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Eudr and ghana’s cocoa value chain: its implication for smallholder farmer livelihoods and cocoa production

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Abstract

Deforestation driven by agricultural expansion remains a critical global challenge, with cocoa cultivation in West Africa identified as a major contributor. The research investigates how the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) may affect cocoa production and smallholder farmers in Ghana, a leading cocoa exporter. The study aims to assess stakeholders’ knowledge of the EUDR, its potential implications for smallholders, and the strategies being

implemented to ensure compliance. The research is academically significant as it situates the EUDR within debates on the Brussels Effect, global supply chain governance, and sustainability transitions, while practically addressing Ghana’s readiness for deforestation-free trade.

A qualitative case study design was adopted, combining in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with key actors across the cocoa value chain including government agencies, licensed buying companies, farmer cooperatives, CSOs and individual farmers. Data were thematically analysed to identify common patterns and diverging perspectives.

Findings show that while regulatory bodies and buying companies demonstrate high awareness of the EUDR, most smallholder farmers have limited knowledge of its requirements and implications. The study finds that although Ghana’s National Cocoa Traceability System (NCTS) and other readiness efforts have been accelerated by the EUDR, the regulation does not amount to a full Brussels Effect but rather reflects negotiated adaptation shaped by local agency. Importantly, the study highlights unintended risks such as potential farmer exclusion, land tenure conflicts, and possible shifts in deforestation pressures.

This research contributes to literature by bridging the gap between theoretical discussions of extraterritorial regulation and on-the-ground realities in cocoa-producing regions. It underscores the need for robust local support systems, fair trade practices, and inclusive policy design to protect vulnerable farmers. The findings have practical implications for policymakers, EU regulators, and industry actors seeking to balance global sustainability goals with local livelihoods and socio-economic development in Ghana’s cocoa sector.

Keywords: Brussels Effect, cocoa, deforestation, eUDR