

Paula-Ann Award Recipients 2014

Reports on fieldwork

Farrah Adam

Factors Affecting the Development of the Colombian Organic Agricultural Sector: The Case of Coffee as a Key Ecological Product

(MSc Sustainability & Management)



Organic agriculture in Colombia has the potential to transform the Colombian agricultural landscape, provide sustainable and dignified livelihoods mainly for small rural growers, peasants and indigenous communities across the nation. These communities are usually located in large rural reserve areas, native forests or in available fallow land. As a tropical country with abundant natural resources, significant biodiversity and microclimates which could be harnessed in a sustainable way, organic agriculture offers a unique opportunity for local, regional and national economic development. It can also contribute to climate change mitigation, food security, a reduction in rural vulnerability and the fostering of social equity. Now more than ever, the conditions of the agricultural sector favour the flourishing of organic agriculture, with the potential to reduce illegal farming activities and violence, and provide the estimated 4.9 million internally-displaced people, as well as rural producers, the chance to strengthen their agricultural activities and have a decent livelihood.

I conducted fieldwork in selected organic coffee farms located in the Department of Cundinamarca, home of several small and medium-scale emerging organic coffee

farms and a potential area for the development of other organic agricultural products. I visited farms including “Hacienda El Porvenir”, three farms of the “Café Valle del Subia” local group, and four farms of “Agrosolidaria” Organic Association-the largest agro-ecologic, solidary producer association of the country with more than 15,000 associated families. I conducted interviews directly with managers/owners and local workers. I also carried out interviews in Bogotá, the capital, as other main stakeholders and actors of the supply chain were headquartered in the city. I visited the Lohas Beans laboratory, a recognised organic and sustainable coffee trader/exporter company, to understand the quality standards required to export the commodity.

The research identified key factors which contribute to the positive experience of the organic coffee sector and which shed light on how the organic sector should be redirected. It also revealed new insights and opportunities for the organic sector in terms of structure and organisation, institutional support, markets, quality, education and training, and promotion and research. These factors were crucial for the organic coffee sector’s growth at different stages of development, and my research suggested that a similar path could be followed in other organic subsectors such as fruits and vegetables, cocoa, meat, dairy products, etc.

My research also revealed the important work that different stakeholders have played in the development of the organic coffee sector. These include the government, business associations, certification bodies, organic farmers, private sector companies, external advisors and research institutions. The government has been very important, but without the collaboration and cooperation of other players in the organic coffee sector, success would have been much more limited. The challenge for the expansion of other sectors of the organic market is to ensure that the collaboration and good governance which has been found in relation to coffee, is replicated. Organic farming is a sustainable economic activity which can foster social prosperity and empowerment, preserve natural resources and a sustainable environmental system in Colombia.

Agbor Bakia

The impact of the Bamenda-Mamfe-Enugu Trans-African highway on sustainable livelihoods and poverty reduction for Ekok village

(MSc Practising Sustainable Development)



With the help of the Paula-Ann Award, I undertook a field trip in June 2014 to Ekok, Cameroon to investigate the role of roads on rural communities. The study assessed the validity of the adage that “Where a road passes, development follows”, in a piece of empirical research that examined the effects of the Trans-African Highway on the livelihoods of the Ekok community.

I spent about five weeks in Ekok gathering primary data from participants in various walks of life. This was done mainly through focus group discussions, interviews and participant observations. They were farmers, small-scale traders, Cameroon government officials, Nigerians living in Ekok, Nigerian immigration officers, drivers, health workers, teachers, loaders and travelers to/from Nigeria.

Being my first fieldwork experience ever, I learned the importance of planning prior to fieldwork, interpersonal communications and patience. The fieldwork enabled me to have a deeper understanding of the livelihood challenges that prevailed within Ekok in the rainy seasons before the start of the Bamenda-Mamfe-Ekok-Enugu road construction project.

