



For immediate release

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PRESS RELEASE

New publication

Certification for small-scale producers – weighing up the pros and cons

The trend for certifying agricultural products has gathered rapid momentum in recent decades, fuelled by the dual objective of providing consumer assurances on issues of sustainability, food safety and responsible sourcing, while improving market access for farmers. However, meeting certification requirements can be a burden for small-scale producers in ACP countries and the advantages may not be as clear as was generally thought. Smallholder farmers would do well to investigate the costs and real financial benefits before they commit to the certification process.

Small-scale farmers, certification schemes and private standards: Is there a business case? investigates the impact of certification on farmers producing coffee, cocoa, cotton, fruit and vegetables. This publication, commissioned by the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA), takes a detailed look at the effectiveness – or otherwise – of the many investments made by the private sector and donors to promote the uptake of certification by small-scale farmers.

Focusing on eight certification schemes, LEI Wageningen UR and Kuit Consultancy examine the net results of this approach for small-scale farmers and describe factors that certified producers should take into consideration. It also asks what steps could be taken to maximise benefits and minimise certification costs for smallholder farmers.

Coffee has dominated the certification sector from the outset, but evidence of a positive impact on small-scale farmers is limited. Producers taking part in certification schemes have obtained higher prices, but the increase in their income has been offset by greater production and control expenses. On the plus side, certified producers generally have more access to services such as training.

Lack of reliable information on costs for small-scale farmers and certificate-holders makes it difficult to assess the net benefit of certification programmes. But one feature to emerge strongly is that while certification is often presented as a valuable tool for small-scale producers, the considerable outlay can only be recovered by farmers producing above-average volumes. This finding is true for all commodities studied. As a result, some certification schemes may mainly benefit more affluent farmers, who have more land and

assets, are located closer to market outlets and are situated in favourable agro-ecological zones.

Donors would be well advised to compare the costs and benefits of certification programmes with the costs and benefits of other supply-chain interventions, such as contract-farming schemes, the study finds.

Looking to the future, there is a risk that as certification becomes the norm for some products, premium payments will decline. With certification becoming mainstream, schemes are likely to increase, rather than reduce requirements, in an effort to differentiate them from market competitors. Some have already added climate change requirements, and stipulations on gender may follow.

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Small-scale farmers, certification schemes and private standards: is there a business case?

By M Kuit & Y Waarts

CTA, 2014

Available and downloadable from: <http://publications.cta.int/en/publications/publication/1823>

(a French version will be available by the end of May 2015)

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