before the disastrous floodings in January, 1988. Upon his arrival, Bartolo (who installed his living quarters at the MAG extension office in Yesenia) quickly realized that the only way of effectively being able to carry out his job would be to concentrate on Yesenia's 150 producers¹⁵. Consequently Bartolo, a hard-working, 240-pound giant with an incredible repertoire of jokes was promptly involved in the community. Himself coming from Parrilla, a poor village that developed through painstaking community self-help, Bartolo is a strong believer of organization as a means to alleviate poverty. In his mid-thirties and with 15 years at MAG, Bartolo had extensive experience in setting-up small-scale development projects. Of a peasant background and knowledgeable of farmer mentality, Bartolo acknowledges BANDECO's original project -assisted by the Commission's conclusions- was a failure because it was BANDECO, not the farmers, who wanted the project in the first place. According to Bartolo, it was not until he himself (with the backing of MAG and BANACOL) urged farmers to organize themselves, that the idea to create an association originated. The idea matured but by the time SAPY was founded, its members wanted to export yams (a crop Ramiro had just introduced to Yesenia and which offered a great export potential). Bartolo, however, persuaded the associates to export plantain instead:

"The yams market is too competitive. One can only sow yams to harvest it in October, November and December. That's the only way one is not competing with the Colombians. They [in Colombia] harvest from January through September and have a big lead on us because in Colombia yams is subsidized."

After voting in favour of the latter crop, Bartolo sought contact with Melquíades for instructing SAPY's Board of Directors.

Whatever the accuracy of the above interpretations, the main objectives of the association were, first, to be able to sell farmer produce (yams, plantains, cassava, squash, chamol, malanga) on export markets in order to reduce (national-) price instabilities and dependency on local middlemen. Second, through the association all members had the right to insure their crops in case of floodings.

¹⁵ A probable reason for this decision was the fact that Bartolo's MAG-owned, 10-year old motorbike was continuously out of order and thus inhibited proper job performance.

Furthermore, SAPY was a non-profit organization in which the Board of Directors had to be elected every two years. The first Board of Directors was composed of Miguel, Enrique, Orlando, Pedro, Salvador, Félix and Ramiro (the last three were brothers-in-law -Ramiro being married to Elsa, sister of both Salvador and Félix). Moreover, five out of seven members of the Board came from San Carlos in the North of Costa Rica. Most of the 31 members also came from San Carlos, but ethnic differences existed within the group: "Mestizos" from Nicaragua and the Costa Rican Province of Guanacaste, Whites from the Central Costa Rican Plains, coastal Blacks and Amerindians all made part of SAPY. Other contrasts within SAPY existed as well. So, for example, all three religious congregations of Yesenia were represented within it: Catholics and members of both "God's Assembly Church" and the "Church of God" mingle with one another. Actually the only common factor to all of the association's members was their political preference: all were known "pericos" -faithful supporters of the Liberacion Party

4. BANACOL AND THE NEW TECHNOLOGICAL PACKAGE

Whatever the real sequence of events, BANACOL -a Colombian banana multinational which had recently expanded operations to include Costa Rica¹⁶- showed a high degree of interest in the Yesenia project, and was quick to react to MAG's request of involvement in SAPY. In just a matter of days, a cooperation agreement between the parties involved in the venture (MAG, BANACOL and SAPY) was reached. Interestingly, IDA was totally left out of the arrangement.

By May 1989 BANACOL's technical staff conducted some field inspections, and concluded that if plantain production was to be raised to an economically acceptable level, technification of crop management was inevitable¹⁷. The imperative for this technological package is connected to the fact that BANACOL is operating within a "restricted market". Restricted in the sense that Miami (where most Costa Rican plantains are exported to) does not buy all plantain because occasionally supply is higher than demand. In case of an over-supply, only the highest-quality plantains can be put on the market. For SAPY this last point meant that the quality of its produce had to increase continuously in order that they not be displaced from the North-

¹⁶ BANACOL encountered some resistance in Costa Rica since many thought the company was linked to the drugs cartel of Medellín. In order to show it was thinking of serious business, BANACOL started buying properties in the Atlantic Coast. Also, long-term contracts were offered to organized groups of plantain and banana producers.

¹⁷ Both SAPY and BANACOL desired a contract. In the contract, however, BANACOL demanded an improvement of plantain quality. This could only be achieved through investments which were not within the financial scope of SAPY's members. Therefore credit was needed. Among the new technical prescriptions by BANACOL were sigatoka control (first through motorized pumps, later through aerial spraying), polyethylene bags impregnated with insecticides, harvest control through the use of coloured ribbons and better fertilization as well as nematode control. Also, drainage canals would have to be dug at places where water stagnated.

American market by transnationals such as Del Monte¹⁸. The supply and demand flux on the North-American market thus harmed SAPY directly, because a part of the production of its 31 members cannot be exported. As Bartolo (who by that time was promoted to head the plantain project of Yesenia) put it:

"Look, people [the associates] are willing to sell SAPY all of their produce. But because of the ups and downs of the market sometimes a shipment is called off and nobody can harvest so members start to be discouraged. We need to make sure we can sell it all, and this means we need to have an excellent and homogeneous product."

Since BANACOL did not feel obliged to make the initial investment or to provide the technical package necessary to improve plantain quality and quantity, SAPY filed a petition for collective credit at the Bank (BANCOOP). The envisaged loan had two components. The first one had the objective of ameliorating SAPY's 100 hectares already under plantain for roughly U.S. \$140,000.- (in principle, then, every member would be given a maximum credit of U.S. \$1,400.- per hectare). The purpose of the second element of the loan was to sow SAPY's remaining 150 hectares (which either lay idle or were planted with cassava, maiza or some other "traditional" crop) in plantain. To this aim U.S. \$110,000.- were solicited.

The Bank immediately carried out a feasibility study, and by December 1989 a loan for the first component was conditionally accorded to SAPY. As a condition for the credit, however, the Bank demanded that a collateral security be supplied by SAPY. Since SAPY could not by itself furnish this surity, an institution willing to provide it had to be found. In the case of Yesenia, the only institution legally entitled to issue such a collateral was IDA. The reason for this was that part of SAPY's plots were situated on PAIS-property that had allegedly been negotiated by IDA in 1982¹⁹.

Bartolo remained in charge of SAPY for a number of months. However, by February 1990, when things were so far that the first shipment of plantains could be exported, a new agreement between SAPY, MAG and BANACOL put restrictions on Bartolo's activities. From then onwards, Manuel -a graduate from UNA- was put at the front of the project, most of all because BANACOL demanded that an agricultural engineer, not an extensionist, be made responsible for the technical follow-up. BANACOL's decision greatly irritated Bartolo, who preferred working in Yesenia on a prestigious export programme (in fact SAPY was the first farmer association exporting plantains from Costa Rica)

¹⁸ Del Monte, which produces plantains on self-owned plantations, obviously has an edge on SAPY since it can apply economies of scale and deliver an optimal product with good quality control and at a competitive price (BANACOL, on the contrary, only buys plantains from small-scale producers).

¹⁹ Although IDA did negotiate some of PAIS-owned land, general uncertainty exists concerning the exact location of these plots. Equally doubtful is the status of the agreement reached between PAIS and IDA: apparently, the latter never paid the accorded price.

rather than visiting farmers on their plots in places unreachable with his tored-down motorbike. Some congeniality was shown to Bartolo by his superiors, who let him work on SAPY issues as long as he did not disattend his other tasks.

Some antagonism between Bartolo and Manuel was created because the first felt the wrong person had been put on the right spot through a dubious manouvre by Antonio, the Regional director of MAG. The whole issue had started on one occasion when both Manuel and Antonio were at a meeting in the Sixaola Valley. Antonio had asked Manuel to represent MAG at another meeting that day. Manuel argued he already had another meeting in the Estrella Valley, and so he could not do Antonio the favour. Manuel then left for Cahuita (where he lived) and waited a little. He then took his lover with the MAG-car back to Sixaola in order to do some tax-free shopping on the Panamenian side of the border. Bad luck was on Manuel' side that day, and as he was nearing Sixaola he again met Antonio, who had not yet left the area. Answering the obvious question as to what he was doing there, Manuel fabricated a lie and told Antonio the meeting in the Estrella Valley had been called off so that he had raced down to the Sixaola Valley to see if he could still represent Antonio at the meeting. Not believing him, Antonio checked at Estrella and the lie cost Manuel his post as County Director in Cahuita. Much to his dislike, but the only viable alternative, Manuel was then put in charge of the BANACOL-SAPY-MAG project. Bartolo's rivalry with Manuel was furthermore sharpened by the fact that Manuel had no knowledge of plantain whatsoever. His thesis had been written on roots and tubers and, ever since working for MAG, Manuel never showed any interest in plantain. Bartolo, on the other hand, although he did not have the university degree, had great knowledge of the crop, having worked with it for the last ten years.

It is the procurement of the collateral mentioned above, and the way in which the conflict between Manuel and Bartolo intersects with it, that will form the essence of the present report.

5. FARMER ORGANIZATIONS: SOME BACKGROUND OF THEIR NATURE.

Although SAPY was the first farmer organization of its genre to be created in Costa Rica, numerous similar associations have recently been erected in the Atlantic Zone in general, and in the Talamanca and Sixaola valleys in particular. Their establishment, however, needs to be seen against the background of a variety of complex factors whose influence have been widely felt in the region.

Travelling through the Atlantic Zone of Costa Rica the first thought that comes to one's mind is the character of the region's physical development, and one cannot but conclude that this development is increasingly beeing influenced by national and multinational banana companies. In the Sixaola and Talamanca region the companies' presence is omnipotently felt, even if indirectly as in the case of Yesenia.

For example, there exists a very real chance that these banana companies (either themselves or through intermediaries) will buy out smallholders in the Sixaola Valley. The excellent physical conditions the area has to offer the particular crop is of great import to this. In fact, these conditions have been instrumental in the formulation of a recent land-use plan by MAG. This plan, which provides for a possibility of traditional smallholder crops (plantain, yams, cassava and squash) foresees a growing role for both banana cultivation and extensive animal husbandry in the development of the Lower Talamanca. Despite the higher prices presently being paid for land (as a

consequence of the speculative practices brought about by banana multinationals and local companies alike), however, a growing number of farmers is reluctant to accept the terms in which a restructuring of production has to come about²⁰. As one of them told me:

"It all sounds very good. But what we want now is a form of agriculture without so much chemicals, and the companies work the other way around. And then there's also the thing that as a wage labourer you can't permit yourself to say "today I don't work because I'm sick, or because it's raining too hard". No sir, at the company you start at 4 in the morning and if you don't like it, you're gone. Besides of this, I don't like the plan. The company bosses are always very good at mathematics and end up screwing you when it comes down to paying..."

