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

Ethical Certification and Sustainable Transformation of the Cocoa Value Chain: Insights from Ghana

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Abstract

This contribution explores the local and the governmental dynamics evoked by 3rd party ethical certification schemes in the global cocoa value chain through the lenses of a civic governance concept. It provides a comprehensive insight in the implementation processes and the outcomes of one project of UTZ certification in Ghana. The results shall inform the normative discussion on fair global food systems.

Increasing consumer awareness of serious grievances in the global cocoa value chain – like child labour, severe poverty and deforestation – led to a rising demand for fair and sustainable chocolate products. Additionally, the cocoa industry fears a future decline in cocoa production due to aging cocoa farmers and trees, and therefore is more concerned about the sustainability and the long term supply of cocoa. Hence, recently ethical certification schemes are introduced by the cocoa industry. However, being understood as a promising innovation for improved sustainability of the cocoa production and farmers’ livelihoods, the actual local outcomes still have to be assessed. Furthermore, in order to evaluate whether these interventions lead to more fairness in the global cocoa industry, we also need to consider the implications for the governance of the cocoa value chain and to reflect on the political scope of industry-led certification programmes.

In Ghana, the world’s second largest cocoa producer, four certification programmes are conducted: Organic, Fairtrade, Rainforest Alliance, and UTZ. Building on empirical data collected during fieldwork in Ghana in 2015, the study analyses one case of UTZ certification. The paper discusses effects at the institutional and at the local level. At the institutional level, a hybridisation of the sector governance caused by the implementation of certification projects can be observed. At the local level, we find immediate positive effects, particularly on the quality and quantity of cocoa beans. However, other findings reveal problematic developments, for instance, the creation of inequalities among the farmers, missing participation of the target groups in decision-making or an increasing lack of public capacity to regulate the sector. These tendencies should be addressed and analysed carefully before considering certification as the new panacea for a sustainable transformation of the cocoa sector.

Keywords: Certification, cocoa, Ghana, global value chains, governance, rural development