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BOOKLET OF ABSTRACTS

The quest for quality of Ecuadorian cocoa: Certification and traceability

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ABSTRACT

There are two main global strategies applied by cocoa value chains actors, namely one based on volume (cocoa as a commodity) and another which privileges quality to obtain Premium prices. Quality of cocoa beans and its products is determined by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Intrinsic factors include the genotype, climatic conditions, soil, and agronomic management; external factors involve the post-harvest process (fermentation, drying, storage), roasting and transformation. Chocolate companies are increasingly demanding certified cocoa to add distinction and value to the final product. Third Party Certifications (TPC) include organic, fair trade, origin certification and, more generally, sustainability. These certifications facilitate i) CFA differentiation strategies and its positioning as a Premium quality product, and ii) the communication of industrial quality driven by external factors. Certification relies on the existence and correct performance of traceability systems. Nevertheless, small producers (the vast majority of Ecuadorian producers) lack access to financing for certification and traceability, resorting, in many cases, to external financing, even though certification does not guarantee sales at Premium prices. The few producer associations that export cocoa directly have gained access to market niches through TPC certifications, but most lack an internal control system to maintain certifications, and such priorities are not reflected in or supported by public policy. Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) constitute an alternative certification scheme to TPC. The management of the PGS involves approaches of good governance, gender equality, quality, healthy nutrition, ancestral knowledge, agro-ecosystems, ecosystem services and climate resilience. In parallel, the industry considers the dimensions of quality in detail: performance, properties, reliability, product conformity, durability, ease, aesthetics and perceived quality; through continuous improvement processes for quality and traceability standards. In the context of a study of the cocoa sector in Ecuador, which mobilised dozens of actors, we analysed the institutional and organisational conditions for the implementation of the various forms of certification in Ecuador, and we qualified their impact on the competitiveness of Ecuadorian production. The study produced an exhaustive review of the secondary documentation and collected data via face-to-face surveys. This follow-up work, explores questions on certification and traceability as a means to guarantee and communicate cocoa quality in the Ecuadorian context: What is needed to strengthen standard certifications

and enable the emergence of PGS initiatives? How could producers and/or associations participate more directly in the different public policy plans that respond, for instance, to certification systems more adapted to local conditions?

Keywords: traceability, certification, Ecuador