

Certification schemes do not seem to improve household incomes for farmers and wages for workers



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There is no guarantee that farmers' and workers' living standards improve due to certification schemes

What is the aim of this review?

This Campbell systematic review examines the effectiveness of certification schemes in improving the welfare of farmers and workers. The review summarises findings from 43 quantitative studies, and 136 qualitative studies.

Certification schemes (CS) set and monitor voluntary standards to make agricultural production socially sustainable and agricultural trade fairer for producers and workers. The evidence base is very limited and inconclusive. Certification increases prices and income from produce, but not wages or total household income. Certification agencies should adopt simpler programmes adapted to local context and rigorously test their impact.

What did the review study?

Certification sets and monitors voluntary standards, and can encompass systems engaging in a wider range of activities in policy, advocacy, and capacity building, and in building markets and supply chains, to make agricultural production socially sustainable and agricultural trade fairer.

Certification is meant to affect a wide range of socioeconomic and environmental outcomes, to improve the wellbeing of farmers and agricultural workers employed by corporate plantations or individual producers. Certification schemes use a combination of standard-setting actions, training, different types of market interventions, and the application of adequate labour standards.

This review assesses whether certification schemes work for the wellbeing of agricultural producers and workers in low- and middle-income countries.

What studies are included?

Included studies evaluate the effects of CS on socioeconomic outcomes for agricultural producers and workers. Eligible CS are based on second- (industry-level) or third-party certifications, and exclude own-company standards. For the effectiveness review, studies must use experimental or non-experimental methods demonstrating control for selection bias. Qualitative studies are included to answer questions about barriers, facilitators and



How up-to-date is this review?

The review authors searched for studies published until July 2016. This Campbell Systematic Review was published in February 2017.

What is the Campbell Collaboration?

The Campbell Collaboration is an international, voluntary, non-profit research network that publishes systematic reviews. We summarise and evaluate the quality of evidence about programmes in the social and behavioural sciences. Our aim is to help people make better choices and better policy decisions.

About this summary

This summary was prepared by Howard White (Campbell Collaboration) based on the Campbell Systematic Review 2017:3 *Effects of Certification Schemes for Agricultural Production on Socio-economic Outcomes in Low and Middle-Income Countries: A Systematic Review* by Carlos Oya, Florian Schaefer, Dafni Skalidou, Catherine McCosker, and Laurenz Langer (DOI 10.4073/csr.2017.3). Tanya Kristiansen (Campbell Collaboration) did copy-editing and layout. Financial support from the American Institutes for Research for the production of this summary is gratefully acknowledged.



contextual factors; these report on relevant outcomes, have sufficient reporting on methods, and provide substantive evidence on relevant themes. The review includes 43 studies used for analysing quantitative effects, and 136 qualitative studies for synthesizing barriers, enablers and other contextual factors.

What are the main results in this review?

There is not enough evidence on the effects of CS on a range of intermediate and final socio-economic outcomes for agricultural producers and wage workers. There are positive effects on prices. But workers' wages do not seem to benefit from the presence of CS. Income from the sale of produce is higher for certified farmers, but overall household income is not. Context matters substantially for the causal chain between interventions of certification schemes and the wellbeing of producers and workers.

Generally, the quality of the studies is mixed, with a significant number of studies that are weak on a number of methodological fronts.

What do the findings in this review mean?

For farmers and workers the results show there is no guarantee that living standards improve through certification. To have a positive impact, CS need favourable conditions and the support of other factors. Some of these conditions depend on deeply rooted socioeconomic factors that, in the short to medium run, will not likely be altered substantially by certification.

For CS practitioners and businesses, there are several lessons to learn. Claims about impact should match what is achievable and verifiable. Standards and interventions could be revised, away from multiple standards with fewer overlaps between systems and rationalisation of interventions. Impact evaluation standards should be given more attention. CS need to develop a deeper understanding of context, and adapt and pre-test the type and range of interventions.

Researchers and evaluators should consider using a range of methods for different kinds of research questions, and have a clear understanding of what kind of design is more appropriate for each question. They should also use a more consistent, rigorous approach in reporting methods and results.