The majority of people in Ekok are traders and farmers. The poor nature of the road in Ekok made it difficult for any inhabitant to focus on a single occupation. Inaccessibility during the rainy season made it difficult for the inhabitants to have food, health care and proper education. The way out of these vulnerable circumstances was to do farming alongside their primary occupations.

The road construction project has decreased their vulnerability and opened a world of other opportunities for people in Ekok. They are generally happier with the state of the road now than any other time in their history. The travel time to other areas in Cameroon from Ekok has greatly reduced, as has the cost of transportation. This has made it easy for traders to travel out at any time to replenish stock. The standard of living has increased as people are able to buy cherished goods and services from Cameroon, rather than depending solely on the Nigerian market, as it was before the road.

However, security has become a huge concern in this small community, as a result of the road. They are already experiencing some of the unavoidable incidences that occur with growth such as increase in crime and accidents.

The research brought to light the fact that the value and price of land are parallel with development. Land in Ekok has become a source of conflict because of its increased value. The more people and institutions develop an interest in Ekok for investments, the more the demand for land and consequently the higher its price. In Ekok, like elsewhere in rural Cameroon, the 'de facto' land tenure system and the 'de jure' systems conflict. This entails that by tradition, the Chief of Ekok and the traditional council are custodians of their land, but legally, following the Cameroonian constitution, all land belongs to the state. Some villagers see the government as an intruder who introduces 'top down' authority to deprive them of their land without compensation, under the guise of road infrastructure and development.

From the research, there is a conviction that in a few years Ekok, like Cotonou in Benin (West Africa), will be the trading hub between Cameroon and Nigeria. With the passing of the road, there have been improvements in cross-border trade, seen in the number and frequency of trucks that load from Nigeria to Cameroon and vice versa.

This research was first of its kind in the Ekok community. It was a great learning experience for me and the inhabitants of Ekok as well. It equipped me with the skills to penetrate local communities and work with people in different strata of the community. It has prepared the ground for any fieldwork that I intend to carry out in future, be it for academic or non-academic reasons. This was an experience with its challenges and opportunities that I will gladly repeat.

Pulo Taal

Urbanisation and Marginalisation: A Study of Peri-Urban Areas in Abuja, Nigeria

(MSc Practising Sustainable Development)



Waste Collection Truck, Kubuwa, June 2014

I travelled to Abuja, Nigeria to undergo research on the effects of urbanisation on individuals residing on the outskirts of the city. To gain an in-depth understanding of the topic, I visited residents of four different suburbs of the city, known as satellite towns. Whilst there, I conducted face-to-face interviews, a focus group discussion and distributed questionnaires to local authorities.

The population of Abuja city and the satellite towns that surround it, can be easily distinguished by the socio-economic backgrounds of its inhabitants. Those in the city, usually consist of expats, top-earning government officials and other high-income

earners. In contrast, the surrounding satellite towns, contain drivers, cleaners, government officials, farmers and other low-income earners.

The overall findings of the research demonstrate that a combination of factors contribute to displace the lower classes from the city of Abuja. These factors include, but are not limited to; forced evictions from the city as part of redevelopment schemes, the high cost of living (rent, transport and food), and government policies that do not favour them. These individuals then seek housing in alternative areas, which are usually shanty or satellite towns. These satellite towns are presented as an attractive alternative for the displaced individuals, as they offer cheaper housing, lower costs of living and readily-available transport links to and from the city. However it is important to note that the satellite towns that surround Abuja often have very poor living conditions, including poor or non-existent sanitation, little access to clean and safe drinking water and lack of stable electricity.

The majority of the research participants said they would prefer to live in the city as it is closer to work and access to services is better, however they cannot afford it. Overall urbanisation has not been associated with an eradication of, or reduction in poverty, rather it places many individuals into deeper poverty. The lack of services has also had a very detrimental impact on the environment since individuals have no other option but to continue to dispose of waste in the streets resulting in environmental degradation and increasing threats to health.