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“Filling gaps and removing traps  
for sustainable resource management”

## Options to Address Food Security on Sustainably Certified Farms in Food-insecure Countries

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### Abstract

Concerns regarding the environmental and social impacts of biomass production, including food security, are increasing. Companies in industrialised countries sourcing biomass in developing countries are increasingly interested, or pressured, to take responsibility and address sustainability issues in their international value chains. Voluntary sustainability certification schemes for agricultural commodities emerged as reaction to these concerns but food security is often not or not sufficiently addressed. Since many agricultural products imported by Europe are produced in food insecure countries, we aim to understand the relationship between sustainably certified production sites, the Human Right to adequate Food (RtF) and local food security and to identify pathways to address food security in sustainably certified agriculture.

The study is based on field research in Malaysia, Guatemala, Bolivia, Kenya and Zambia targeting sugar, palm oil, coffee and cotton produced by smallholders, medium-sized or large plantations. Five multi-stakeholder workshops and over 80 interviews with workers, farmers, plantation managers, community representatives, certification bodies, standard initiatives, NGOs, ministries, enterprises and scientists were conducted.

The certified plantations are engaged to improve the labour conditions of their workers and address their food security, but the large degree of seasonal work means also periods of food insecurity during phases of non-employment. The effects of plantations on food security of surrounding communities were mixed and depended on management, socio-economic context and historical development. The situation of certified smallholders ranges from being relatively wealthy, food secure to being desperately hungry and experiencing RtF violations despite selling to certified markets. Specific food security criteria for standards help to assess food security aspects for certified plantations and better-off smallholders, raise awareness and foster action to fully implement the RtF. In regions with very high food insecurity, the solution of many of the problems of extremely poor smallholders and their experienced RtF violations is often beyond the support that first purchasers can provide and outside the scope of most certification systems. Other parties along the value chain would need to pay premiums that enable living incomes for smallholders but additionally, governmental action and alternative development models outside agriculture for the extreme poor are needed.

**Keywords:** Biomass, certification, food security, plantation, right to food, smallholder, sustainability standards