To this end, national and multinational banana companies alike could offer farmers a variety of contracts which can also be secured more or less by force. Since IDA has negotiated, yet not officially bought smallholders' plots in the Sixaola Valley, PAIS can (and will) reclaim them. Although difficult to achieve legally²¹, PAIS can evict farmers out of its properties in the following manner. PAIS would first let an expert appraise the value of the land. Such an expert could easily defend his taxation that the land is worth more than, say, a million colones per hectare (it is now sold and bought for around a tenth of that) since it concerns the best soils of Costa Rica. IDA, which has never had an offer by PAIS concerning the price to be paid for the negotiated tract of land, would then be compelled to pay the price. According to IDA's statutes, this price would later have to be passed on to farmers. Of course, there is no farmer in the area in the position to pay such an amount per hectare, not even when spread over 25 years (IDA's term). As a result farmers would be compelled to sell for a more reasonable price (BANACOL is presently offering farmers 50% above the market value for land). This has already been the case in Daytonia (1988) and there is no reason to expect this mechanism will

²⁰ In a neighbouring community of Yesenia for example, negotiations were already going on to establish a banana plantation. There, the variant is that Mr. Gachupín ("very well connected up there in San José"), with the backing of both MAG and IDA, is trying to reach a deal with farmers. The deal is as follows. Gallego offers farmers a contract to grow bananas on their plots. Since he himself supplies the capital required (U.S. \$12,500.- per hectare) to make the needed infrastructural changes (drainage, sowing, "lines", processing plant), profit is shared with farmers on a 50-50 basis. From this 50%, farmers have to pay back 10% of the initial investment (they have ten years to do so). After 15 years (the duration of the contract), farmers can "buy back" their land by paying 40% of the initial capital investment (after all fixed-capital has already depreciated and the soil is probably not worth much anymore because of soil depletion). Farmers also get U.S. \$500.- per hectare for doing nothing the first two years it takes the first bananas to come into production. Thereafter, farmers can work as wage-labourers on their own plots. In another neighbouring community such an agreement has already been reached.

²¹ Producers have been cultivating the area for over ten years, so there would be no way of legally evading them from PAIS-property: the "Sala Cuarta" would immediately pronounce itself in favour of farmers.

not function elsewhere. According to some MAG and IDA functionaries, the only ones spared in this process will be legally established groups and associations exporting plantains, bananas or other traditional export crops.

In my point of view, then, the sudden proliferation of farmers' organizations in the area has to be seen in the light of the above process, and can be interpreted as an alternative to, and a direct rejection of, smallholders' perception of the dangers involved in the expansion of banana companies in their immediate vicinity. This alternative has been endorsed by the widely stated belief that IDA/PAIS will respect small farmers' associations.

A second ingredient that certainly played a major role in fomenting an environment in which farmers' associations could be created, is the official discourse located in the ideological commitment to "agriculture of change". Through this programme of "agricultura de cambio" the Costa Rican State is launching an ambitious model based on the export of traditional crops (e.g. plantain, squash, cassava, yams). According to a leading officer of IDA,

"The problem of the Costa Rican agricultural sector lies in the commercialization of its products. I sincerely think traditional crops should be given more promotion. Right now, only non-traditional crops have been stimulated. Of course one can achieve a high price with them, but when the internal market saturates prices start falling and with it farmers' motivation. What we need is to promote these traditional crops in foreign countries."

Another important structural constraint concerns the legal status of much of the Sixaola Valley. In Yesenia, for example, the plots of a number of smallholders are indeed located within an area purportedly bought by IDA from PAIS. More than half of Yesenias' farmers, though, had to cope with a precarious legal condition. The main reason for this (and indeed this was the case for half of SAPY's members) is that farmers do not in fact possess a title to their plots. This implies that credit cannot be granted to this category of farmers because of their general lack of collaterals. IDA, as official owner of the land, is in charge of issuing the land titles and formally the only institution that can assign farmers a collateral²².

The unstable legal situation can be made clear through the following meeting that took place at the beginning of July, 1990. A rendezvous between personnel of IDA and members of SAPY who did not yet possess land titles had been called for by IDA. The object of the meeting was to try and find a solution to this pressing problem. Next to the 11 members without a title, Bartolo (from MAG), Ramiro, his brother-in-law Salvador (respectively general manager and president of SAPY) and myself were present. Rafael, the IDA official, started the meeting in an incredibly tense manner. In fact, he had even forgotten to greet his audience as he started:

²² Contrasting views of IDA's activities in the area abound. One of them, for example, is the conviction that IDA is not distributing land titles any more because it is expecting huge profits whenever PAIS decides to buy back the land for an astronomical price. Others say titles are not being issued anymore because IDA never paid PAIS so it actually cannot assign them. Hence, collaterals are not allotted anymore to individual farmers.

"Well, we have the following problem. The association asked IDA for the collateral. But therefore you need a land title awarded to you by IDA. That is the issue. So the work I perform has to do with that, more or less. For the titling. So the following is happening: from the list you brought, thirteen have land titles. So the issue is that of why the rest has not yet been awarded a title. Well, they have not been awarded maybe for various reasons which I ignore but of which I have heard because one learns most by asking over there in the fields. So maybe it is because there was a dispute, or simply because nobody came by to measure his plot. That is, various motives. If the census says the plot has not been awarded it doesn't mean it can't be awarded. So what we pretend now is to award you."

Rafael pauses for a few seconds, quickly looks at some papers on the table before him, and continues:

"But, we have another problem coming now which is a little bit more delicate because it is about what IDA has bought or has not bought. Because there it is a little, a little doubtful. There is a census made by IDA, that is, maybe there are many but the most recent one was made a year-and-a-half ago. Of course it may be changed right now; we have to bring it up-to-date. Maybe the names have changed. So the point is there. According to the census... Well the census is not something which is, let's say which is very accurate. But in the end, well, it says something. At least there's the census, right? According to the census, well, there are some of you who are not within the acquired part. If that is so, definitely we can't legalize the plot. Now, what IDA has, is a sketch. A sketch. It is not very reliable, it is like tottering, tottering. From there it will be clarified, but unfortunately it can't be clarified this week because that would be too much work for IDA...."

After a long solo, which leaves half of the people asleep and the other half wondering what the man actually said, the meeting is closed. During the meeting, I get the impression that the extensionist from IDA is not very sure of his position. This may be due to the fact that decisions have to be taken which are based on unreliable censuses and sketches which do not offer any guarantee -neither to the farmers nor to the institution.

As the problematic exemplified in the above discourse suggests, notable legal constraints exist in Yesenia. This all but beneficial legal condition is further exacerbated by a number of other statutory restraints which can indeed account for the intricate legal situation in which farmers in the Sixaola Valley generally find themselves in²³.

In the next paragraph, a general impression will be portrayed of

²³ One such constraint, for example, is the existence of a law specifying that all plots falling within a strip of 2,000 metres wide along the borders with Nicaragua and Panama are inalienable property of the State (Ley de Tierras y Colonización from March 1982; §7). This alone would indeed render nearly all farmers in Yesenia in a doubtful legal position.

the type of problems intrinsic to the production and distribution process of export plantains. The heterogeneous nature of these obstacles should be kept in mind when reading through the case study since they form the background against which some organizational efforts are cast.

6. SAPY: SOME INHERENT ORGANIZATIONAL PROBLEMS

To recapitulate: SAPY was established in March 1989 with the objective of stabilizing and increasing the price farmers got for their plantains as well as creating new sources of labour. To this end a verbal contract to export plantains was obtained with BANACOL in February, 1990. The price per box of U.S. \$7.00 indeed enabled SAPY to realize its goals.

SAPY, however, should not be seen as a group of farmers harmoniously working together for the achievement of a single, generalized goal. In fact the period of research on the association was distinguished by a multitude of conflicts and problems related to the character of the organization. In my interpretation, the representation of the problems and conflicts at hand themselves formed new "objects" which could be used in subsequent definitions of situations.

Apart of the existing differences in plantain cultivation among members of SAPY the most encompassing difficulty of the association concerned the process during which plantains were harvested, transported to the central packing site and packed into carton boxes. These difficulties actually inhibited associates to take full advantage of the higher prices offered by the multinational, and thus set the stage for much discontent. This packing process consisted of the following. After harvest, the plantains would be carried on the back of a donkey to some place at the side of a road, where they were thrown on one huge heap until one of the pick-ups rented by SAPY for the occasion came by. The plantains would be thrown again on the pick-up, which would then take the bunches to the central packing site. There the plantains were again flung on another pile until they could be finally cut, selected, and treated with chemicals and packed into 50-pound boxes. Because of handling damage, only some 70% -but often much less- of plantains would meet export-quality standards. This meant that the average ready-to-export box of plantains would contain 3 to 4 bunches of the fruit. In the end, and after subtracting packing materials, freight and handling costs, a member of SAPY would receive U.S. \$1.30 for each bunch he delivered. Although this price was higher than the prevailing prices middlemen normally paid (between U.S. \$.90-1.10), in June 1990 demand for plantains rose due to the presence of Nicaraguan intermediaries in the area²⁴. These intermediaries were willing to pay up to U.S. \$1.45 per bunch, and a substantial number of SAPY's members started selling their produce to them. As a consequence the accorded number of boxes could not be delivered to BANACOL, and the multinational at one point considered ending the agreement with SAPY. Costa Rican middlemen, on their part, seeing that high prices per bunch were having the effect of breaking up SAPY, intended to keep the same

²⁴ Nicaragua does not itself produce plantains during 3 to 4 months per year so Nicaraguan transporters go all the way down to the Sixaola Valley to buy them. During this period, plantains on the Nicaraguan market cost nearly U.S. \$3.00 per "racimo".

level of prices after the Nicaraguans departure. Since an organized farmer's organization was not in the interest of these middlemen, prices would be kept artificially high until SAPY would cease to exist. Thereafter these middlemen planned to let prices fall again²⁵.

Related to the problem mentioned above was the fact that some members would deliver bunches of inferior quality because they would be bought for U.S. \$1.30 anyway. Members producing good quality plantains (= "good farmers"), of course, did not like this because it was directly damaging them. So, for, instance, 2 out of 31 members quit SAPY during my fieldwork period, and more were considering to do the same.

More frictions arised because some members did not carry out their responsibilities, and this was often followed by proposals to evict the more lazy elements from the association. For example, when there was a shipment sometimes the container was not fully loaded until 11 p.m. because many members did not show up at the shipment site to help loading. In order to finish loading, casual wage labourers were then engaged, but the extra costs was deducted from the price every members gets for his/her bunches.

Another problem usually surfacing was related 'to members' obligation to give a weekly indication of the number of bunches they expected to deliver for export. These figures were then passed on to BANACOL which could then plan ahead how much space would be needed in the cargo ship. So it could happen that members would not stick to their commitment, and indeed there were occasions in which only 50% of the promised amount of boxes was actually delivered to BANACOL. Although there existed no penalties if SAPY delivered 10% over or under the agreed number of boxes, the association had to pay BANACOL U.S. \$1.00 for every box it failed to deliver under this 10% flexibility-margin. Since this penalty was not passed on to the individual producer but was taken collectively, members not keeping to their delivery commitments were usually in conflict with other members. The opposite would sometimes also occur. If bad weather was expected BANACOL would call off a shipment -sometimes 18 hours before hatvest! If in this case the Board of Directors was not quick in alerting members who were going to harvest then these farmers were left at the mercy of local

²⁵ In order to counter this problem SAPY's Board of Directors proposed to build small packing plants on the plots of each of its members. The idea behind this was that less produce loss would occur because reduced transport mistreatment. This would have a positive impact on labour, since each mini packing-plant would generate an income for 2-3 unmarried women with children (these had preference). Since 25 mini packing-plants were projected, this meant that -potentially at least- 50-75 women could be given the opportunity to earn some money -instead of 11 which worked at the central packing plant. As concerns profits, the idea was that -after deducing extra labour-costs- each bunch would in this way earn farmer's between U.S. \$1.50 and \$2.20. Motivation for the construction of these packing plants was indeed high, but this meant new access-roads to each of the packing plants had to be build. Since the capital means for this project were non-existent, I was contacted to try to obtain the means through the Dutch Embassy. Although in the end I succeeded in obtaining a donation for the project, the different steps that had to be taken took some effort, both by SAPY's members and by myself. In the process, however, I became to be seen as one more member of the association. This, in turn, gave me access to the people and the information on which this case study is build.

intermediaries who were keen in assessing the situation and thus offered to pay irrisory prices. Another reason for conflicts breaking out was when the Board of Directors -knowing how many boxes SAPY could deliver BANACOL- did not inform the multinational on time and the shipment would be postponed.

