

# The banana split

**Aim** - To introduce the banana chain; what happens to a banana before it reaches the consumer; and to introduce the reality of 'who gets what' in the chain.

**Suitability** - A minimum of 6 players of all ages. Adjust the debriefing as appropriate.

**You will need** - Nothing, although you may like to use some bananas or pennies as props.

## HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

Tell the group that you are about to play a game that traces the path of the banana as it is exported from its plantation in Latin America to their fruit bowl.

Divide the group up into 5 groups that represent links in the chain. You can do this by asking the group who they think are the first people to handle a banana in the supply chain. Whoever says 'worker' chooses other 'workers' to join them.

Follow the same process to fill the roles of the plantation owner, shipper, importer/wholesaler/ripenener and retailer.

Space the groups out. Give the groups a few minutes to imagine what work their role involves.

Get the groups to imagine that a banana costs 30p. How much of the 30p should they get? Ask them to spend a couple of minutes discussing this, and preparing

arguments why. The groups should think about all the jobs/work that they do and resources they use in the banana chain.

Ask each group to present their arguments for the amount they have decided and why. The facilitator should ensure that key points for each role are included.

**Second Round:** Inevitably the total from all the groups will be more than 30p. They then need to renegotiate. Put one person from each group in a straight line so that they negotiate with the player next to them as they probably would in real life.

Now reveal the true breakdown of who gets what from the final price of a Latin American banana. You can either cut up a banana or give the supermarket 30 pennies - they would give keep their share and pass the rest to the importer, who then keeps their share and passes the rest to the shipper and so on.

(Adapted from a game initially published by Christian Aid)



breakdown is fairly accurate, but is obviously simplified for the game. Each banana exporting country will have a slightly different breakdown. There is also a difference in the way profits are distributed from bananas exported from small farms and large plantations. People often ask about the breakdown for a Fairtrade banana. This game is about 'conventional' bananas - the way most bananas

are produced, and the issue of Fairtrade is best dealt with later on in a workshop as the debate can get bogged down about the specifics of Fairtrade. Another issue is that the amount received by a Fairtrade banana farmer varies from country to country, as the price is determined for each country's specific circumstance. The price paid means that farmers and workers receive a 'living wage' - in other words a wage that pays for them to shelter, feed, educate their family and have a small amount left over for discretionary expenditure.

As a group of Fairtrade workers or small farmers, they are also paid a 'social premium' which the group themselves determine how they will spend this: it could be to increase wages, community development projects, to improve production practices or environmental concerns.

**Suggestions for discussion:**

What does the group think?

Who benefits most/least? Is it a fair situation?

Why is the distribution of income as it is?

Who has power and why?

What could be done to improve the situation?

What role can consumers play?

Would you be prepared to pay more for your bananas if you knew workers and farmers got a price that would enable them to meet their basic needs?

Are participants aware of similar situations in Britain - what about the use of gang workers (migrant labour) in East Anglia?

**Key ideas:**

We are connected to people around the world through the things we consume.

Many products in our shops are made from raw materials imported from the South.

Many plantation workers do not earn enough to meet their basic needs: food, shelter, clothes, medicine and schooling.

Fairtrade labeling has been introduced so that consumers can guarantee that producers get a fair deal for their work.

## Banana Split Role Descriptions

These are only rough ideas and not comprehensive notes!!

These can be used by the facilitator to ensure the different roles of the banana chain actors are clear to the participants, and what sort of things these actors need to be worrying about, what their job entails. Please note that the information below is not comprehensive, but rather to give some ideas - if you have comments please let us know.

We use 5 main actors of the banana chain (This is a slightly simplified version of the real world, but is appropriate for the purpose of this game).

### The five actors are...

#### Banana Worker - the Banana Caretakers!

- 12-14 hours/day of hard physical labour in hot conditions
- Selecting the best bananas
- Washing bananas - hands in water all day
- Cutting bananas - carrying heavy loads of bananas on your back
- Applying fertilisers and pesticides - can lead to health risks such as cancer, sterility, birth deformations in offspring.
- Pesticides are also sprayed from planes over schools and homes
- You have to worry about having enough to buy food, pay medical bills or to pay to send your children to school.
- Often discouraged or prevented from joining a trade union with other workers to ensure that your employer respects your rights, pays you properly and provides you with decent working and living conditions

#### Plantation Owner

- Plantation Running Costs: expensive pesticides, fuel for pesticide spraying airplanes, tools and machinery
- Cost of lawyers in case workers sue them for work accidents
- Waste: European Union Regulations demand a perfect, blemish free fruit which takes a lot of investment, and still a considerable part of your crop does not suit the high demands. So every harvest you lose some money on these lost bananas.
- Risk Factor: You bear the cost if the harvest is bad, or a hurricane or pest destroys your crop.
- Modernisation Investments. You need funds to invest in modernisation of your plantation in order for you to stay in business.
- Cost of Land. The longer a certain plantation is used for banana production, the more fertilisers it will need as the soil

#### Importer/Ripener

- Transportation: by truck from the European port to big ripening centres, and from there to the retailers.
- Contracts: The importer is liable for contracts both to the producers he buys from (promising to buy x amount per week) and to the retailers (promising to provide them x amount of bananas per week). They must honour these, even if they are let down by one end of the chain.
- License Fee. Importers pay licenses for the importation of their bananas into the EU and or UK.
- Big Offices/Admin. Importers "need" big, fancy office buildings for the administration and bureaucracy that their role involves.
- Ripening gas: Ethylene is used to ripen bananas

#### Shipper

- Ships: big cargo ships are very expensive to buy and maintain.
- Fuel: One load between Latin America and Europe may take up to 5 weeks.
- Insurance: in case a cargo is lost or damaged, for which they will be held responsible.
- Refrigeration. On board, the bananas are kept in big fridges to prevent them from ripening during the voyage, which would make them arrive at their destination "spoilt".
- Port Fees. These need to be paid to port authorities on either side of the voyage.

#### Supermarkets

- Staff: Supermarkets require a lot of staff.
- Running Costs: lighting, transport, designing of staff uniforms, carrier bags...
- Developing/buying new property to stay competitive supermarkets
- Risk. Supermarkets must not lose their image regarding the quality of their products. If the bananas are handled badly or arrive on the shelves over-ripe, they will lose customers on the long term.
- Image/Advertising. To attract and keep customers, supermarkets need to invest in advertising and image building.