

Wilde Garten (German Edition)

Certification of wild coffee in Ethiopia: Experiences and challenges (Article submitted to Forests, Trees and Livelihoods, April 2007)

K.F. Wiersum¹*, T.W. Gole², F. Gatzweiler³, J. Volkmann⁴, E. Bognetteau⁵ and Olani Wirtu⁶

¹ Forest and Nature Conservation Policy group, Wageningen University, the Netherlands

² Ethiopian Coffee Forest Forum (ECFF), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

³ Center for Development Research, Bonn University, Germany

⁴ Amber Foundation, Freiburg, Germany

⁵ Sustainable Livelihood Action, Wageningen, the Netherlands

⁶ NTFP Southwest Ethiopia Research & Development Project, Mizan Teferi, Ethiopia

* Corresponding author, E-mail freerk.wiersum@wur.nl

ABSTRACT

Coffea arabica originates from montane forests in South and Southwest Ethiopia, which form part of Eastern Afrotropical biodiversity hotspot region. Wild coffee refers to coffee that grows and regenerates spontaneously in these forests and that is genetically different from commercial cultivars. Wild coffee is collected as a non-timber forest product from little disturbed forest coffee systems as well as more intensively managed semi-forest coffee systems; in addition coffee is also produced in garden systems and plantations often using landraces or cultivars. Recently several programmes have started to conserve the coffee forests and the coffee genetic variety. In 2003 a first initiative was started to market forest coffee in Germany as a certified authentic product; this initiative was followed by additional schemes for forest coffee as an environmentally friendly and socially responsible product. As in the coffee market already well established criteria for coffee quality exist, the forest coffee certification schemes depart from these existing criteria. In order to obtain premium prices, it is important to fulfill the consumers demand for good cup-quality and to use quality criteria regarding production systems as additional marketing criteria. In developing those additional criteria questions arise as to the precise objective of forest coffee certification: does it concern the certification of a product originating in the forest or with natural product authenticity and/or the certification of a sustainable production practice in biodiverse organic production systems and/or the certification of a socially-responsibly produced and marketed product. And also as to what extent it is efficient and effective to develop different certification schemes and different marketing strategies for forest-based, organically grown, and/or socially responsible produced NTFPs and their crop equivalents. In order conserve the unique characteristics of the Ethiopian coffee forests as well as prevent confusion due to co-existence of different certification schemes, it might be considered to base certification on an area-based approach focused on the sustainable management of forested landscapes involving both forests and environmentally responsible agricultural lands.

Key words: forest coffee, garden coffee, organic production, fair trade, biodiversity, genetic diversity

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