A variety of other conflicts and problems might arise with fellow villagers who are plantain intermediaries. Some members which had previously sold to these middlemen sometimes felt obliged to deliver some of their plantains to them, much to the annoyance of the rest of the members.

Yet other members did not easily integrate in the association since they felt they were becoming too dependent on SAPY's rules and regulations. For example, I often heard the statement that "I like to do what I want, when I want. With the association it's more difficult". Such as point of view was often related to the issue of payment: due to bureaucratic impediments, BANACOL's cheque usually took two weeks or more to arrive. A widely-aired complaint, then, was that farmers needed money when there was an urgent task to perform, or a labourer demanded his pay. Many of these problems were connected to indebtedness of the members. For example, one member quit because he could not wait to be paid two or three weeks after the harvest:

"I quit because I am poor and because I don't have the means to care for my family. I owe some two thousand at a grocery shop here, some three thousand at a grocery shop over there... If I deliver my plantains to the association everybody notices and they will soon be at my door trying to collect my debts. And because I can't pay them back that day they become suspicious and don't want to give me any more credit²⁶..."

Personal loyalties, furthermore, would also account for a number of conflicts. For example, SAPY had bought 5 expensive motor-pumps to spray against sigatoka, but only two were used while the remaining lay idle (or were used by members of the Board for personal purposes). The reason for this was that Ramiro wanted to supply his brother-in-law Gerardo and a friend of his (Camilo) as much labour as possible. If all five pumps would be used daily, then there would only be 2-3 hours of daily work for for Gerardo and Camilo. So the problem arising was that (apart of expensive capital investment laying idle) the fumigation-cycles were not being observed. As a consequence, farmers were still plagued by sigatoka and thus accused the Board for not executing its tasks as it should.

7. THE CASE: SOME APPARENT CONTRADICTIONS

It is halfway through May, 1990. Since I am already mixed up with SAPY I visit Ramiro (manager of the association) to discuss a viable strategy for obtaining a donation from the Dutch Embassy. When I reach his place Eufemia -Ramiro's cheerful wife- tells me he has left for Bribri together with Bartolo, where both are apparently trying to settle the collateral-issue at the IDA offices. I chat a while with Eufemia, waiting for the couple to be back. Both arrive an hour later on Bartolo's torn-down, ten year-old motorbike. We cordially greet each other, but I notice the disappointment on their faces as soon as they

²⁶ Middlemen pay immediately after loading the bunches in their truck.

get off the bike. I ask them for the reason of their gloominess. Somewhat cranky Ramiro responds:

"Ah, these people from IDA! I don't know what they are here for... Instead of helping us poor farmers they seem find a new problem every time we call on them. This time they told us that each member of the association should get a letter of good conduct signed by the Rural Guard... I'm fed up with all these delays in getting that goddam collateral! I think they're just making time because of Calderon²⁷..."

After a conversation on the Embassy-issue I leave with Bartolo. On the way to his bike we talk about the future of the association when suddenly he discloses that he has stopped motivating SAPY-members ever since Manuel was imposed upon him by Antonio (the former Regional Director of MAG). Because of this, Bartolo continues, some members have ceased delivering plantains to the association and others have even quit. At that very moment Ramiro comes out of his house and calls Bartolo. We say good-bye and agree to talk about the issue on some other opportunity.

What puzzles me at the moment is why Bartolo is capable of discrediting the same association he is so keen to defend in front of Ramiro and the rest of the Board of Directors. I go home musing it all has to do with some kind of internal quarrel. Whatever his motives, Bartolo's ambiguous behaviour certainly points to a contradiction which I cannot yet assert.

One week later there is news that the delay in the procurement of the collateral is beginning to annoy Arturo (General Manager of BANACOL), who expects SAPY to introduce the technological package as soon as possible. Hence Ramiro has travelled to his office in San Jose to appease Arturo²⁸. According to Bartolo -whom I meet during Ramiro's absence- Ramiro should not pay too much heed to BANACOL. Instead, SAPY should seek other commercializations channels in case Arturo assumes an inflexible position.

A month passes by without too much news on the acquisition of the collateral (I must admit I was more engaged trying to find out about differences in plantain cultivation at this stage). Slowly, however, I am getting to know SAPY's members and the livelihood problems they face, and it is obvious to me that the delay in obtaining the collateral is beginning to wear down members' patience and motivation. Rumours arise about the reasons for IDA's hesitations, and I am led to believe that something must be very wrong either with Yesenia or with SAPY since IDA has given collaterals to individual farmers from neighbouring communities on prior occasions. More-or-less at the same time differing interpretations of the agreement between SAPY and BANACOL begin to appear: whereas Bartolo tells me BANACOL cannot always buy SAPY's production due to market fluxes, Ramiro tells me the

²⁷ Calderón -the new President of Costa Rica- took office on the 8th of May, 1990. Ramiro refers to this because a change in Administration is often followed by a change in policy. Presumably all IDA officers were waiting for new guidelines.

²⁸ It is worth remembering that BANACOL wanted to sign a contract with SAPY only in the event that the association would get a loan to implement the changes the transnational suggested.

transnational is willing to receive up to 2,500 boxes weekly (which is, for the time being, out of SAPY's possibilities). I try to deepen these contrasting representations some ten days later when I come across both Ramiro and Bartolo at Yesenia's only, one-table restaurant. Pedro (auditor of SAPY) and Antonio (ex-union president and now administering a plot of an absentee member of SAPY) are also present and the four of them seem to be debating about the character of the contract that is about to be signed with BANACOL. Ramiro just addressing his audience:

"Well, everything is arranged right now. I managed to pin down Arturo to specify [in the contract] that BANACOL will inform us six days in advance when a shipment's going to take place. That's a great gain, I consider. It shows Arturo is willing to join his head with ours on this issue."

Ramiro says this in a pleased tone. But Antonio interrupts him:

"I agree with you that this is a good thing. But I think there are others who see things from another angle. It's worthless if they notify you with six days' anticipation if they're gonna notify you every six weeks! The whole point is that we need to know every how often they're going to buy from us!"

A discussion ensues whether or not the contract should make it clear when shipments are going to take place. In the end Ramiro agrees with Antonio, but anticipates that it will be difficult for SAPY to force its will upon BANACOL. Bartolo then intervenes. Turning to me but clearly addressing Ramiro he carefully advances the idea that SAPY should regard the possibility of finding other export companies which might be willing to offer a better deal, for example through the granting of the CAT²⁹ to the association. Readdressing the issue of the timing of BANACOL's notification Bartolo says:

"Look, people [SAPY's members] are willing to sell all their produce to the association. But if they don't know when to harvest their spirit goes down. We could offer our plantains to BANDECO, maybe that'd be a better deal."

Ramiro disagrees. According to him, as long as SAPY cannot provide the 2,500 boxes a week BANACOL can absorb there is no need to make any drastic changes³⁰. Food arrives and the subject is dropped. Bartolo entertains us with a variety of magnificent jokes. After dinner Antonio and Bartolo retreat, leaving Ramiro, Pedro and myself behind. While drinking some beers Ramiro goes back to Bartolo's prior comment,

²⁹ Cédula de Abono Tributario. CAT is an export subsidy granted to the exporting agent (in the case of SAPY's plantains BANACOL is the official export agent). The subsidy (14.5% of the total value) paid for every box of plantains, then, belongs to the transnational. According to an article in the "La Nación" newspaper, the CAT-subsidies represent nearly 10% of Costa Rica's Gross Internal Revenue. This same article also mentioned that 10% of Costa Ricans' exporters were receiving 80% of the subsidies.

³⁰ In this Ramiro is openly backed by Manuel. According to the latter it would not be in his advantage to take Bartolo's position: "after all, I'm receiving part of my pay from BANACOL, don't I?"

thus confirming some of the predicaments presently affecting the association. In order to cope with these problems Ramiro plans to hold a plenary meeting two weeks from today. As I see that Ramiro is willing to speak about the subject, I inquire a bit further. Making use of the situation (it is a common secret that Pedro is selling his second-quality plantains to the association as well) Ramiro explains:

"Of course it's not a bad idea to have export alternatives. But I have a moustache-to-moustache agreement with Arturo. I'm a man that likes to stick to his words and I'd rather not disappoint them [BANACOL]. I think it's preferable to finish what has already begun! I really think that most problems plaguing us now are of another sort. First of all there's a problem with those who try to introduce second-quality plantains into the packing plant. You know as well as I do this would be fatal for us on the long run. And then there's the issue of responsibility; it's always the same people who have to carry the weight of all extra work that's performed at the packing plant and later at the harbour. A lot can be lost just because a few do not cooperate... That's the problem, Gerardo: one has to be on top of it all the time, otherwise people start failing. I'm tired of all this!"

Pedro, a skinny man in his fifties whose strength seems to have been wasted away by 30 years at a banana plantation appears to get the message. He counters that it is not all members' fault that devotion for SAPY is declining. As an example, Pedro airs the most heard-off charge against SAPY: that the Board of Directors is composed of too many relatives and that this might jeopardize a proper management of funds. Ramiro, resorting to the peasant-leader rhetoric he effectively and distinctly employs, clarifies:

"Yes, I know there's a lot of gossip out there. But we have to see one thing: the important point is not who is there, but that work is carried out correctly, right? Because one is working for you, for the community's development, isn't that true?"

8. THE MEETING

Three weeks later there is still no sign of the collateral. Also, the idea of a plenary meeting (as proposed by Ramiro) is dropped because some members of the Board of Directors are visiting relatives in San Carlos. Meanwhile, on another front, some success has been booked as SAPY has been offered a draft of a new contract by BANACOL. The contract is full of booby traps and, clearly, some clauses will have to be renegotiated with the multinational³¹. In any event, without the collateral (and thus the credit) the contract cannot be

³¹ In my opinion the contract is a truly exploitative document. Luckily for SAPY a lawyer from MAG has already gone through it, noting down which clauses should never be signed. One such clause states that if an SAPY member sells his land the first option to buy is BANACOL's. Otherwise, the technical manual of the contract seemed next to impossible to accomplish. Many aspects of it were already being carried out in the wrong manner and it was plain that the multinational could rid itself at any time from all contractual obligations by just pointing to the present deficiencies.

signed. Otherwise the same problems that have been plaguing the association still exist. In order to straighten out these troubles a meeting of SAPY's Board of Directors is scheduled for the 11th of August.

