Livelihood in Chains: Context-embedded perspective to smallholder farmers’ inclusion in value chain collaborations (VCCs)

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Problem definition
Literature on value chain collaborations (VCCs) calls for inclusiveness, so that VCC interventions meet smallholder farmers’ realities and avoid exclusion and adverse inclusion. However, current approaches lack a holistic conceptualization of what inclusion is and view VCC inclusion through a lens of vertical value chain interactions only. Existing perspectives thus provide partial and fragmented answers to our understanding of smallholder farmers’ inclusion in VCCs.

Research Question
How do institutions, and the profiles, agency and livelihood trajectories of smallholder tree-crop farmers affect their engagement in VCCs and how does this engagement affect their household food sovereignty?

Theoretical Framework
The study adopts an actor-oriented perspective. It moves beyond the preconceived dichotomous notion of smallholder farmers’ inclusion in VCCs as being wanted and good and exclusion as being unwanted and bad with assumedly uniform outcomes for farmers in either scenario. Instead, this study conceptualizes inclusion as a multidimensional process encompassing vertical value chain relations and horizontal interactions within the context in which the value chain is embedded. This conceptualization allows us to identify institutions and the individual heterogeneity that determine how and why smallholders are included in VCCs. Thus, we explain VCC engagement and its livelihood and food sovereignty outcomes by looking at the interface of institutional context and individual characteristics of smallholder farmers in terms of their agency and livelihood strategies.

Methodology
Using a multi-case design, this study examines smallholders’ inclusion in cocoa and oil palm VCCs in Ghana through a mixed methods approach. Data collection methods include document analysis, surveys, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, timelines, and verification workshops with smallholder farmers and their households, stakeholders in the cocoa and oil palm value chains and community members.

Expected Results
Outputs include a typology of VCCs in both sectors and associated institutions, smallholder farmer profiles and agency typology, and insights into profile-specific livelihood trajectories and how VCC inclusion differs among these. The study also presents profile-specific implications of inclusion and exclusion on household food sovereignty.

Expected Graduation
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