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Operationalizing social sustainability

A critical reflection

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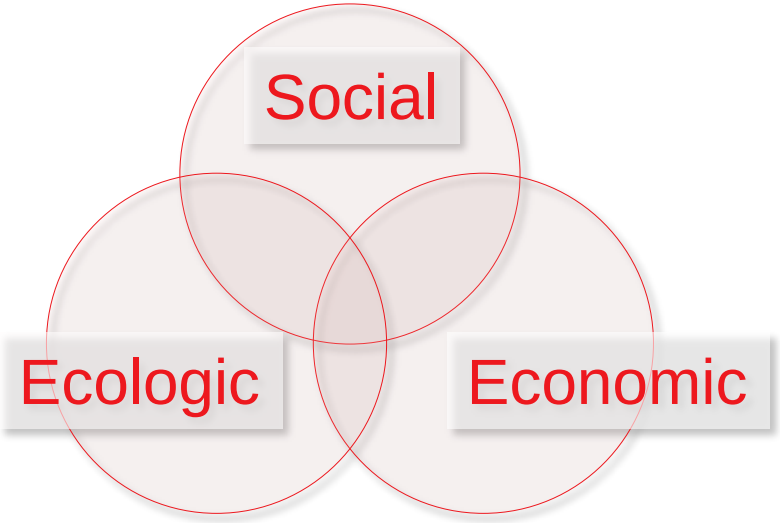
Outline

- Background
- SMART & social sustainability
  - Critical reflections
  - Explanations
  - Learning from other approaches
- Conclusions

BACKGROUND

Background



But what does «social» mean in agriculture?

Background

"Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. (…) sustainable development requires meeting the **basic needs of all** and extending to all the **opportunity to fulfill their aspirations for a better life**" (WCED 1987: 24f.).

«Measurements»?

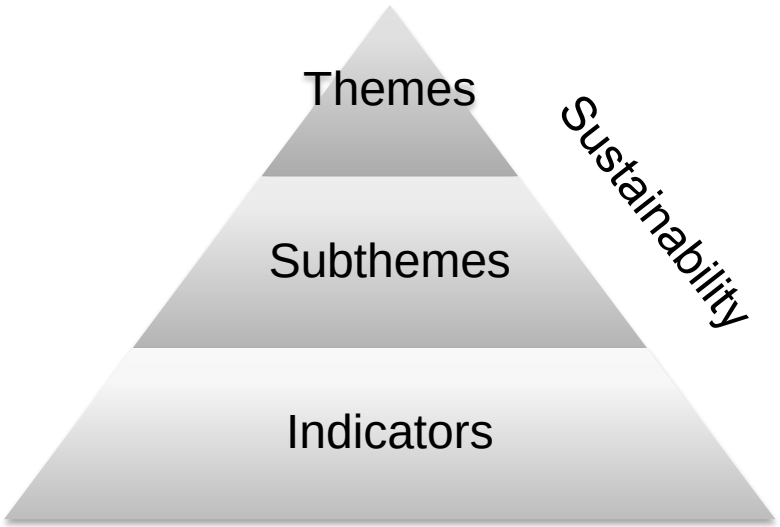
SMART & SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

SMART

- bases on SAFA guidelines

→ indicator development

- farm level sustainability assessment tool / food businesses
- globally applicable
- upstream value chains (e.g. impacts from purchased inputs)



→ goal: integrate agricultural suppliers into sustainability evaluation

(Schader et al. 2016 & 2014)

SMART

- Define «typical farm» thresholds for country specific production systems, e.g. coffee in Brazil, maize in Germany

→ social dimension «social well-being»

- themes & *subthemes*

Decent livelihood:	*quality of life, capacity development, fair access to means of production*
Fair trading practices:	*responsible buyers, rights of suppliers*
Labour rights:	*employment relations, forced labour, freedom of association / right to bargaining*
Equity:	*non discrimination, gender equality, support to vulnerable people*
Human safety & health:	*workplace safety / health provisions, public health*
Cultural diversity:	*indigenous knowledge, food sovereignty*

Preliminary results

- Approach: Expert interviews

«I can't really provide the detailed information that you are looking for»

«From a value chain perspective, social sustainability would include meeting customer preferences such as environmental accreditation»

«I do not have time to answer surveys, and in any case would not know the answers to any of these»

«I think that your research is missing the point»

What's the problem with social sustainability?

Preliminary results

- Approach: Systematic evaluation of strengths and weaknesses of SMART on 3 levels
  (Indicator level, data acquisition/aggregation, operationalization of the social pillar)
- Origin/background of these strengths and weaknesses

- Main findings:

- Indicators missing regional flexibility
- Cultural embeddedness of values («good»/«bad»/«normal»)

→ What does «well-being» mean?

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Examples

- Indicator applicability
  - «subsistence farming»
    e.g. coffee in Brazil vs. pigs in Denmark
  - «mechanization»
    e.g. in Ecuadorian coffee
- Indicator relevance
  - cultural embeddedness of some factors neglected
    e.g. master craftsmenship, child work

Local vs. Global Discrepancies

Preliminary results

SMART

«Social well-being» at the basis of the sustainability assessment tool

- definition missing
- themes, subthemes and indicators mostly based on basic human needs definition, e.g. fundamental rights
-

SAFA

- Missing frame of the social pillar («Social Well-being»)
- Bases themes on human rights (right to food, civil / political rights & work rights)

  & International frameworks e.g. ISO norms, GRI Sustainability Reporting Guidelines, Bellagio Stamp, … (FAO, 2014)

→ Sustainability development goals

→ Need for definition of an adequate frame of the social pillar

Learning from other approaches

- S-LCA as example of a life cycle approach
  - → still missing a definition of social sustainability
  - → including all stakeholders along production processes and their interactions (cultural / subjective perspectives integrated)

- Capabilities approach
  - → criticize approaches with predefined sets of indicators for personal well-being (e.g. income, holidays, access to food),
  - → focus on the individual freedom of decision-making to achieve satisfaction of individual needs and the ability to living a good life according to one's own interests

(Sedmak, et al., 2011, p. 7)

CONCLUSIONS

To be continued .. (conclusions)

- Meta analysis of food-related sustainability assessment tools
  - Background
  - Evaluation processes
  - Operationalization of social pillar,
    e.g. frame, themes, indicator sets

→ improved understanding of social sustainability

→ recommendations

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Thank you for your attention!

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Preliminary results

2) Data acquisition & aggregation

- major advantage in the on-farm data collection («reality»)
- data always is subjective / only facts the farmer wants to be evaluated
- data processing / standardizing can always lead to distortions