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A Partnership for Biodiversity: Chiquita's Nature and Community Project in Costa Rica

The rapid depletion of our planet's biodiversity is one of the great challenges facing humanity. As with other global issues, an effective and lasting solution only appears possible if the resources of governments and international institutions are joined to the energy of citizens and the private sector.

In 2003, Chiquita commenced work on a pilot project in the Sarapiquí region of Costa Rica, which aims to protect biodiversity with the support of communities, farmers, authorities and scientists. The GTZ, the Swiss retailer Migros and Chiquita have funded the project, which is based on the Rainforest Alliance's concepts of sustainable tropical agriculture.

The project's activities include the protection of remaining forest on private properties, the establishment of biological corridors connecting forest areas, environmental education for local inhabitants, and the creation of small businesses linked to conservation and eco-tourism.

This pilot project has generated a method and a vision which can be applied on a much larger scale. The key concepts are:

- Private sector participation in funding and effective organization.
- Public sector funding and expertise
- Local farmers provide land for reforestation and commit to conservation.
- Scientific guidance and impact monitoring
- Local community participation and benefits
- National and local authority support.

The lessons that emerge from this work are clear:

- Partnerships create a high level of energy, commitment and resources
- The voluntary participation of farmers and land users is essential
- The main task is to change attitudes: To establish the value of biodiversity and natural environments in the minds of the local community.
- In tropical regions, such collaborative efforts can achieve substantial progress in a short time.

The major question is this: What will it take to multiply such initiatives and create lasting benefits for endangered species and ecosystems?

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