The day of the meeting only Salvador, Félix, Ramiro, Orlando and myself show up. Miguel, Enrique and Pedro fail to arrive and I take this to be indicative of the current motivation shown by members of the project. Bartolo (as representative from MAG) and Manuel (technical head of the project) are also absent. After waiting nearly two ours for the missing contingent Ramiro summons us to go ahead. We have just begun when Bartolo enters the room. He apologizes for being late, lits a cigarette and sits down. He comments that now there is a quorum; if the rest approves the meeting can officially start. Ramiro quietly laughs at Bartolo's last, annoying remark. The meeting is officially re-opened and the first issue to be discussed concerns the problem of correctly filling in the new invoices. Then the point is raised as to which strategy SAPY has to follow in order to obtain donations from the Dutch and Canadian Embassies. Halfway through, Bartolo asks for permission to interrupt. In a very gloomy way, he propposes to first address a more pressing issue. Everybody nods, and Bartolo takes the word.

Bartolo begins narrating that he had met his superiors in both San José and Siquirres yesterday and the day before. When discussing the issue of SAPY's collateral, Felipe (the new Regional Director of MAG) had apparently shown some discontent by the fact that there were three relatives in the association's Board of Directors. Not leaving any time for someone to interfere, Bartolo then discloses that a literal earthquake is shaking MAG, and that for the time being nobody can be sure of his position. His version of affairs is that political persecusion is taking place, and that all "pericos" (Liberación-Party supporters) within the institution are being put with their backs against the wall by the new Administration. So, for example, Linvol (District head of MAG at Cahuita) has already been replaced. Even Bartolo's position vis-a-vis SAPY is in jeopardy since Felipe now wants him to commit himself to activities contrary to those accorded with Antonio (Felipe's predecessor). As an example of this new policy Bartolo mentions that last week a MAG-team (accompanied by the Minister of Agriculture) made a trip to the Sixaola valley to inquire into the extension activities of MAG officials. Both the Minister and Felipe (the Regional Director) had been very annoyed to find out that, with the exclusion of SAPY, relatively little was going on in terms of extension:

"According to Felipe one MAG engineer at the head of the plantain project was more than enough. So he warned me: either I leave all activities related to SAPY or I'll be fired. Well, as you know, this is totally against the agreement we made with Antonio!"

Pausing a little in order to light another cigarette, Bartolo intensifies the anxiety he is trying to build up. He then continues in a grievous style:

"Now, there's one more thing I ought to tell you. The new Regional Director of IDA, a new one who was put there by the new Administration, a certain Juan ..., well it seems that he's a personal enemy of Manuel, who like the rest of us is a "perico". The problem is that this Juan happens to be the one that has to

put his signature on the collateral for the credit. Right?"

Bartolo goes on explaining that (according to a commentary made to him by Felipe) Juan had already said that as long as Manuel was in charge of the SAPY-project he would not sign any collateral at all. According to these rumours Juan wants to replace Manuel by a certain Juan Antonio, a man with a vast working knowledge of plantains, "Calderonista" and personal friend of his.

All present realize the content of what has just been said. Although the issue of the collateral is put in another light, everybody perceives that new, unexpected difficulties lay ahead. But Bartolo makes some more clarifications. To make matters worse a political rival, the "calderonista" Alvaro, has just been promoted as head of BANCOOP -the Bank in charge of disbursing the loan to SAPY in the event that the collateral be signed by IDA. As far as Bartolo knows this Alvaro is now personally in charge of approving all credit petitions. Looking around, Bartolo then tries to unfold a strategy:

"To me everything is more or less clear. If we don't play their game we can forget all about the credit. And without the credit the project will stagnate. What SAPY needs to do at this stage is to write a letter stating they do not wish to continue working with Manuel. Because he's the one obstructing the credit. At least so I'm told. Let's face it: after all, the man isn't working as he should. I think we have to act with great strength now and not let the others win!"

We all keep quiet for a while. Everybody is carefully taxating the meaning of what Bartolo has just reported. The first one to break the silence is Ramiro, who is celebrating an intense hangover of four days of drinking:

"Well, look. It is not Juan who gives the collateral: that is decided in San José as you know."

Bartolo answers that even if IDA in San José agrees to sign the collateral, Juan can still veto the decision since the loan concerns the Atlantic Zone. After some yes and no's on the issue Ramiro categorically articulates his opinion:

"I'm not talking on behalf of the association because I am not the Board. That pertains to the others. But I want to say this: its us who made the association and its us who were brave enough to send that first shipment to Limón. Because nobody knew beforehand if it would be accepted or rejected. And now this... These are political manipulations! Listen: I am not here for myself; I'm here for my children. And when I say my children I also refer to the association. It's been long since that we took off our loincloths and it is not fair that these señores force us to raise the Unidad³² flag."

Turning to Bartolo, Ramiro goes on:

"You know it very well: even within ourselves there are those wanting to break us. Trino, Jose Pedro [members of Unidad]...

³² Calderón's Party.

Hijos de puta! But these are politickings in which we are not going to take part! These are problems you have within MAG or IDA. A problem that therefore you yourselves have to solve. It is not of our incumbency. And look here Bartolo: if someone comes up to me and asks if I am satisfied with the work Manuel has been fulfilling I tell him in the face I don't like his work because he has committed many faults. But from that to sawing someone's legs, no!"

A moment of silence ensues after Ramiro's crisp words. Salvador then seizes a standpoint and backs Ramiro. So does Félix. Miguel and Orlando say nothing: it seems they either do not understand or are not willing to take parts. Bartolo, ignoring the response, suggests there may be a possible way out of the dilemma. According to him, it would be a good idea to ask FERTICA³³ credit for fertilizers, and ask other parastatal companies for credit in order to comply with other elements of the contract with BANACOL. Salvador intervenes forcefully for the first time, arguing that SAPY applied for a loan to cover the whole technological package, and that not because the Board did not want to saw someone's legs were they going to act otherwise.

After some further exchange of words on the matter of what strategy to follow, Ramiro suggests to call all parties concerned (BANCOOP, MAG, IDA, BANACOL, SAPY) to an extraordinary meeting on the 25th of August in order to discuss the problem at hand. Bartolo strongly opposes the idea, arguing this will only cost time and a further delay in the signing of the collateral. A voting is then cast, and Ramiro is able to push his proposal through.

9. Manuel AND Bartolo: representations and enrollment.

The days following Bartolo's message were generally marked by intrigues and gossiping. Although nobody had officially informed Manuel about what had been said during the meeting news somehow reached his ears. Initially Manuel attributed the rumours to Bartolo's fantasy and did not overtly at least pay much attention to it³⁴. Some days later, however, a letter from the Regional Direction of MAG addressed to Bartolo fell into his hands. The letter specified that, as of then, Bartolo was not authorized to work on SAPY-matters anymore and should, hence, direct his attention to other projects in the Sixaola Valley³⁵. Whatever Manuel made out of this, the essence of the letter was evident: the Regional Director had started re-ordering prior work arrangements in Yesenia. From that moment on, a mute "war" broke out between Manuel and Bartolo.

The first omens of the confrontation were not very conspicuous and centered around winning the support of SAPY's members in general

³³ FERTICA is a government-owned producer of fertilizers.

³⁴ This, at least, was professed to me by Manuel. However, Manuel was living next door to Linvol (MAG's recently-ousted District Head) in Cahuita and thus probably knew more about the subject.

³⁵ Bartolo had been "forbidden" to participate any longer in SAPY-affairs. His superiors considered it more adequate for him to visit neighbouring communities and try to establish new farmer groups there.

and of the Board of Directors in particular. To this effect both Manuel and Bartolo deployed a series of strategies. Manuel, for example, would try to coopt Ramiro, Salvador and Félix by letting them drive BANACOL's brand-new Toyota Hi-Lux, one of Costa Rica's most expensive cars. Also, Manuel tried to persuade the labourers with whom he went to fumigate daily to take his side: one of them was Gerardo, another brother-in-law of Ramiro and thus potentially a crucial piece since Ramiro was in fact SAPY. Bartolo on his part -and despite his wife's disapproval- would go more often to the canteen. There he would tell more jokes than usual, and invite others to drink at his expenses. Also, and knowing I was a friend to whom Ramiro would listen, Bartolo tried to enroll me in his endeavours³⁶.

The low-key conflict between Bartolo and Manuel lingered on for a while without any blatant skirmishes. On the one hand, Manuel had gained the support of Ramiro's three brothers in law (Salvador, Félix and Gerardo) and was confident that SAPY would not let him fall in case the Regional Directors of IDA and MAG asked for his scalp. On the other hand, Manuel was certainly jealous of the response Bartolo got from farmers: living 35 km away in Cahuita, he once remarked, also had its disadvantages since he could never obtain the same degree of confidence with SAPY's members as his rival did³⁷. Ramiro, meanwhile, still considered that the answer to the whole issue at hand lay with the Regional Directors of IDA and MAG, and was thus little inclined to favour either Manuel or Bartolo. Nevertheless, Ramiro was more inclined to back Manuel, probably because of the respect Ramiro normally showed towards the technical discourse entertained by the former. Ramiro's friendship with Bartolo, on the contrary, cooled off mainly because the rhetoric displayed by the latter was well known to Ramiro (who must have sensed Bartolo was trying to persuade him). However, Ramiro audaciously cashed in on both Manuel' and Bartolo's intentions. Firstly, he made sure for the first time that Manuel did what he was being paid for (in fact Manuel started working 12 hours a day instead of 4-5 after he felt the heat in his neck). Secondly, Ramiro was able to manipulate Bartolo to block a decision by IDA and BANCOOP to designate part of the credit -in principle already set aside for SAPY- to a neighbouring association (more on this later).

Gradually the struggle between Manuel and Bartolo became more open. Hence, the translations/representations of the situation, at hand gained importance. What was interesting about this were the contrasting discursive means both used. Bartolo, for example, took advantage of his detailed knowledge from his 15 years of experience with plantains. Manuel, on his part, usually manifested a "technical" or "engineer's" view. In the following part, some examples of the means used by the two competitors will be shown. The situations I sketch are not placed in chronological order but took place in a time-lapse of two months.

³⁶ To this he had ample opportunity. Ever since told to work on other extension activities in the Sixaola Valley Bartolo depended on me: his motorbike was constantly out of order and I was the only one with a car willing to take him to his appointments in other communities.

³⁷ Manuel has tried to get involved in Yesenia, for example by nearly buying 4 hectares from one of SAPY's members. However, ever since Manuel backed off from the deal he has got the name of not being a very trustworthy partner.

I become aware that the fight between Manuel and Bartolo has turned into an open battle just as I arrive to Yesenia after an absence of some days. Once back I come accross Manuel who is standing next to his car talking to Salvador, Félix and Gerardo. Asked about his position, Manuel commented he was "between the sword and the wall". Felipe had given him one month's respite to show it was not his fault, but Bartolo's that the project was not functioning as should. To this he added that -in case he should leave Yesenia- he had already arranged for a new (and better) job either in Guápiles or in San Jose, so he was actually doing SAPY a favour by staying.

This strategy of playing SAPY's "defender" is made apparent on another occasion when Ramiro, Salvador and Félix are present. Manuel has just aired a complaint by his superiors that some members of SAPY's Board are relatives. According to the people from MAG this could influence the granting of the collateral, since §218 of the Law of Associations prohibits affines to be members of the same Board. Manuel:

"I got very angry with Felipe. I told him straight in the face he shouldn't come with that. In Yesenia there have already been a lot of associations and groups and none has ever made it any longer than three months. SAPY has been working for one-and-a-half-years now so there's no need to doubt about the Boards' capability".

