

# Solidaridad



## Solidaridad wins Globoil award for sustainability

### Acceptance speech by Solidaridad Executive Director Nico Roozen

**Globoil annual conference**  
**New Delhi, India**  
**2 February 2017**

It is an honour and pleasure for me to address this high-level Globoil conference here in Delhi and to be invited to make a humble contribution on behalf of Solidaridad.

First a few words about Solidaridad.

Sometimes people ask me: Why is Solidaridad doing so well. How come the organization is growing so fast? And how does Solidaridad manage to engage with so many partners on so many issues, with real impact on the programmes?

I think there are two main reasons:

First, the proposition of Solidaridad is inspired by the concept of the 21st-century civil society organization. In essence, this means having a solution-oriented focus. It means not being just a 'watchdog', as many campaigning organisations prefer, just criticising everything that is going wrong from the sidelines. We as Solidaridad want to take the role of 'guide dog', aiming to guide society towards a more inclusive and sustainable future. To be more precise, for Solidaridad this means being a CSO looking for market-based solutions.

Markets are becoming legitimate channels for social and ecological change and are likely to be more efficient and effective than more traditional NGO approaches. But the challenge is that markets have to produce more desirable social and ecological outcomes through the interaction between good governance, corporate social and ecological responsibility and innovative civil society contributions.

Public-private partnerships will be increasingly important for leveraging the change we seek: market transformation.

Secondly, the success of Solidaridad is related to our new organizational structures. The process of transformation from a more traditional Western organization for development cooperation, into a network organization based on local vision, knowledge and expertise in all continents of the world.

Our world is changing into a multi-polar world, thus ending a long period of Western dominance. We can build on the aspirations of the dedicated people in India, Indonesia, Malaysia and China to create a more sustainable palm oil sector. With local teams, Solidaridad has the boots and the brain on the ground to walk

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the talk and organize the transformation in a strong partnership with governments, businesses and farmers. At the end, farmers have to make the difference.

On Palm Oil first I want to emphasise the economic importance of this crop. It is one of the most productive agricultural crops of the world generating much better income for the farmers in comparison to cash crops like cocoa and tea or vegetable oils like soy. It creates real opportunities for smallholder farmers to improve their incomes and move out of poverty. And for sure it contributes to the national economy. Palm being the cheapest vegetable oil in the world is well positioned to address the growing demand of consumers with minimum impact on the environment.

Having said this, the urgency for sustainable sector transformation can not be debated any longer. The most critical issues as we all know are the destruction of valuable forests, endangering biodiversity and conflicts with forest communities.

I want to clarify the position of Solidaridad towards two traditional NGO approaches up to now.

The first approach can be characterized as the blaming and shaming strategy. It has for sure raised awareness of society but has also generated polarisation mainly highlighting the problems without showing the business case for sustainability. Now it's time for finding common approaches and rewarding innovative solutions.

The second more traditional approach is about sustainability certification. To be honest, when I am critical on this issue, it will be self-criticism. Solidaridad has introduced in the last decades of 20th century the first fair trade labelling scheme for coffee and bananas. Solidaridad is also the co-founder of the UTZ Certified sustainability standard. It has also played a constructive role in the establishment of roundtables including RSPO for palm oil. We are proud of this history. But we are aware of the fact that future is about going beyond certification.

We can not certify farmers out of poverty. We can not stop deforestation with certification programmes covering a relatively small share of markets. Scale and speed are decisive for the future. So, we are entering the post-certification era. In this era, technology will drive change.

We will have to build communities of change. Solidaridad is stressing the importance of a convening process to bring stakeholders and different perspectives and interests together to define a common strategy.

It will be foreseeable that in the end game the Governments have to take the lead. We will have to move from voluntary to mandatory frameworks. Good Governance implies offering market sustainability frameworks and incentives. The first positive signals are already there in national initiatives like ISPO and MSPO.

For the sake of time, I would only elaborate on the promise of advances in technology for the sustainability agenda. The new technology will open up the science of farmers. Data generated by farmers will identify the best practices of sustainable agriculture and turn them into meaningful information to be shared amongst the neighbouring farmers. This will stimulate constructive dialogues based on peer reviews and will generate transformative knowledge.

This logic will replace the expensive auditors by reliable data stimulating continuous improvement. And honestly spoken, the budget of 4.5 billion USD actually spent on auditing under different sustainability

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schemes could be better used for real investment for sustainability-for example for including smallholders instead of excluding them as is the practice to date.

On the short-term Solidaridad will launch its own digital platform by the name of Solidaridad Sustainability Solutions. Building on our earlier experiences with the Rural Horizon ICT tool successfully supporting the sugar business in Brazil. Having a similar tool available for palm will revolutionise your sector. It would be great if we could join hands in this innovation.

We are walking the talk. You will see these slides shows the footprint of Solidaridad supporting mainly smallholder palm oil farmers across Asia. Over last two years, we have made significant breakthroughs in our engagement with Governments and industry. In saying that I refer to national initiatives in China, India, Indonesia and Malaysia to develop and adopt their own national sustainable palm oil framework. Two years ago I couldn't have imagined this dynamic which is so promising for the future.

The people who are contributing to this success are our boots and brains on the ground dedicated local staff, scientists, governments and partners. It feels already a natural partnership aiming for a more sustainable and competitive palm oil sector. Thanks for your friendship and commitment.

**Nico Roozen**  
**Solidaridad Executive Director**  
**New Delhi, 2 February 2017**