



Dear Colleague,

Recently, we decided to let people turn the tables on us. After years of assessing the sustainability of others, we asked 124 leading experts to assess us.

We created a feedback survey to ask tough questions and invite tough answers. We also promised to share the results, so a brief sample of what our peers and partners have to say about us is below.

Tough questions are timely given a current trend that is perplexing to many. Just as there was a cyclical move to standards-oriented solutions that buoyed certifications in the first decade or so of the century, there is now a move in the other direction. The reasons are many, but chief among them is perceived return on investment or ROI. Particularly for some in the business community, the relative costs of implementation have not aligned with their expectations of improved sustainability.

This is perhaps not surprising given the high expectations fueled by exuberance around the relatively new tools of standards and certifications. Seasoned development professionals and supply chain managers are a bit more sanguine, realizing the folly of expecting standards – that each invest on average a few million dollars a year globally – to resolve the sustainability issues that have remained intractable even with billions of dollars in annual investments by global development agencies.

So, do voluntary sustainability standards have a role to play? With Partners such as the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture and in collaboration with Wageningen University and ISEAL, COSA is investing in measuring the value a standard or certification provides compared to just having the key components such as training.

Feel free to contact us to learn more about this or any of the news items below that introduce new Partners and staff to COSA and outline notable advances on new Producer Organization assessment tools with a group of 30 contributing partner institutions.



With warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniele". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Daniele Giovannucci
President, COSA

What sustainability leaders say...

A combination of leaders from business, research, governmental and development agencies, academia, producer groups, and NGOs participated in our recent survey. This is a brief sample of what they had to say.

88% of leaders say, "COSA provides valuable work."

3 Top three suggestions for what we ought to focus on:

- The development of simplified tools for projects or supply chains
- Investment in the capacity of local institutions
- Distilling knowledge and publishing research

4 Of the four crops we were asked to research more, we are embarking on two:

- Horticulture (food crops)
- Cotton
- Soy and palm oil are as yet unfunded

Guiding Producer Organizations towards sustainability



The European Research Institute on Cooperative and Social Enterprises (EURICSE) and COSA launched a joint initiative to measure the key characteristics of effective Producer Organizations (POs).

The PO initiative has assembled a select group of international experts into an [Advisory Panel on the Sustainability Assessment of Producer Organizations](#). The Panel contains a cross section of stakeholders that represents traders, lenders, development agencies, researchers, businesses, and producer organizations.

“An important challenge threatening the livelihoods of smallholder farmers is the knowledge gap between trading relationships and farming practices. Producer organizations play a key role in filling this and other gaps that are vital for researchers to understand.”

The Advisory Panel will guide the formation of innovative measurement tools designed to assess factors affecting the sustainability of Producer Organizations. These tools will be available in simple and more sophisticated formats and can be used in combination with COSA's farmer survey to provide a more complete understanding of the social, economic and environmental factors affecting producers.

The COSA Partner network continues to grow...

Recent additions to [COSA's consortium of key institutions](#) include:



The **William Davidson Institute** (WDI), at the University of Michigan, pioneered the Base of the Pyramid initiative (C.K. Prahalad) that aligns business-oriented incentives for growth, innovation, and profits with the development community's efforts to create a more inclusive capitalism for the world's poorest. WDI is a global leader in this market-based approach to poverty alleviation and its researchers are collaborating with COSA on indicators and approaches for agricultural assessments of relatively poor producers. Together we are mutually adding new dimensions to our assessment work.



The **International Institute of Tropical Agriculture** (IITA) is one of the Consortium of International Agricultural Research Centers (CGIAR) that anchors a community of 16 major donors and dozens of Advanced Research Institutes. They are a leading research partner for solutions to hunger, malnutrition, and poverty in dozens of countries around the world, particularly in Africa. The COSA partnership with IITA initially focuses on advancing sustainability research methods in food crops and coffee. Together we are building capacity in local institutions to conduct multi-dimensional impact assessments.

The COSA Team

COSA welcomes...

Louise Salinas, Operations Manager

Louise was previously a senior manager at an international nonprofit organization responsible for its multi-country projects and many volunteers. Her decades of diverse management experience are a valuable asset as she coordinates COSA's network of staff and all of its administrative operations. Having lived in a developing country and worked in the private sector, she brings to COSA a practical

understanding of sustainability from both the business and the socio-cultural perspectives.

Saurin Nanavati, Manager of Partner Relations and Learning

Saurin joins COSA from his previous role as Vice President of Root Capital where he led their global development programs to prepare producer groups and enterprises for growth, financing and participation in supply chains. He has managed international development programs across 15 countries and brings a welcome ground-level experience that spans three continents. Saurin also leads the multi-stakeholder effort of more than 30 institutions developing two new tools for assessing producer organizations.

[View the latest career opportunities at COSA.](http://www.thecosa.org)

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