



## International seminar on social LCA

Agropolis International – Louis Malassis amphitheatre  
Montpellier (France) – May, 5-6, 2011

### Opening speech

Robert Habib  
Director of Persyst Department - CIRAD (France)

The Life cycle analysis concepts and tools have recently been introduced in the vocabulary of the agri-food sector who wish to measure their "sustainability". LCA reigned without sharing on the world of the assessment of environmental impacts. The debate is regularly open on the tool itself and its limitations (uncertainties) on the exploitation of the results coming out. Soon after being introduced the LCA concept have shown to be rather incomplete. Indeed, we can no longer limit sustainability to the only measures of impacts on the environment. It must also assess the economic and social impacts of any economic activity.

Currently, these are inventories of type Social responsibility of Industry or business that are occupying the methodological vacuum of the social LCA. At the risk of being simplistic, it is in this type of study to check whether the inspected company meets international standards. There are two main limitations to the use of such technique. The first is almost moral. The reference to standards, often prepared by the North and imposed on the South seems to be inherently little adapted to all situations, and based on a very Western value system. The second limit is conceptual. Indeed, the investigation doesn't give information on the actual effects of productive activities in the society. Such information should include actual impacts, such as ability to control his life, freedom of expression, decision, autonomy, etc.

Whatever be the values defended, it remains that it is difficult if not impossible until now, to evaluate actual impacts. Processes are anything but natural. If one knows, what should become the fate of one kg of nitrogen spread at the foot of a banana tree, it is unable to tell the real impact the work of a child of 14 years in planting or packaging station will have. Because the impact depends on a multitude of indicators whose respective weights are unknown but also intimately linked to the local context (the region of production), national (the country to develop laws, rules, etc.) and international (if products are exported). But the issue is. Doing nothing in the years ahead is not an option, the risk is to continue to allow to develop Social Washing, the eco-social version of the well known Green Washing. The ambition is really strong and the way to go really long and difficult, that is why, I am pleased to see you so many come at this conference. Thank you to all for coming.

Thank you for your attention.