

Implementation of certification

Evidence from literature and websites



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Introduction

Wageningen UR and partners are conducting a BOCI funded commodity programme entitled 'Enhancing sustainability of Dutch cocoa and coffee imports: Synergy between practice, policy, strategy and knowledge'. One of the components of this study was a quick scan of literature on the noteworthy and actual implementation methods of certification and their impact. This paper reports on outcomes of this quick scan.

Methodology

The literature search used Scopus (peer reviewed literature) and a review of internet sources (through Google) with a focus on the websites of standard setting bodies and organisations that implement certification activities/programmes. The search terms used were: Commodity, certification, standard, UTZ, Fair Trade, Rainforest Alliance, 4C, implementation, method, approach, mechanism, plan, programme, project, plan. The references selected and reviewed are provided at the end of this document.

Results

Information found in the literature found through scopus and a Google search did not result in much concrete information on exactly how certification has been implemented. When information was found in the first place, the literature did not mention more detail than 'assist producers/processors to obtain certification' (Forumsec, 2010), 'training small producers to qualify for quality standards' (Hivos Alliance, 2011) and 'undertaking an in-depth assessment to evaluate the status of the FNGOs and the networks in relation to fair trade standards

and draft an action plan that enables them to comply with these standards if needed' (SANE project, 2007).

Information on certification approaches indicated that the two most common routes are 'group certification' and 'individual certification' (PEFC, 2012, UTZ website) and that guidelines and series of planned actions need to be carried out to comply with standards' requirements (PACT, 2009). Also, the literature mentions 'creating awareness and support training for farmers small processors' (MARD and EDE, 2009), providing materials and tools for compliance with codes of conduct (DEF, 2009) and 'support the production of sustainable coffees [...] mainly through advisory services' (TCB and TCA, 2012). The search of websites of standard setting bodies and implementers of certification programmes, indicated that Rainforest Alliance organizes training workshops and diagnostic visits, provide training material and an online training platform (RA, 2012). The UTZ Certified website contains resources on UTZ implementation on their training centre webpage (UTZ, 2012).

The literature can be divided into that which covers:

1. Creating awareness about certification
2. Sets action plans and guidelines for farmers to obtain certification
3. Provides materials and tools for compliance with codes of conduct
4. Assist farmers / processors / producer organizations to obtain certification (e.g. through training / advisory services, technical assistance)
5. Organization of cooperatives/producer groups.

Very little detail was found in literature about how the programmes and projects are implemented. The exceptions concerning coffee and cocoa projects:

1. A DE Foundation coffee project in Brazil described that they train 250 farmers through Farmer Field Schools (FFS) and they also describe in detail how many farmers have obtained certification (120) and why 47 farmers did not maintain certification (unsatisfactory prices and premiums). (DEF, 2010)
2. Two DE Foundation coffee projects in Vietnam describes that they implemented FFS (in which 40 key farmers had a role) to train 800 producers in Gia Lai, of which 564 farmers opted for UTZ certification (EDE, 2009). In Tam Lan, 150 farmers were trained through FFS and obtained UTZ certification (Kuit, 2006).
3. A news post on the Solidaridad website describing the implementation of FFS in training 15000 cocoa farmers in Ghana (Solidaridad, 2012)
4. A news post on the H.R. Neumann Stiftung website on sustainable cocoa production in Ivory Coast. 30 FFS and 64 demonstration plots to train 1800 farmers in GAPs and RA certification (HRN, 2009).

Even though these examples show more detail, still often it is not stated how exactly FFS are implemented (by whom the FFS are trained/guided, how often they come together, how large are the groups, etc.

A body of literature discusses the implementation methods used in certification and its impacts also provides insights into the impacts of certification. There has been a focus on the development of indicators to define sustainability and key criteria and indicators (Foster 2010); evidence and description (Hicks 2007; Perez-Aleman 2008; Gallup 2004) of outcomes and impact mostly on basis of surveys (interviews of stakeholders) (Alemagi et al. 2011). However, none of the literature describes the methods on how to measure impact. What is mentioned is the problem of attribution and causality, although spin-offs are described, without describing causal relationships. The lack of information from certification schemes and ecolabels to substantiate their claims is iterated (Amstel-van Saane 2007). The most common indicator of impact is in the use of production yields (before and after certification) and farmer incomes (using different measures). Studies also focused on strategies of implementing sustainability criteria and mention the importance of contextual factors:

- Involvement of stakeholders in definition and implementation of standards will increase its potential effectiveness. Institutionally defined participation of stakeholders does not always lead

to actual participation in decision making (Roberge *et al.* 2011).

- Legislation, especially related to forest management, is a crucial factor determining sustainable practices.
- Binding conditions for sustainability (social environmental) are management practices; capacity of local staff to implement new practices, and economic yield of changes in business practice (cost-benefits).

Several authors express doubts about the trustworthiness of audits (Roberge et al 2011; Amstel-Saane 2007).

Conclusions and recommendations

Concrete information on how certification programmes, projects or initiatives are implemented in the field is very scarce in the public domain. Often, activities are mentioned in general ways (e.g. 'we provided training to farmers') without any specific data on how such training was set up, organized, who implemented, how many farmers were included in the (separate) training, fall out and success rates etc. For coffee and cocoa certification, more information was available, although not always containing a depth of detail that can be used to assess how these activities may have led to impacts (the theory of change or intervention logic), despite this being a requirement of ISEAL Alliance Credibility Principles¹, a set of core principles that underline the effective operation of voluntary standards systems. The ISEAL Alliance currently has 19 members, including many of the largest certification organisations.

In order to assess how programmes influence outcomes on farmer-level, we recommend that organizations that fund and implement certification initiatives make information available on exactly how such initiatives are implemented available in the public domain.

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¹ <http://www.isealliance.org/our-work/credibility-principles>

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