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From Futures Markets to the Farm Gate: A Study of Price Formation along Tanzania's Coffee Commodity Chain

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abstract

This article examines the nature of price formation and transmission in the Tanzanian coffee price chain. To date, research on the real-world processes of price formation has been scant in economic geography and extant literatures. This article addresses this by focusing on price formation in geographically distant but connected markets, and the interaction between global and local price dynamics. The article employs a new framework that builds on chain and network approaches by integrating concepts from marketization and institutional approaches. The study finds that the world price of coffee has become increasingly volatile as a result of the behavior of international coffee traders and broader shifts in the character of global capital accumulation. It also demonstrates the varying role domestic marketing and local-level institutions play in shaping price formation and cushioning Tanzanian producers from sudden price

changes. Finally, the study highlights the role prices, via these local-level institutions, play in extenuating differentiation between producers, creating winners and losers.

Key words:

coffee

commodity chain

price transmission

Tanzania

financialization

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Notes

¹ Maimfu is the site of West's ([2012](#)) research, and Goroko is its nearest marketing center.

² Seven UN agencies joined together in 2010 to create the United Nations Value Chain Development Group in an initiative that highlights the broadening appeal of value chain approaches in development practice (Neilson, Pritchard, and Yeung [2014](#)).

³ Primary societies are voluntary groupings of coffee farmers, based around their village or locality, and are aimed at assisting producers with the production and marketing of their coffee. These societies were originally introduced as a central part of the cooperative marketing system. Today, however, the functions and membership numbers of primary societies in Tanzania are not uniform.

⁴ The other four vantage points consist of the things in the market, agencies, encounters, and market maintenance.

⁵ The NYBOT was renamed ICE Futures US in September 2007.

⁶ The analysis presented here is focused on bulk Arabica coffee, as opposed to speciality or niche coffee, or the usually lower-quality Robusta coffee.

⁷ The ICA consisted of a series of agreements beginning in 1962 between a group of exporting and importing countries aimed at maintaining stable and relatively high prices.

⁸ Throughout the ICA, exports tended to be channeled through a single state marketing institution in coffee-producing countries.

⁹ Quotes are taken from interviews with coffee traders in international trading companies conducted in 2007.

¹⁰ These are largely funded by external donors, and the organizations deliver programs and services aimed at developing the smallholder coffee sector in Tanzania. The projects seek to improve the quality of smallholder coffee and market it externally as speciality coffee.

¹¹ Consumer prices for inputs and food have risen for a number of reasons in Tanzania. One can associate the price increases with changes in global prices from the mid-2000s to 2013, particularly the increase in the oil price, which has fed into the costs of production (Ghosh [2010](#)). The rise in input prices is also a result of changes to the domestic sale and pricing, with liberalization resulting in fewer subsidized inputs available to producers (Bargawi [2015](#)).



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