All look preoccupied, but Manuel tries to reassure his audience that there is no need to worry. After all, he contends, the fault laid with the lawyers, not with the Board. The lawyers had approved the credit petition submitted to them by SAPY, and it had been their job to check the names of the members of the Board of Directors at the Civil Register to see if any irregularities existed. These had not been found and, consequently, SAPY was not to blame.

This persuasive style is used by Manuel over and over again. For example, on the issue of why he is being politically persecuted by Juan (Regional Director of IDA) publicly told SAPY's Board that it all dates from the time both he and Juan attended the same University. At that time Manuel seems to have publicly flirted with leftist political ideas for which he was then hated by Juan:

"We've all been young once, haven't we? Times change and now I'm convinced that private initiative is the way to the future. That is my position, that is your position and that is Juan's position as well. So I don't really understand what this fuss is all about..."

Manuel' enrollment efforts are once more displayed on an occasion when I'm at the canteen together with some 15 farmers. As Manuel drives by (accompanied by Salvador and Gerardo) and sees me, he stops. He gets out of the car and, addressing me loudly, then publicly blames Bartolo for not having had the wisdom of involving more interested parties in the project. Manuel then shows off by revealing that he has lately been trying to obtain a totally new and innovative chemical product³⁸

³⁸ The Costa Rican name of the product is "Power Plant". Although it has not yet been legalized, the chemical has already been tested on an estate in the North of the Atlantic Zone of Costa Rica (San Carlos), apparently with good results. "Power Plant" is a sistemic chemical

through the German Embassy. The object of this venture, he goes on, is that the use of the new product offers the possibility to market plantains in Europe after 1992³⁹. Manuel:

"BANACOL has already shown interest and is seriously considering selling plantains treated with "Power Plant" on the European market. See, what one can achieve through a little initiative? Of course, as an engineer I have the contacts needed..."

As if to give more body to this last statement, Manuel tells us a scientific experiment is needed to check the real potential of the new chemical. To this end he intends to start using it on an experimentation-plot with

"a minimum planting density of seventeen hundred plants per hectare. In case the strategy works out well I'm thinking of asking an increase of 50% in the price of each box [of plantains; U.S. \$11.- instead of \$7.50]"

Gerardo and Salvador very proudly stand next to him, listening. Since "Power Plant" is very expensive⁴⁰ new forms of obtaining credit need to be found. This, however, should pose no problem. According to Manuel,

"A friend at the German Embassy said he could help us through the GTZ [Gemeinschaft fuer Technische Zusammenarbeit]. So I've already arranged for a meeting in San José on the 30th of August with the owners of the liquid to see if it can be utilized in Yesenia."

Manuel's most frequently-used discursive tool to obtain full support by SAPY's farmers and Board alike was that of his technical knowledge. One instance in which this became evident concerned the spread of Erwinia, a new fungus increasingly damaging plantains in the region. Although Manuel openly confessed to me he did not know how to counter the fungus, he nevertheless encouraged farmers to use AGROMICIN-100 (a very toxic antiobiotic). However, the antibiotic was too expensive and thus out of reach for farmers. Although farmers were

compound that purportedly regenerates the soil, attacks black sigatoka, increases plantain production by 30%, has a strong nematicidal effect and has no harmful consequences for the environment, the producer or the consumer. The only disadvantage seems to be the price.

³⁹ The new chemical compound reportedly leaves no residuals in the fruit, which seems to be a prerequisite for agricultural products coming from outside the EEC after 1992. The American FDA (through USAID) wants the same norms to apply to the U.S. too. Thus many agricultural producers will have to switch to new chemical compounds shortly since BANCOOP receives its funds through USAID.

⁴⁰ One hectare should be sprayed twice a month with the new product. Since each spraying would consume some 0.6 liter, an "average" farmer with some 5 hectares would need at least 6 liters per month. Since "Power Plant" costs nearly U.S. \$40,00 per liter the "average" farmer would have to invest U.S. \$240,00 monthly - a figure way out of proportion.

conscious of this fact, Manuel' technical description of the manner in which the antibiotic worked against the fungus increased his contested (by Bartolo) authority over technical matters. It meant that the problem did not lay in the diagnosis or in Manuel' ability to reach that specific diagnosis. Rather, the blame was laid on the price of the product.

Another example of Manuel' technical representations is obvious when he counsels farmers to fertilize. He first impresses them by assessing plant density through a method in which he measures a 10*10-meter piece of land and then counts the number of plantains within it. Manuel then multiplies this figure one hundred times the number of hectares the farmer has planted in plantains thereby obtaining the total number of plants. This figure is then related to a specific soil type (which can be ascertained using a soil survey carried out by Bartolo 18 months ago). On the basis of this knowledge Manuel is then able to indicate the precise type and amount of fertilizer bags the farmer needs to buy. As I had the chance to observe a number of times, farmers are clearly amazed by this method.

Bartolo, on his part, tries his best to show Manuel' technical incompetence. One opportunity to do so appears when Bartolo, myself and Esteban (a member of SAPY) visit the latter's plot. The reason we call on Esteban is his dissatisfaction with advice on pruning and fertilizing which he recently obtained from Manuel. Indeed, demonstrating some recently-pruned plants which were left with two suckers of the same age, Bartolo explains that, consequently, a long time between the inflorescence of the parent plant and that of the suckers will follow. This inhibits planning, which is essential if one works with a transnational demanding a certain fixed amount of boxes per week. In addition Esteban is supplying both suckers the same amount of fertilizers he first gave the parent plant, thus in fact halving the amount of fertilizer the suckers need. This brings about nutrient competition and leads to lower outputs.

Illustrating Manuel' ineptitude has indeed become the focus of Bartolo's present enterprises. For example, that same night a number of people are gathered at the canteen. Amongst them are a number of SAPY's members, Bartolo and me. At a certain point some racist comments about the only Black member of SAPY (who is not present) are made. One man says:

"Niggers are really retarded. Take that Terencio, for example: one knows about his bank account by looking at his plantains... The more he's indebted, the higher his plantain density!"

All have to laugh, but immediately Bartolo takes advantage of the situation by demonstrating Manuel is a bad extensionist. Taking the crude comment about Terencio's high plantain density (which is nearly double the recommendation) as a point of departure, Bartolo starts explaining that Manuel never really listens to farmers. Bartolo:

"Well Terencio sows with a very high plant density because he has a debt at the bank and wants to get the most from his plot. We all know that... But let's face it: he produces way above average, which is actually quite interesting. And what does Manuel do? Nothing! He's plainly not interested because Terencio's method is against the book... Another example is Norman, who has the highest production with his double rows. And what does Manuel do? Tell everybody that Norman and Terencio are

wrong and proposing that a three by three distance is left at all times!"

Bartolo goes on explaining that apart of not listening to farmers, Manuel is counseling farmers to fertilize according to soil surveys carried out a year and a half ago. Since the soils are changing their structure rapidly due to the high level of chemical inputs (compactation) he probably takes wrong data as a starting point. Another fault of Manuel concerns the way in which he counts plant density: he first measures a plot of 10*10 meters and then multiplies. Bartolo argues this is to no use because farmers often have areas where planting density varies. Thus defficient planning is the result. The farmers gathered at the canteen are all ears...

Otherwise Bartolo wanted to gain the favour of the Board by asking a donation from the Canadian Embassy in order to construct a warehouse and some offices for the association. The first steps to obtain this donation had been taken by Bartolo alone, and I could nearly see his vanity the day he entered Yesenia in an expensive car accompanying some representatives from the Embassy who wanted to inspect the SAPY project⁴¹.

A turning point in Bartolo's struggle against Manuel takes place after Felipe visits Yesenia and "snatches" Bartolo on a trip for a day. The entire community, of course, wants to know what is going on. All have the chance to hear the news when Bartolo comes back. In front of the MAG-office some 20 farmers are eavesdropping on him. He tries to make clear that he seems to have gained Felipe's confidence and thus now has an important "ally" against Manuel:

"I had a strong discussion with Felipe. I said look, Felipe, people from the Ministry [of Agriculture] came to my area of operation and worked behind my back; I don't like anybody to spy on me and if somebody wants to move in my area he should first report with me⁴². He [Felipe] understood I wasn't hiding anything and now respects me. Even he will now report with me whenever he comes..."

Bartolo's self-professed breakthrough in his relationship with Felipe was concretized in a number of ways. First of all, Felipe appointed Bartolo to take charge of a new banana project in a neighbouring community of Yesenia. This task was joined with another responsibility: from then on Felipe wanted Bartolo to supervise all dealings with BANDECO in Yesenia. Taking heed of his new, strategic advances with Felipe, Bartolo immediately set out to cash in on the latter obligation. Subtly menacing SAPY's Board as well as Manuel with the idea of forming a parallel organization of SAPY within Yesenia,

⁴¹ This turned out to be counterproductive because Ramiro accused Bartolo of side-stepping SAPY when asking for the donation.

⁴² Apparently Felipe and other personnel from MAG had been "spying" on Manuel's and Bartolo's activities as well as on SAPY to know whether the proposed credit for SAPY made any sense at all. When SAPY's Board first got wind of these activities, Bartolo took the position that this was the only "objective" way of finding out; otherwise either he or Manuel would only let Felipe meet the "best" farmers.

Bartolo had already spoken to a number of farmers that could easily conform a block of at least 100 hectares (BANDECO's minimum requirement) to see whether they showed any willingness to create a new association. All parties seemed to be very interested⁴³

The new relationship with Felipe provided Bartolo with inside information that placed some of the institutional manoeuvrings in another perspective and which proved useful for Bartolo's own project. Apparently, part of the deal between Juan (Regional Director of IDA) and Felipe was that Juan should dismiss Johnny (from IDA-Bribri) while Felipe would oust Manuel. Felipe, however, had to act carefully because officially he could not discharge Manuel without a specific complaint against him. The only party entitled to file such a complaint was SAPY and, hence, it became crucial for Bartolo that the association drafted a note in which it objected to work with Manuel. Furthermore -according to Bartolo- it seemed both Juan and Felipe had come to the conclusion that the plantain project would fail if Manuel was kept as head of it. So, Felipe had told Bartolo that he would rather have Bartolo somewhere else for the time being and let Manuel drown on his own before he had the chance to involve people Felipe considered competent. Moreover, as Bartolo put it,

"Felipe cannot maintain why he's assigning two tecnicos to a project involving twenty-five farmers when there are some three-thousand-six-hundred other farmers in the Valley who don't get any technical assistance at all."

The implication, Bartolo told his audience, was that working with Manuel became problematic for both IDA and MAG since these institutions would be held publicly responsible in case SAPY would get the collateral and failed to fulfill its contract with BANACOL. Other signs, Bartolo continued, which pointed to an inter-institutional conflict between MAG and IDA complicated the matter:

"According to Felipe, Juan has proposed to replace Manuel by Garita from IDA. This has hit upon strong resistance within the MAG-cadre who does not want to lose influence in the area to a rival institution."

