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Coffee Certification in East Africa: Impact on Farmers, Families and Cooperatives

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Writings on certified coffee in the past 10 years have largely focused on Latin America and organic and fair-trade certification systems. This new book expands the discussion to another important coffee-producing region. Certified coffee exports from East Africa are growing, due in part to changes in regulatory frameworks that make direct export of coffee possible and to efforts by governments and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to support enhanced coffee quality and certification. The book provides insights into how buyers, NGOs, farmers, and cooperatives have worked to build East African supplies of certified coffee and the related implications for farmers. It touches on issues related to fair trade (Chapters 1 and 3, for example), but the major focus is on UTZ Certified—another unique element of this book.

The book begins with a review of certification systems for coffee, mainly from Latin America, and what we know about their impacts on farming households, cooperatives, and rural communities. It emphasizes recent findings about efforts to reduce poverty by linking poor coffee farmers to certified coffee markets. The benefits of certification for smallholders have been limited, in many cases, by the persistence of low yields and relatively high labor requirements, declining prices relative to conventional coffee, and the limits of smallholders' ability to intensify coffee systems given their livelihood insecurities and rising production and household costs. Do these lessons hold for East Africa? The book explores this question through case studies of certified coffee. Authors use an interesting set of methods, in particular analysis of longitudinal data, behavioral experiments, and discourse analysis, that are applied at different levels, mainly individual, household, and cooperative.

Chapters 2 and 3, as well as Chapter 5, assess the impacts of UTZ certification on smallholders in Uganda and Kenya. The chapters apply a similar methodological approach, whereby outcomes are assessed based on differences in indicators over time and between control and treatment groups. This is supplemented by qualitative information for understanding outcomes and the reasons behind the outcomes. Rather than skim the contents of the 3 chapters, this review shall provide a more in-depth discussion of Chapter 2, which investigates the outcomes of UTZ certification on 2 groups of coffee farmers, each linked to a privately owned enterprise in Uganda. In the first case, it is argued that farmers increased their income from coffee largely because of higher productivity (including access to free seedlings), transport cost sharing, and cheaper milling charges. Stronger buyer relations emerged, due partly to increased coffee quality delivered by producers: "The changes in the 'New Ankole' group show the positive effect of UTZ certification" (p 68). However, for the "New Ankole" group, access to certification had yet to provide benefits in terms of price premiums. In the second case, the farmer group was unable establish lasting relations with the UTZ Certified buyer or with the NGO that provided services to it. Delays in buyer payments and aggressive local middlemen led to a situation where farmers stopped selling to the buyer, the buyer pulled out, and, shortly afterwards, NGO support ended. Data suggested no significant change in productivity and a decline in total coffee production.

Chapter 4 looks at the implications of multiple certification systems (fair trade, UTZ, and organic) on coffee farmers who belong to cooperatives in Ethiopia. Similar to the previous 2 chapters, a difference-in-differences approach is applied to identify outcomes and obtain insights on attribution: "According to our results, double-certified coffee farmers receive better prices and higher incomes than single-certified farmers; and triple-certified farmers receive better prices and higher income than double-certified farmers in the study area" (p 143). However, the study did not find that multiple certifications led to either higher productivity or improved access to technical or financial services. The authors concluded: "Certification of Ethiopian coffee cooperatives alone is unlikely to bring about significant poverty alleviation among cooperative members. Along with promotion of certification, more attention should be given to increase the technical, financial, and human capacity of primary cooperatives" (p 144).

Chapter 6 focuses on relationships between cooperatives and coffee-farming households in Ethiopia. Surveys, games, and interviews were used to understand the role of cooperative performance in influencing trust and the willingness of member households to invest. The authors found that farmers who belonged to better-performance cooperatives had higher levels of trust (with both fellow community members and their cooperatives) than farmers belonging to weaker cooperatives: "This is an important relationship because trust in turn has a strong and positive influence on the engagement of members with their cooperative and with members' loyalty" (p 198). The notion that strong cooperatives can instill trust in their members, and that this trust provides a positive feedback loop in terms of cooperative development, is important. It highlights the need for new and better strategies in Africa

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and elsewhere to support the building of strong cooperatives in less time and with fewer resources. The chapter leaves it up to readers to figure out just how best to do this.

Chapters 7 and 8 focus on gender and its links to certification systems and, in the opinion of this reviewer, form the most exciting element of the book. In the interest of brevity, the focus here is on Chapter 7, which looks at the gender approach of an UTZ Certified coffee cooperative and compares it with the approach of a noncertified cooperative. The certified cooperative, which included various women on its management committee, made considerable strides in opening up opportunities for women: Barriers were lowered to not only participation, but also voting rights and new opportunities to market new products made by women (including women not officially members of the cooperatives). By prioritizing women's involvement in the management committee, overall attitudes of both men and women were more favorable toward women in leadership than in the control cooperative. The authors then look inside the household, and it is here where the limitations of such an approach become apparent: Women have too few assets, face a heavy workload, and have limited decision-making power. The authors conclude with a strong take-home message: opening up new opportunities for women, whether promoted by cooperatives or others, will not lead to gender equity unless the underlying power relations between men and women change. The chapter highlights the need to consider gender at both the cooperative and household levels when looking at gender in the context of certification and value chains.

In summary, the book should prove useful to anyone interested in certification, cooperatives, and value chains in East Africa. It does, however, exhibit some weaknesses. Though it describes the problems faced by farmers, cooperatives, NGOs, and others in building value chains for certified coffee, it rarely provides guidance on solutions and actions needed by stakeholders. The book deals with a complex system that involves various actors with different objectives and capacities who engage one another in an overall context shaped by market trends, donor and government actions, and certification schemes. A well-designed conceptual framework at the beginning would have helped most readers, including this reviewer. Having considered certification systems from various angles and used a diverse set of methodological approaches, the book cries out for a synthesis at the end—it is a pity that this was not included.

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