

**ORGANIC COFFEE PRODUCTION AND SUSTAINABLE
AGRICULTURE
(A SOCIO- ECOLOGICAL ANALYSIS)
A CASE STUDY IN LIMMUU KOSSAA DISTRICT**

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Background

Coffee is the main agricultural commodity of Ethiopia since long period. The last thirty years have experienced repeated falls in coffee price at the global market. This has affected the country's foreign exchange earnings in general and smallholder producers in particular. About 25% of the populations who directly or indirectly depend on coffee industry need to search for alternative means of being competitive.

The objective of the study is to explore the sustainability of organic coffee production scheme, as implemented in Oromiyaa. The study area is one of the 23 high coffee producing districts of Oromiyaa. This case study is conducted at Limmuu Koosaa District, Jimmaa Zone of Oromiyaa National Regional Government. The area is located at 1200 masl – 3100 masl. Eleven thousands four hundred ten households (11020 male and 390 female) i.e. a total population of about 57050 people mainly depend on coffee production.

The total area is estimated to 175495 ha - Highland (10%), mid-highland (65%) and lowland (25%). Average annual rainfall of the area is 1954.23mm. The total area covered by coffee plantation is 27476.16 ha. Plantation owned by State Plantation Enterprises comprises 16.4%. Areas under private commercial investors account for 6.8%. Average annual production of green bean in the area amounts to 81795.5 quintals. Small farmers produce 65.7%, investors 9% and State Plantation Enterprises 25.1%.

Three coffee producing sites were selected with their characteristic attributes relevant to organic coffee production, cooperative membership, non-organic coffee production and non-cooperative membership. The survey covered 69(3.6%) household sample elements from a population of 1900 households. The study utilized both primary and secondary data. The unit of analysis in the process of data collection is coffee producing households and producers cooperatives'. Sampling technique is two-stage sample design.

FINDINGS

Baabboo farmers are found to practice eco-regulation and biological/organic soil fertilization at a comparatively higher level than farmers at Ambuyyee and Walakkee Sonboo. Regarding cropping systems, such as having multi-purposes, the engagement of Baabboo farmers rated better than those of Ambuyyee and Walakkee Sonboo. Plant biodiversity and species abundance are enhanced or conserved in the area of organic production than in areas of non-organic production. As a result, resource management opportunities of the two systems of coffee productions, regarding biological diversity and species abundance, have

established a better performance at Baabboo than at Ambuyyee and Walakkee Sonboo. Accordingly, organic coffee production, as implemented at Baabboo, proved to conserve and utilize the natural resource base at a higher level than non-organic system of coffee production.

The study has uncovered significant differences between Baabboo and other sites on the state of financial autonomy farmers enjoy. The study disclosed organic coffee producers to be free of any fertilizer loan unlike the majority of non-organic producers. Financial assistance in the form of pre-payments for certification fee, though available to organic producers, did not negatively affect them. Additionally, the premium payments that organic producers capture from the sale of organic coffee improve their financial earnings and enhance their saving capacity. The capacity of generating extra income from both off-farm and on-farm activities of organic producers is enforced by the ability of the system to support the production of other crops and the intrinsic nature of the system to practice different systems of cropping. The higher income and savings obtained fosters the chance of involving in the generation of off-farm activities. These have encouraged the organic coffee producers to keep the standard and quantity of their supply. The cumulative effects of these performances enforce the economic viability of the system under study to qualify as a system of sustainable agricultural development.

The analysis of social performances indicated that the state of human resources, with respect to fulfilling training needs, is better achieved at Baabboo than in Ambuyyee and Walakkee Sonboo. However, the study uncovered a serious gap, particularly at Baabboo, with regard to trainings on issues of relevance to organics such as legal requirements, organic standards and quality management systems. Social justice and equity are observed in neither of the sample sites. Alienation of female family members from entitlement to property prevails in Baabboo as it does in non-organic producing sample sites. Organic production system at Baabboo could not make a “break-away” from the conventional way of social approach. It is suffering from not satisfying one of the crucial criteria of sustainability – social justice. This is a potential danger discovered in Baabboo, whose negative effect can crack the sustainability of the production system.

Weaknesses in the institutional performances of organic coffee production at Baabboo are one of the constraints brought to light by the study. Lack of transparency and absence of good governance manifested through lower popular participation and illegitimate leadership

of cooperatives are serious drawbacks. Corruption, dictatorial behaviour and absence of accountability of the leadership of the cooperatives have resulted to lack of confidence from the side of farmers on their own institution. This state of the institutional performance certainly hampers the sustainability of organic production at Baabboo. It is contrary to organic agricultural principle, fairness – fairness to the primary producers in every aspect.

Summary

Organic coffee production as a new approach of agricultural development in the area proved to perform well with respect to ecological and economic dimensions. The results of the ecological performances emanated from the common phenomenon prevailing in almost all coffee producing areas of the country. One can assume that the use of agrochemicals by our farmers in their coffee farms is at its lower level, eco-regulation is a cultural plant protection practice employed by poor farmers, and that farmers usually plant and keep trees in their farms for their immediate purposes. Though these practices have their own contributions to organic coffee production in the sample site, the merit of the differential impact produced at Baabboo in reality goes to the materialization of organic certification.

The existence of higher economic performance at Baabboo, in light of falling coffee price in other areas, can certainly be the merit of the specific production system. The impact of the economic performance is based on the fact that Baabboo coffee farmers have succeeded in obtaining organic certification for their coffee, a chance which opened access global organic and fair-trade coffee markets.

However, social and institutional dimensions, which base on conscious involvement of the community and individuals, are at their lowest levels. If a ‘break-away’ is not met in such sensitive involvements, the system can face a “break-down”. As a new undertaking, then, organic coffee production as implemented at Baabboo could be a bad example for the neighbourhoods. Ultimately, it could possibly result to a shuttering effect to the development of organic production at large in the area.

Conclusions

The core policy issues of organic agriculture in Ethiopia focus on income generation by exploiting competitive advantage through export promotion. In all respects, the market-led policy environment of the country is conducive for the promotion of organic agriculture,

opening the possibility for the involvement of the private sector. It is an opportunity for exploitation by coffee farmers and traders.

The opposite side of the scenario bears a challenge for the production system under consideration. The main challenge rests on the difficulty of compliance to the organic standards and legal requirements. The processes of inspection and certification dictate high level of quality management systems. Compliances to these conditions are necessary for a product and a farm to be organically certified. In this respect, implementation of the law to the advantage of smallholders is a challenge to be tackled. As a tool, though passing organic law is a positive measure, but the advantage to the promotion of organics lies on its wise implementation.

The sole objective of the conversion to organics in Ethiopia, in particular, is income generation and export promotion. It is also evident that environmental concern remains second to livelihood needs. Yet, the core value of organics remains to be achievement of ecologically sound production, without which all objectives fail to be accomplished. The policy environment should coil environmental sustainability, food security and self-reliance in the realm of income generation. Striking a balance in these regards is an agenda of serious consideration.

Under market-oriented economic policy, organic inspection and certification will obviously become a potentially profitable industry to the private sector. The technical 'know-how' and the provision of certification services are already in the hands of private organizations. This creates a risk to the export of certified organic products becoming a business colony dominated by large farmers and /or highly organized and favored groups. Legislative frameworks, which provide definitions, standards and accreditation to certifiers, are expected to provide equal and balanced opportunities to all involved.

Finally, successful promotion of organic agricultural development is no more than a dream in the absence of research and knowledge building. It is highly essential that government and non-government supports to organic agriculture focus on research and education. This calls a shift of capital investments from hard to soft technologies.