This, of course, made Bartolo's ambitions more problematic. Aware that this problem was in some sense out of his direct zone of influence, Bartolo just murmured:

⁴³ Some complementary constraints, however, would seriously impede BANDECO to start a parallel project next to SAPY in Yesenia. Discussing these obstacles, Bartolo mentions that in conforming a group Mario B. - who controls 70 hectares and thus nearly complies with all of BANDECO's requisites (a block with a minimum of 100 hectares that would enable aerial sigatoka control) would pose a problem since he is presently selling his farm. The reason is that he sharecrops the farm with an uncle of his; this uncle is presently in need of cash and wants his share back. Furthermore Mario appears to have a huge debt at the Bank. Another person that would form part of BANDECO's group is Pedro. The problem with him is that he is also selling his 12 hectares because of his debts with the bank. Bartolo's conclusion (which, of course, he did not make public) is that an independent group next to SAPY would be difficult to realize without some of SAPY's members changing sides.

"That'd be very wrong. Even if he [Garita] knows a lot about plantain! Look at Manuel: how long has it taken him to notice how things are? Besides, Felipe is of the opinion that within MAG there's also qualified personnel to do that job."

Bartolo had been actively trying to persuade SAPY's members to put on the pressure on the Board in order that a letter of complaint be written. This was to no avail since the Board (read: Ramiro) was obdurate in its decision. A crucial moment, however, emerged when Bartolo, Ramiro and myself travelled to Bribri to make a phone call. Bartolo, addressing me, disclosed by way of gossip that Jose Miguel, National Director of Investigations of MAG under the Arias Administration had a bad recollection of Manuel. According to Bartolo Jose Miguel did not trust Manuel ever since the latter worked for him on a 4-month tiquisque research. After 8 months there still was no outcome, and Jose Miguel went to the experimentation plot to see what the problem was. As it happened, the experiment had failed simply because the crop had not been attended properly. I have to laugh, but Ramiro comments:

"Manuel is slowly becoming a pain in the ass for all of us... [Turning to me] What would you do in my place?"

Bartolo (who is sitting next to me) gives me a sign with his knee without Ramiro noticing. I realize Bartolo wants to take advantage of the situation, so I propose to go and drink a beer in Bribri after the phone-call. Once in the bar, we talk some 10 minutes about less substantial issues. Then Ramiro suddenly addresses Bartolo in a very straightforward way:

"Good, Bartolo. We have now been waiting ages for that stupid collateral... Honestly speaking I think others are spoiling our party. To be sincere with you: one or two persons [referring to Juan and Felipe] cannot be so powerful that they can withhold the collateral for such a long time! Independently of Manuel I think there must be other reasons as well..."

Bartolo stares ahead quietly, and after a long pause he explains that the issue is indeed more complicated. Carefully choosing his words, Bartolo opens the old wound of local politics. It seems that Trinidad and Pedro actively participated in Unidad's (President Calderon's Party) campaign before and during the last presidential campaign. Now that they got wind of the collateral issue they are both demanding their Party why it is that people from Liberacion⁴⁴ (the opposition Party) should receive any financial aid in the form of credit. Bartolo:

"You can see they have had results. All negotiations with IDA and the banks have been delayed... They are raising walls all around us!"

Bartolo does not need to explain any more. As I understand his move, Ramiro now has two options left if he wants SAPY to procure that collateral: either he writes a letter of complaint asking for Manuel's removal or he must openly change from political Party. Should he choose

⁴⁴ All members of SAPY are known to sympathize with this party.

for the first option, then the question of political colour might not be raised. The latter case -totally out of the question because of Ramiro's hatred of Unidad- would automatically imply a change of leadership of SAPY. Getting the message, Ramiro laughs nervously. Angrily, he mutters:

"Hijos de puta!"

Shortly after this last breakthrough on the issue of Manuel Bartolo confided me that he wanted to clarify the issue of his' and Manuel' position within SAPY: either the association was with him, or against him. Bartolo intended to address the issue on the extraordinary meeting of the association which he could not attend himself because of other compromises. Nevertheless Bartolo had already indicated one of the members and close ally (Eduardo) to bring the issue on the agenda⁴⁵.

The day of the extraordinary meeting of the association came. As usual, it started one-and-a-half-hour too late. Some 25 members were present; both Manuel and Bartolo were unable to attend. After some introductory remarks Salvador -who led the discussion- started arguing that many technical problems concerning the cultivation of plantain had arisen lately. He also made a point about the insufficient quantity of plantains members had recently offered SAPY. Salvador asks for the reasons when Eduardo, who wants to put forward the problem Bartolo told him to raise, is the first to intervene. Changing the direction of Salvador' question somewhat, he states:

"Look, it's a matter of loyalty. I reckon I have failed the association partly because I'm very lazy. Everyone of you can see that! But you [addressing the Board of Directors] have failed us. Where is that technological package? It has been promised for a long, long time now, right? Without that package we're not working well. I say we have to start working from the bottom up, and not from the top downwards like it's being doing now⁴⁶."

Salvador replies that the loan is on its way but that, unfortunately, to that end a signature under the collateral is vital. This may take some time to get, so he urges everybody to be patient. As concerns the control of sigatoka, Salvador answers it is BANACOL, not SAPY who dictates so. Eduardo goes on:

"The truth is that there is much dissatisfaction. We've been told the loan 'll be there in eight days. Then in fifteen more... How long have we struggled like that? There's just no seriousness! And to us farmers that's like a bucket of cold water! Look, everybody knows. There's a person here that's obstructing that signature. The thing looks like this to me: either Manuel leaves

⁴⁵ The last days Bartolo has been giving a number of crucial members some more on-site advice, especially on how to fight the erwinia outbreak.

⁴⁶ By this he meant that fertilizers and herbicides had to be furnished first (bottom) and aerial spraying against sigatoka later (top).

or we all leave. Even though we may have a lot of friendship with him, I say it's better to throw him out."

Salvador cannot cope with this harsh statement and looks for a helping hand. Ramiro is quick to aid him. He states categorically:

"Well, those are others' internal affairs and are not of our concern here. Those problems have arisen as a consequence of the political takeover by the calderonistas. But right now things are already starting to cool down a bit. We'll have that collateral shortly..."

Eduardo cuts him down:

"I say we have to make an agreement."

Ramiro, bypassing this last statement, counters:

"That's not the issue. We're not their bosses. They already know something's wrong, so why don't they throw him out? Listen: we're the owners of the hens with the golden eggs... I think the healthiest thing to do now is to leave aside all this shit and better leave the issue to settle by itself."

Eduardo, not knowing how to answer this one, addresses all members:

"I say we have to vote."

Ramiro does not give the rest a chance to react. He assures the assembly that the Board will take cards on the issue, and that all paperwork has already been submitted to IDA for its approval. He informs everybody that he expects the contract with BANACOL to be signed within a week and announces Felipe has been invited to talk with the Board.

Bartolo -who probably thought that the matter of Manuel would be settled at the meeting- kept on attempting to earn the confidence of SAPY's members in general, and of Ramiro in particular. This was made apparent through Bartolo's version of the issues that were discussed during a meeting at MAG's regional headquarters. Present at the meeting were a delegate of BANACOL, Bartolo and his superiors from the institution. Upon being questioned by Felipe at the gathering, the delegate of BANACOL admitted it was indeed absurd to spray against sigatoka if there were still some producers who did not even use nematicide or fertilizers. In the opinion of the delegate, implementation of the entire technological package (i.e. pest control, fertilization and bagging of the inflorescence) was needed before sigatoka-control could be effected. Upon this comment, Bartolo -according to himself- pushed the delegate to agree that BANACOL would deliver all chemical inputs to SAPY at wholesale prices and thus lower farmer's costs substantially. Although strictly speaking the delegate's concession had indeed been made, I later heard from Felipe it was not Bartolo who negotiated it, but the delegate himself who offered it. No doubt Bartolo -by openly playing the hero of the meeting- tried to impress SAPY's members and convince them that, first, they drop Manuel and, second, they support Bartolo in case an open struggle breaks out for SAPY's guidance should a new figure be sought.

10. A SOLUTION FOR THE IMPASSE. NEW PROBLEMS

By the end of August both the procurement of the collateral and the struggle between Manuel and Bartolo seem to be at an impasse. The contents of the meeting reach the community some days later, and everybody seems to be well aware of the struggles going on within the association. Rumours about the political nature of the refusal of the collateral supersede one another to the point where hearsay dominates the stage. All vacillations dissipate the day of the first meeting between Felipe and the Board. Ramiro is hindered to participate because he will visit a cancer-ridden sister of his in one of San Jose's hospitals. Before he leaves, he instructs Salvador to

"Tell him [Felipe] we want to work. That's all we want. All of us won't be screwed just because of one..."

The content of the meeting is later revealed to me by both Salvador and Bartolo. According to Bartolo, Felipe is already aware that Manuel is not functioning as he should. Out of compassion Felipe gave Manuel 10 days respite to put everything back in order⁴⁷. Bartolo on this:

"If the man couldn't get the thing going in eight months, you think he'll do it in ten days?"

Moreover it was arranged at the meeting that Felipe would try to see in San José what the content of the agreement of his predecessor with BANACOL and SAPY amounted to. There, Felipe would try to find out whether or not an agronomist should be at the front of the SAPY-project or if a technician with good plantain-knowledge could do the job. If so, Felipe had added, Bartolo could take the post. Another issue discussed during the meeting was that of Manuel's double income, and Felipe had made it very clear that he did not at all like Manuel's moonlighting⁴⁸ (which is unlawful).

The day after Felipe's visit to Yesenia a new meeting was scheduled. The objective was to try to modify the contract that should be signed between SAPY and BANACOL. After some five hours of work, Víctor (right hand of Felipe and head of MAG's plantain programme for the Atlantic Zone) lets everybody know indirectly that everything seems to be in order now, including the granting of the credit. Bartolo seems very satisfied with Venancio's comments. His mood is later substantiated by Milton (a tecnico accompanying Víctor) who confides me he will probably take over Bartolo's position as regional extensionist in case the SAPY project is assigned to Bartolo. I agree with Venancio that I will type out SAPY's version of the contract with BANACOL, print it and bring the original and the revised documents to the regional

⁴⁷ Manuel desperately wanted to have the job in Yesenia since it enabled him to live close to his Black mistress in Cahuita and far away from his jealous wife in Turrialba.

⁴⁸ Bartolo felt bad by this: on top of his U.S. \$700 salary as MAG engineer Manuel also got U.S. \$300 and the car (including unlimited mileage) from BANACOL whereas Bartolo was earning U.S.\$199 a month and had a 10-year old motorbike and U.S. \$60 of monthly travel expenses at his disposal.

head office of MAG in Siquirres.

When I arrive there two days later Venancio confuses me with some commentaries on a new obstacle that surfaced concerning the collateral and Bartolo. According to Venancio IDA's Executive President had until the 17th of September to inform the Vice-Minister of Agriculture why credit for SAPY had not yet been granted why these funds now lay idle at BANCOOP. In case the contract between SAPY and BANACOL had not been signed by that date, the Vice-Minister would then commit the funds to other projects since the money is "out there devaluating while many other groups desire those funds". It was imperative, then, that SAPY reacted quickly to the Vice-Minister's ultimatum. Since there are no communication possibilities with Yesenia, Víctor would personally drive there that same day and tell the Board of Directors about the necessity of signing the contract with BANACOL without delay. About Manuel Venancio expresses that SAPY has to define his position before the weekend. But he also makes it clear that in case the Board opts to expel him Bartolo will most probably not get Manuel's post, the reason being that Bartolo does not possess the university degree which BANACOL demands.

