



Tropentag, October 5-7, 2011, Bonn

“Development on the margin”

Why Small Producers Do Not Participate in Organic Certified Agriculture? : The Case of Cocoa in the Brazilian and Peruvian Amazon

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Abstract

Today, it is widely believed that market tools, such as organic certification and/or other incentive payments can help improve the conditions of the global commons. For example, in the Amazon region, incentive payments are assumed to have the potential to positively impact forest conservation while also improving the social conditions of the people who provide these goods. This study aims to provide insights into smallholders' attitudes towards participation in organic certification schemes in the Brazilian and Peruvian Amazon. An analytical framework on the conditions affecting participation was built based on rational choice and collective action theories focusing mainly on individuals' rationality to cooperate. The analytical framework was then applied to colonist farmers on study sites along the Transamazon Highway in Pará state, Brazil and at the Federico Basadres Highway in Perú. Direct observation and unstructured interviews were used with informants stratified into three groups according to their participation status in organic certification: current participant, past participant and non-participant. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with local technicians to retrieve their perceptions about farmers' answers on certification. Preliminary results show that several economic and non-economic conditions affect smallholder participation, with an emphasis on availability of other local commercialisation opportunities better suited to conditions already met by smallholders; technological incompatibility between certification parameters and local capacities (further aggravated by economic stratification among producers); lack of trust in cooperatives (also related to wealth heterogeneity); and inflexibility regarding individual operations due to imposition of organic certification rules (rather than unwillingness to cooperate). Many of these challenges are related to: 1) The lack of a clear governance structure that supports smallholders' ability to make their own decisions on their livelihoods and 2) The lack of social organisations that target livelihood benefits for the entire social group. As a result, several farmers cannot afford to be certified. Overall, the Brazilian case showed that gender perspectives, wealth heterogeneity and expected benefits need to be better understood.

Keywords: Certification, collective action, conditions, governance, participation, rational choice