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“Filling gaps and removing traps
for sustainable resource management”

The New EU Regulation on Cadmium in Chocolate: Impacts on the Colombian Cocoa Value Chain

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Abstract

For the first time, the EU cadmium regulation determines cadmium thresholds for cocoa-based-products, effective from January 2019 onwards. Latin America is particularly affected, since cadmium levels in soils are high and fine flavored cocoa is derived from this region. In Colombia, cocoa production has been considered as an alternative to coca production and a critical element of rural development for peace achievement in the post-conflict era. However, this alternative is at threat since around 50 % of the total cocoa exports of Colombia are shipped to Europe. This case study aims at understanding the effects of the new EU regulation on Colombian smallholders. Particularly: 1) What strategies have been developed or taken by the different actors along the cocoa export value chain to tackle the cadmium challenge? 2) How do information channels work and how well are producers and cocoa associations informed? To answer these questions, affected Colombian cocoa producers and exporters, were identified. Stakeholder analysis and semi-structured interviews were conducted and an innovative network mapping tool, the Net-Maps, was applied in combination with qualitative interviews. The preliminary results identify potential risks for stakeholders along the Colombian cocoa value chain derived from the new regulation. Many smallholders are still in the process of identifying cadmium levels in their farms, information flows are mainly dominated by exporting companies, smallholder producers benefit from memberships in cocoa associations, and mitigation strategies such as blending cocoa with different cadmium concentrations might not result very effective in the long-term. Finally, the cadmium regulation on cocoa seems to challenge the maintenance of peace in rural areas.

Keywords: Cadmium, chocolate, cocoa, Colombia, regulation, smallholders