When I come back to Yesenia after an absence of five days it seems Ramiro and the Board know all about the Vice-Minister's ultimatum. Ramiro therefore tried to communicate with Arturo (head of BANACOL) to make an appointment for the signing of the contract, but the latter appeared to be out of the country until the 18th of September. Ramiro then immediately phoned IDA's President to notify him SAPY could not make any move until that date. Also the person in charge of the credit department at BANCOOP was informed. Both persons coincided it was a case of "force majeure" and therefore told Ramiro the matter could wait some more days. However, once Arturo is back Ramiro will try to speed-up things by asking BANACOL for a "letter of intention". This letter -which states the company is willing to buy the associations produce- would allow for a short recess during which the contracts' clauses could be negotiated between SAPY's Board and the multinational.

On the dilemma concerning Manuel Ramiro now seems to have changed his mind. He now prefers that Felipe (who is supposed to visit Yesenia tomorrow) takes whatever decision he likes as long as he enables SAPY to get the collateral and keep its operations going. According to Ramiro, Felipe had already told him (and contrary to what Bartolo had been pretending) that the problem was not so much Manuel, but his style of guiding the project. Sensing that politics were being left out of the arena, Ramiro felt it was now indeed legitimate to ask Felipe to remove Manuel and place him somewhere else.

Later, when I stumble upon Bartolo it seems he also knows everything about the Vice-Minister's ultimatum. He lets me know so by giving an account of two newly formed farmers' associations in Paraíso, some 10 kilometers away. The interest of the first association had apparently laid in the production of plantains, but there also existed a possibility that it would inscribe in a huge banana programme. According to Bartolo, the members of this association were pretty bright and had managed to obtain juridical status (a prerequisite for obtaining credit) with the help of MAG, IDA and a private lawyer in

only a matter of days⁴⁹. This association could be a potential obstacle for SAPY's endeavour to procure the collateral because the new association's members (35 producers with a capacity of 160 hectares) also wished to obtain a rehabilitation loan through BANCOOP. Since this institution has not yet disbursed any money to SAPY, Bartolo fears that -should the loan be asked for too quickly by the Paraíso-based group- BANCOOP could indeed allocate part of the credit formerly promised to SAPY to the other party. Bartolo therefore wants to "block" the Paraíso group in order not to harm SAPY. To be able to do so Bartolo is continuously trying to convince the Paraíso association that it should first elaborate detailed investment plans before applying for a loan. In doing so Bartolo obviously attempts to "win" a little time and gain Ramiro's support by way of a letter in which Manuel's activities are criticized and his own position strengthened.

Since Arturo would not be back until after the ultimatum had expired a rendezvous between a delegate from BANACOL, Felipe, and the Board of Directors of SAPY was arranged. As I hear later, BANACOL is indeed willing to sign a temporary "letter of intention". Some other issues, however, were discussed as well. One of them concerned Manuel's car, which would be taken from him in 10 more days⁵⁰. The delegate also showed his preoccupation about SAPY's decreasing export production and threatened BANACOL would not sign any contract in case this did not change: the company could easily look out for a contract with other intermediaries. Felipe replied to this that he had already decided to fire Manuel and put Bartolo at the front of the project. The delegate had been very at ease with this decision, and declared no engineer was needed for the task: someone with clear administrative insight and intense knowledge of plantains, he said, would be able to heighten the morale of the producers and motivate them once more to attain a higher production level. As the delegate left he took with him a copy of SAPY's version of the contract to show it to BANACOL's lawyer (Alvaro, son of a former President of Costa Rica). Everybody seemed content and confident after the meeting: after all, it was only a matter of days before both the contract and the collateral would be signed and the money waiting at the bank's counter...

Some problems, though, loomed at a distance. Doubts concerning SAPY's bookkeeping have awakened the interest of the institutions and, for example, Venancio has been asking for the Board's financial report lately. Indeed, only the accountancy of the first three shipments is up to date (out of fifteen). This preoccupies Felipe, who fears the project will fail as a consequence of ill-administration. In this event Felipe (and thus the institution) will lose face and probably not be accorded such projects anymore. To complicate things further, gossip is going around about Felipe mistrusting Bartolo in case he should take

⁴⁹ Within the association conflicts about the selected way to go arose, and two "dissidents" had decided to create their own association. This new association uses an "environmentalist" discourse to further their objectives which -among others- consist of marketing plantain through a multinational company.

⁵⁰ According to the delegate, an agreement had been made with MAG in which BANACOL allowed Manuel to use the car for a period of 4 months, after which MAG would supply the car. Eight months had passed, so BANACOL had already done more than it was supposed to do.

responsibility as head of the project. The essence of this small-talk is that favouritism or some form of cooptation may arise when the loan is disbursed.

Apart of these difficulties some new information contributes to my understanding of the impasse. As I learn through Doris (a 55-year-old lady with a wide array of relations outside Yesenia), the National Bank's credit expert for the Province of Limon is trying to obstruct the loan SAPY will receive through BANCOOP. According to Doris this character - a member of Unidad and not on good terms with members of SAPY - contends some members of SAPY (10 out of 31) have not yet cancelled their debts with the National Bank. Hence, he believes, these members will probably use BANCOOP's loan to finish paying off what they owe the National Bank instead of utilizing it for the rehabilitation of their plantains. Granting SAPY a loan, he argues, would not be fair towards Unidad-devoted farmers.

A week after the Vice-Minister's ultimatum additional problems emerge: the local office of IDA at Bribri has not send the paperwork required for the signing of the collateral to IDA's regional headquarters in Bataan. The reason, it seems, is that the office in Bribri has been waiting for all of SAPY's members to furnish the ID-card numbers of their spouses⁵¹. Javier (the wealthiest member of the association) had not yet showed his wife's ID-number. So now gossip had it that Javier is resisting on purpose, and with good reason: Javier has an export license and he will probably end up a winner in case SAPY is not granted the loan⁵². Ramiro and Bartolo had gone mad at IDA's staff since they felt further delays at this stage would be fatal to SAPY. Hence they had more-or-less commanded that all paperwork be send to Bataan immediately, regardless of the fact Javier had not complied with the official guidelines⁵³.

On the 27th of September Bartolo, Ramiro, Enrique, Miguel (both members of the Board of Directors of SAPY) and myself drive to Guapiles to negotiate the contract with BANACOL. Since the multinational's legal department is still working on the ammendments the contract itself is not signed on this occasion. However, some crucial "bottlenecks" are discussed. First of all, it is confirmed that BANACOL will sign the "letter of intention" needed for obtaining the collateral. We also discuss the likelihood of SAPY's members fulfilling all technical requirements stated in the quality manual of the multinational, since

⁵¹ This measure was taken to officialy protect women from their husbands in case these should walk away on them, re-marry or some other circumstance which would jeopardize the financial situation of the spouse.

⁵² Javier -an agricultural middleman- had been buying and exporting plantains, yams, squashes and cassava prior to SAPY's foundation. Although he joined the association and even let it use his packing-plant for a variety of complex reasons which cannot be further elaborated here, it was obvious that he was not really interested in the well-being of an organized farmer's association that actually reduced his profit margin.

⁵³ Javier would thus not be recorded as an official member of SAPY and would, hence, not be elligible for credit. This created a further problem since this meant Javier could then suspend the permission he had granted the association to make use of his packing-plant.

conformation to these requirements can only be achieved when the rehabilitation loan is granted. Arturo understands the vicious circle in which SAPY is trapped and suggests to "wait-and-see" until credit is awarded. He also corroborates that BANACOL will provide fertilizers, nematicides and herbicides at factory cost since this is "a service of the company". Transport of these inputs will also be taken care of by BANACOL and cost SAPY nothing. A problem which is left unresolved concerns SAPY's working capital (which, as Ramiro put to the fore during the meeting, is needed to solve some internal problems of the association such as payment arrears to its members). The association's original working capital had been supplied by BANACOL in the form of credit. The whole sum, however, had been subtracted from SAPY's current account with BANACOL only two weeks ago -probably because there were rumours that SAPY was heading for bankruptcy and would therefore not be able to pay back. Arturo promised to investigate the matter, but everybody seemed to be pessimistic about it since all had to be checked with the accountancy department of the multinational -which can veto Arturo's decisions.

After the meeting we leave Ramiro behind with Arturo; both will drive to San Jose. The rest of us drive back to Yesenia. On the way Bartolo asks to stop shortly at MAG's regional headquarters in Siquirres to see if there is any message for him. We make a stop there and let Bartolo out of the car and into the building. Two minutes later I cannot believe my eyes when I see Bartolo coming out, dancing. As he approaches the car, he frantically waves with a letter he carries in his hand. Finally, he announces in a loud voice:

"We won! We won! Imagine, they've fired Manuel and given the project to me! It's all in here! [signaling the letter]..."

Laughing, he makes the observation that, in the end, SAPY did not even have to write a letter of complaint to MAG. Enrique and Miguel are also very cheerful, and we proceed our trip to Yesenia making plans about the future of the association now that Manuel is gone...

Just as we are about to enter Yesenia we run into Manuel, who is on his way back to Cahuita. Making some signs with his lights he makes us stop. Indicating he wants to speak to me, I get out of the car alone. Manuel asks whether we have any news from the headquarters, and I have to lie to him. Probably sensing I know more than he does, Manuel says:..

"Look, I know I'll probably be fired. That's the way it's done at MAG: they tell you only one day or two in advance that you have to leave elsewhere. But listen: I know the true motive behind all of Bartolo's manipulations. All he wants is the car. But I'm going to ask him [Felipe] to go and ask farmers the truth about Bartolo..."

11. HIDDEN DETAILS, NEW PERSPECTIVES

I meet Felipe again at a workshop on soils at the beginning of October. Talking about SAPY he tries to make clear to me that the delay in the signing of the collateral has nothing to do with political persecution. Rather, he explains IDA's statutes do not officially allow the granting of collaterals covering more than 6% of the institution's working capital. Since this amount has already been greatly exceeded, SAPY needs to wait until some financial room is found at IDA. Although,

I do not have the chance to confirm Felipe's story, his account nevertheless points at a dilemma. Either Bartolo has been using the issue of the political persecusion to forward his own interests, or there exist institutional contradictions that have their roots in the particular situations in which a specific institutional course of action is championed.

This last alternative gains force two weeks later as I return to Yesenia from a holiday. The first person I visit is Ramiro, whom I expect to be aware of the 6% clause. But he does not know, and neither does Bartolo when I call on him a little later. Instead, new barriers seem to have surfaced. This time a letter from IDA's General Manager arrived in which both IDA and BANCOOP require SAPY to present a profile of its intended activities as a condition for the signing of the collateral. This document has already been given to IDA a year ago, but somehow it apparently got lost. Ramiro is also unable to find his copy and, to make matters worse, Manuel is in possession of the original. Also, BANCOOP is asking for figures on all inputs needed to sow one hectare in plantain (even though BANCOOP has a whole team of experts constantly producing cost-benefit figures for all sorts of crops!). On top of this, both institutions (and MAG) are demanding that SAPY's accountancy be up to date by the time credit is made available.

