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Sustainability of Participatory Guarantee System of Organic Certification: A Perspective from Uganda

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Abstract

Organic products are credence goods, implying that determining their quality cannot be done either by observing or tasting only. Therefore, buyers of organic products require other means for assessing their quality. One of these means is certification. Certification can be third-party or participatory guarantee system. Third party certification is an export-oriented category, while participatory guarantee system is mainly applied in certification for the domestic market. Participatory guarantee system emerged as a silver bullet for integrating smallholder farmers into organic market, because it is much cheaper and bottom-up compared to the expensive and top-down approach of third party certification. However, its sustainability remains questionable. Based on secondary sources of information triangulated with phone interviews, the sustainability of the system was assessed. The findings show that the system is sustainable because of the growing demand for organic products in the domestic market, its learning process, stakeholder engagement and transparency-induced trust. However, it is compromised by opportunistic behaviours, low participation of group members and group weaknesses, over-dependence on supports from non-governmental organisations.

Keywords: Participatory guarantee system (PGS), sustainability, Uganda