workshop report

Behind the screen

Exploring the (dis)connections between transparency, traceability and sustainability

In this workshop, our aim was to discover if and how traceability contributes to transparency and sustainability, and if and how the potential contribution of traceability to transparency and sustainability can be strengthened?

In his introduction, Martin Skrydstrup from Wageningen University highlighted that there are different traceability design and systems which can reflect the flow of both the tangible and the intangible (product and information). There are also different models of traceability, such as identity preserves, segregated, mass-balance and book-and-claim. However, the overall research questions remain the same: What is traceability and what is it for? What visions of sustainability/ transparency do these system represent, and are they the same for everyone or more diverse than those set on western based standards?

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These questions were addressed by two practitioners (from UTZ Certified and Pacifical) who presentated their view on traceability and how they organize this in their specific organization. This was followed by an interactive session in which participants could experience the use of a traceability platform.

For UTZ, traceability is about **efficacy and credibility**. Sales, purchases, product conversions etc. need to be registered – otherwise no certification or renewal of certification is conducted. The UTZ traceability system is an online system granting different levels of information access to different users. The system is called **Good Inside Portal**. Through this system, the production of UTZ certified cocoa, coffee, tea and hazelnut can be tracked (e.g. to follow the certified product, monitor volumes and premiums). The system is user friendly, all users have a profile with inbox, outbox, etc. folders. Certificates to producers are given by certification bodies, while licenses are given by our tracking team who have access to the system. Traceability number is given per batch sold, also allowing to link up to findings of an **audit**. UTZ uses different models, for example ID and segregated for coffee, mass balance for cocoa.

The **people** factor is far more important than **technology**

UTZ Certified

How did you manage to introduce it successfully?

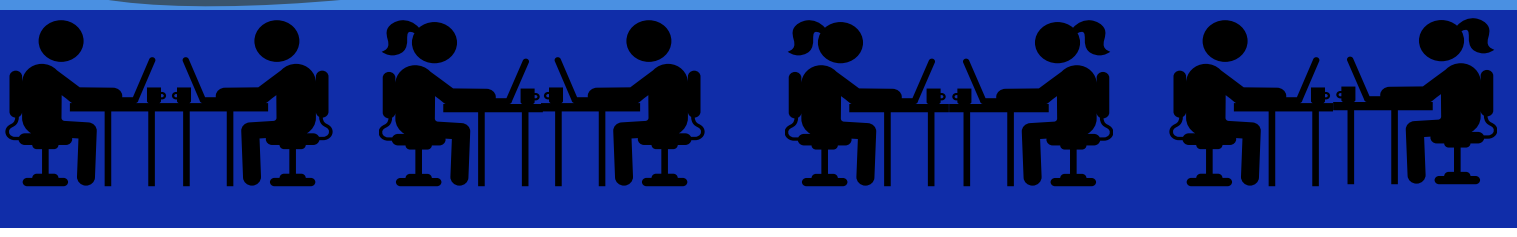
It was introduced as part of the package of what UTZ was offering. It is now 15 years old, we are currently remodelling it.

Pacifical is a joint venture that oversees the market side of **MSC certified tuna** fisheries. We cover PNA countries with the aim to develop sustainable fisheries, which also means having an economic spin-off to the whole issue, bringing and keeping processing jobs in the region. **Chain of custody** is very important to communicate sustainability. Traceability starts right during the trip, as not the whole catch will be MSC certified since there is not enough market for that yet. There are different users of the system; operators, Pacifical members, sellers as partners. The system has been developed in 2000, based on tracing for logistics reasons. When **sustainability** came in, the system was extended. In the link between traceability, sustainability and transparancy it is very important to have a contract for sale, as the traceability number is linked to certification. This is crucial for the final step when the fish goes to **retailers**.

Why do different catching methods need to be separated?

During the same fishing trip different methods can be used, of which one can be considered to be more sustainable.

Pacifical



In the plenary discussion, impressions and insights from the interactive session were shared, and reflected on

Just because we can trace it and know where it comes from, it does not mean it is sustainable. Traceability is needed to guarantee on sustainability, however, it is a bit scary because it involves transparency, data sharing and competitiveness.

If someone claims to know the producer, then the assumption is that he trusts the producer well. However, traceability should not be taken as proxy to sustainability. There could be waste of money for setting the traceability systems, which actually does not communicate much. Traceability must interlink with transparency to communicate the challenges of a harvesting region. It is important for marketing purposes.

In the example of Pacifical it became clear that fishery systems are so diverse that chain of custody of sustainably caught fish is very important. And harmonization of different systems is very challenging and might be very costly

Sensitivity of the data is an issue to discuss. How to make sure the data is not being misused?

We should differentiate fraud and typo. Fraud happens not within the system, but outside.

It is a struggle to use such systems as a kind of a tool to get credibility. It is all about the design of the system – it needs to be designed in a way that all steps feel as natural and in the end adding the logo adds the value to the whole product. If it does not add value, it goes under the radar.

Many systems are used by food safety checking agents and can be used by sustainability officers. So, you have the flow of a lot of information which is looked from different angles. Traceability in the food system started within the poultry production, to deal with the safety issues there. And then the whole system scaled up to other sectors.

Yes, the first thing that comes up is the design of the system. Is it aimed at business to business or consumers? Who are the designers? How government and NGOs get involved? However, we still see that designers of systems still have got some work to do. As the design of the systems do not necessarily reflect the complexity of real life production systems and issues around sustainability.

Traceability does something on the way to achieving sustainability via changing how supply chain is organized. In terms of showing how actors interact with each other- that makes it more stable and reliable.

Right now, the certification is based on volume based system, however, we would like to move towards performance based system to check how the progress is made and see where improvements and challenges are. And see if there is a group of farmers that have a challenge, let's say with social issues. Can we organize the system in a way that money flows to the direction where the improvement is most needed? That would be very rich in terms of data.

Any claim on sustainability without traceability is useless, we believe it is the only way to connect this two. However, there is a power shift towards the end of the supply chain. Thus, reinforcement of already existing power structures is an issue.

This workshop was organized by Esther Turnhout and Martin Skrydstrup, in close collaboration with Margreet Brinxma and Henk Gilhuis.
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