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The Quinoa Value Chain in Colombia: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

The issue of global value chains is gaining increasing significance due to globalisation. The integration of countries of the South into the world market may lead to high economic growth for developing countries and reduce poverty and hunger. Quinoa becomes important in this context. Due to its high nutritional value and extraordinary characteristics, the plant can contribute to the eradication of hunger, malnutrition and poverty. In this sense the UN declares 2013 as “International Year of Quinoa”.

The changing consumer behaviour to healthy and natural food resulted in a “quinoa boom”. The traditional countries of quinoa cultivation, Peru and Bolivia, have become large producers. Market integration has led to significant economic benefits for farmers but also to adverse effects such as soil erosion by monocultures and sharply rising prices, due to shortage.

Colombia’s interest in quinoa for food security and income generation through exports is growing. However, multiple challenges need to be addressed in this initial stage. The study, based on nearly four months of empirical research with collaboration of CIAT and financial support of GIZ, explores the opportunities and obstacles for the quinoa value chain development in Colombia. Bottlenecks are the lack of public policy support, lack of machinery, equipment and infrastructure especially in the post-harvest and processing sector, lack of high quality seed material, low horizontal and vertical cooperation, fluctuating prices and unstable supply, lack of a national research agenda, climate change, and in particular low domestic demand. In addition organic farming practices and certification need to be promoted for entering export markets. Competitive advantages can be seen in already existing high degree of product differentiation and in the high soil fertility resulting in possible higher productivity, combined with two potential harvest seasons per year. Including quinoa in the national research and development programme would strengthen the chain performance and competitiveness. The results of the present research will inform public and private key stakeholders and decision makers to be convened in a national quinoa multi-stakeholder workshop shortly, with the aim to facilitate the development of chain upgrading strategies and a national research agenda.

Keywords: Colombia, market integration, Quinoa, smallholder, upgrading, value chain development