One night later that week an unexpected incident changes my outlook over the events I have so carefully been registrating the last months. I am at Ramiro's place together with Bartolo when a car stops in front of the house. Ramiro's five-year-old son runs out the house to see who it is. He comes back announcing that a very rich man wants to talk to Bartolo. Pretending I want to go home myself, I accompany Bartolo to the road to satisfy my curiosity. There, a well dressed man accompanied by two acquaintances of mine and a chauffeur sits waiting in a luxurious car. Seeing Bartolo and me approaching, the "rich man" gets out of the car, shakes our hands and introduces himself as Mr. Caniggia, Presidential Delegate for the Limón Province. Discretely, I walk towards the other people in the car and leave Bartolo behind to talk with the Delegate. This only takes five minutes or so, after which the hand-shaking procedure is repeated and the party leaves.

Bartolo looks cheerful, yet when I ask him about the motive of the Delegate's visit he takes on a very reserved and unfamiliar attitude towards me. Wanting to know the story, I propose we go to Cahuita to have dinner. Once there, sitting behind a couple of beers, we gossip about all sorts of things. Slowly, the conversation turns towards ourselves: about our problems, about our lives, about our illusions. Suddenly, Bartolo changes the subject and makes a confidential statement:

"Gerardo, I think you ought to know a number of things. I know this may surprise you, but I belong to Unidad..."

He pauses and looks at me straight in the eyes, as if trying to capture a a sign of approval or objection. But I simply have to laugh. He goes on:

"Yes... It's not to screw the others [referring to SAPY's members who despise Unidad], believe me... I became calderonista just before the elections, just for fun [nomás por pura carajada]. It's because I signed a document in which I promised to back the regional delegate should Unidad win the elections... And now... Really, this has helped me a great deal recently..."

Bartolo then goes on explaining that without the Party's support he may as well not have been put at the head of the plantain project. He mentions that both Felipe and the Presidential Delegate of Limon Province are now backing him, and thus indirectly SAPY. For instance, tonight the Delegate suggested there was a possibility for SAPY to obtain a permit for a trasiego de venta⁵⁴ in order to export plantains to Nicaragua. This would indeed be of great help to SAPY: all plantains that did not conform to U.S. export-quality standards had to be sold for a ludicrous price to Nicaraguan transport entrepreneurs holding an export license. According to Bartolo, the Delegate had also promised to send ICE (the Costa Rican Electricity Company) to Yesenia to install a telephone in Bartolo's office⁵⁵. One more affair Bartolo would probably achieve through Felipe and the Presidential Delegate was the procurement of the Municipality's bulldozer and ballast equipment through the PROBASA program⁵⁶. These could be put to use to finish building much-needed roads leading to the plots of SAPY's members, and which would make it possible to pick up boxes of plantain priorly packed at mini-packing plants on farmers' fields.

I leave Yesenia to come back ten days later. On the way back I meet Salvador (President of SAPY) who is just returning from San Carlos in the North of Costa Rica, visiting relatives and harvesting half a hectare of yams which he owns there. He tells me both he and Ramiro had held a sit-in (planton) last week at the Head Office of IDA in San Jose. After two days of waiting they succeeded in committing the General Manager to their cause, and both left with the conviction that the collateral would be signed in a matter of days. According to Salvador, the General Manager had even talked about BANCOOP willing to extend the loan to 24,000,000 colones (roughly U.S. \$240,000), thus providing in both a rehabilitation loan (U.S. \$140,000) and credit for sowing idle patches of associates' land in plantain.

Indeed by the 7th of November there was word that the collateral had finally been signed by IDA. Asking Bartolo why the signing of the collateral had come about after all, he tells me Felipe turned out to be a close friend of Walter -who just took over as Executive President of IDA at national level⁵⁷. As a sign of friendship to Felipe, Walter had cleared the collateral barely two days after taking office. Ramiro, however, has another version of things and is angry at Bartolo. Contrary to the latter's account, Ramiro contends the collateral has

⁵⁴ Such a trasiego is a centralamerican agreement on trade similar to that existing between EC-countries.

⁵⁵ This would be a great privilege: the only telephone available in the area was that of Bribri some 15 kilometers away, which catered for nearly 13,000 people! Going to Bribri, waiting to make a phone call and going back to Yesenia would usually take half a day.

⁵⁶ The PROBASA program makes it possible to use machines owned by the Ministry of Public Works and Transport (MOPT) which are under the supervision of different municipalities (or Provinces) and utilize these for infrastructural community work. The program is backed (and paid for) by MAG.

⁵⁷ The former Executive President of IDA replaced the Minister of Labour when the last quit after a conflict with President Calderón over IMF-imposed policies.

not yet been granted. Some paperwork seems to be missing and, when everything is found, all should first go through "Contraloría" (the auditors of IDA). In a desperate way, he then comments Bartolo made him lose face in a bad manner. The first thing Ramiro did after Bartolo had informed him about the signing of the collateral was to pay an immediate visit to BANACOL in San Jose in order to sign the contract. The company had then phoned BANCOOP to ask if credit for SAPY was now cleared, but the answer was negative. Ramiro on Bartolo:

"Gerardo, it really is not very nice to be there doing business with a serious company and then feel like a carajillo (little kid). He's [Bartolo] slowly getting on my nerves... He's making up things and only makes me lose my time!"

As a consequence of the uncertainty concerning the collateral Felipe decides to call for a meeting on the 14th of November between SAPY's Board of Directors, Felipe, Víctor, Juan (Regional Director of IDA) and people from the Bank. According to Venancio (who comes to Yesenia to bring the news of the intended meeting) all problems pertaining to the collateral could be solved quite easily on that day. However, he makes it very clear that an up-to-date accountancy of SAPY will be the crucial factor. This poses a serious problem. Apparently, Felipe and Venancio are at least a little suspicious about SAPY's financial affairs. Indeed, as I hear now that Ramiro's cousin is doing the accountancy⁵⁸, the first three shipments of plantain left a net benefit of some U.S. \$4,000. Aware of the problem at hand, Bartolo suggests to "massage" the remaining invoices in order to finish "even" because SAPY presently has not a penny left at the bank. Ramiro has even hinted SAPY can better manipulate the invoices and try to pretend a net loss⁵⁹.

The issue of the accountancy, however, is finally not raised. Nor is the planned meeting between all parties concerned held. As it appears, Felipe (through Walter) again inquired about the collateral, this time with success. On the 15th of November SAPY's Board of Directors and Bartolo go to IDA's Head Office in San Jose where they have an appointment with the institution's General Manager who finally gives his affidavit and sends the party downstairs to meet the subordinates that have to sign the collateral. Once there, a last obstacle has still to be surpassed. As Salvador told me:

"We arrived downstairs for the signature, and the one responsible for this told us out of the blue that that was not possible, that he couldn't sign the collateral. So we all went upstairs again to see the Manager but he had already left. Imagine! They're all a bunch of corrupt freaks wanting a piece of the cake. Of course, they already knew they were signing a document worth twenty-four million..."

⁵⁸ Ramiro had waited until this cousin finished her professional exams to start with the accountancy. Against everybody's advice Ramiro gave her the job because his mother was living in San José with his cousin's mother (and at her expenses).

⁵⁹ The reason money is missing is due to a number of intricacies whose complexities cannot be spelled out here, but will form part of a subsequent paper on the internal organization of SAPY.

The party did not give way and just waited until IDA's General Manager returned that same day. After going through the whole plot once again the collateral was finally signed. As I learn later, IDA's official standpoint concerning all past delays in signing the collateral was the problematic legal condition of the plots of some of SAPY's members. These plots had not yet been regularized (that is, their owners had no legal title to their properties). IDA maintained that it was very difficult to grant such a big loan to such a small number of people, since only 14 members actually had legal titles (cartas de adjudicacion). The solution (as proposed by IDA's General Manager) to this problem lay in finding some additional 3 to 4 members with legalized properties willing to join SAPY. Promising to do his best, Bartolo then tried to persuade Rufino, Mario, Doris and Fabio (the first two were members of Unidad) to participate in the project. When I left Costa Rica in December, three of them had already been convinced⁶⁰.

12. EPILOGUE: UNEXPECTED OUTCOMES

The irony of the case narrated above is that when I pay my last visit to Yesenia on the 29th-30th of November no contract has yet been signed with BANACOL. This seems puzzling, since all necessary ingredients are present: the collateral has finally been signed and the money is "at the counter", ready to be transferred to SAPY at any moment. Also, the amendments to the contract with BANACOL have already been effectuated and approved by both parties.

According to Ramiro and Bartolo, the reason for this is that Abraham, a superintendent from BANDECO, had come to Yesenia with a more profitable offer to buy export-quality plantains: U.S. \$8.75 per box (instead of U.S. \$7.50 offered by BANACOL in the new contract). Abraham also proposed that the CAT (14.5% of the total value) be left to SAPY. Since the association was indeed very interested BANACOL was made to wait. Amazed by this decision because I expected Ramiro would keep loyal to Arturo and BANACOL, I ask him for an explanation. He reasoned:

"I went to talk about it with Arturo the other day! I explained the situation and he replied he couldn't offer anything better because in Colombia they were paying something like five dollars sixty [per box of plantains]. So I said to him: good, so why are you trying to do business here in Costa Rica? You're loosing with this deal! He responded it wasn't like that, that the whole thing had to do with the agreement he had with Jose María [former Minister of Agriculture]."

Making use of the break Arturo gives him Ramiro decides BANDECO's offer is so good it doesn't make sense to go on with BANACOL. Curiously, none of SAPY's members had been involved in BANDECO's initiative. Apparently it had all started when Fernando (a Black

⁶⁰ These new members will not be given any credit at all. They will only be offered SAPY's new facilities (cheaper inputs, technical assistance). For those "old" members without legal property-title access to credit is made possible as follows: the total loan is first accorded officially to SAPY. Then, and since SAPY is an organization with juridical status, the credit can be further allocated on the basis of individual loans to its members.

absentee landlord from Limón owning some 25 hectares of plantains in Yesenia) had proposed Abraham -an old-time friend of Fernando- to initiate business with export-quality plantains he and two of his associates could deliver. Abraham agreed to go and visit Yesenia to inspect the quality of their plantains. Once in Yesenia, though, Abraham was impressed by SAPY's potential and made an offer not to Fernando, but to SAPY. As Ramiro put it:

"Abraham said he'd better sign a contract with SAPY yesterday than today..."

The reason Fernando was side-stepped was that BANDECO can only buy from formal associations, not private parties. Fernando was also offered to join forces with SAPY, but this posed a problem: Fernando - who does want to join SAPY- had already promised his associates and long-time business partners that they would be a part of the deal. The problem with Fernando's friends, however, is that their plots are situated in neighbouring Olivia and thus too distant from Yesenia. Since BANDECO is only interested in homogeneous blocks of plantain for effective aerial spraying against sigatoka, the issue of Fernando's friends joining SAPY is out of the question.

13. CONCLUSION

In this report I have presented a detailed account of an intervention situation involving a number of Costa Rican agricultural bureaucracies as well as -though to a lesser degree- a banana multinational in the creation and transformation of a farmer organization. I have focused upon the practices engendered by such an intervention, and tried to show how the outcome of this process was given shape at the local level by highlighting the interfaces between all parties concerned.

Starting with an actor-oriented framework of analysis, the report has shown that intervention is not a linear process in which people are seen as passive reactors, not actors. Rather, the report demonstrates that intervention is a complex process full of contradictions which has its own social life. Intervention seems not to follow the rules of some kind of "logical order". On the contrary, intervention itself is a social construction constituted by the interplay of different sets of interests.

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