



Tropentag, September 14-16, 2022, hybrid conference

“Can agroecological farming feed the world?
Farmers’ and academia’s views”

Building resilient value chains after the COVID-19 disruption: challenges for the coffee sector in Central America

INGRID FROMM

Bern University of Applied Sciences, School of Agricultural, Forest and Food Sciences (HAFL), Switzerland

Abstract

Coffee (*Coffea arabica* L.) is one of the most important global agricultural commodities. For many developing countries, coffee is the top agricultural export, accounting for a substantial part of the gross domestic product (GDP). In Central American countries, coffee is one of the top agricultural sectors. In El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua, coffee is the main agricultural export and second largest agricultural export in Guatemala and Costa Rica. In all countries, the coffee sector represents a main source of rural employment. The central question of this paper is how small-scale farmers in Central America can build resilience to cope with the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the extreme climatic events which affected the Central American region in 2020. The impact on small-scale farmers was analysed from two perspectives. First, the immediate impacts on coffee exports from Central America during the onset of the pandemic were studied. Second, price volatility and changes which affected farmers in the subsequent harvest were analyzed. Finally, options to build resilience were addressed, using the framework proposed by Béné et al. (2014), where resilience is defined as the capacity to absorb, adapt and/or transform to shocks or events, which are unexpected and have short or longer-term repercussions on the system. The analysis was conducted using secondary, qualitative data sourced from reports, expert panels, interviews, and newsletters published by Instituto Hondureño del Café (IHCAFE), Asociación Nacional del Café de Guatemala (Anacafé), Instituto del Café de Costa Rica (ICAFE), Consejo Salvadoreño del Café (CSC) and for information on Nicaragua, the reports from Latin American and Caribbean Network of Fairtrade Small Producers and Workers (CLAC) were consulted. During the first wave of the pandemic, the confinement measures did not influence the 2019–2020 coffee harvest, which was over when the first cases of COVID-19 were reported in the region. The analysis suggests that climate change impacts such as the hurricanes which hit the region had a more devastating effect. The coffee sector in Central America urgently needs to adopt strategies to help farmers build resilience to cope with climate change effects.

Keywords: Central America, climate-resilient value chains, coffee, COVID-19 impact