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“Solidarity in a competing world —
fair use of resources”

Adapted Institutional Environment and Sustainable Resource Access for Co-Developing Brazil Nut Value Chains in the Amazon?

MARCELO CUNHA

Freie Universitaet Berlin, Geography, Germany

Abstract

The potential of sustainable use and commercialisation of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) – as a means for forest dependent smallholders to make a living while contributing to biodiversity conservation – has not yet been fully harnessed in Brazil’s environmental agenda.

In the frame of inclusive sustainable rural development, key determinants of the access to natural resources and markets of Brazil nut (BN) value chain (VC) actors are analysed based on a bottom-up research approach to provide input for policy making. Within the Lower Amazon basin, Brazil, focus is laid on the Trombetas River Biological Reserve – a Protected Area (PA), which was established in 1979 in territories that have been traditionally occupied by ‘Afro-Brazilians’ for over a century. Established in 2012, the ‘Term of Compromise’ (‘ToC’, based on a Decree), and related limited institutional environment for gathering and marketing of BN is analysed, as is its purpose of overcoming conflicts concerning the access to BN and markets among traditional populations and the responsible branch of the country’s Ministry of Environment.

The central research question was: “How do rules regulating BN gathering and marketing formalised per ToC affect the position of BN gatherers vis-à-vis local buyers within the VC?”

Qualitative and quantitative data were collected from 2012–2014, including a survey with 185 households as well as key-informant interviews from national to community level. An analytical framework was developed for combining conceptual analysis with evidences as an input for co-developing BN VCs, which can be applied to other VCs elsewhere.

Findings indicate: (i) importance of sustainable BN and market access, given 13% of smallholders’ income; (ii) formal environmental rules (ToC – Clause 10) enabled the exclusion of external buyers, which led to local oligopsonies and cartel building within the PA while it institutionalised the dependency of BN gatherers from established buyers and limited their bargaining power as well as market outlets; (iii) self-sustaining inclusive BN VC development depends on ‘locally desired adaptation’ of the ToC combined with socioeconomic upgrading of the position of BN gatherers while enabling their participation in shaping formal institutions for democratic environmental governance.

Keywords: Amazonia, forest conservation, formal institutions, livelihood strategies, local markets, non-timber forest products, production networks, resource access, sustainable development, value chains