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RECONFIGURING THE OIL PALM CHAIN: THE RSPO IN CHIAPAS, MEXICO

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The restructuring of agri-food chains in the post-Fordist era has had significant impacts on small-scale farmers, who are the first link in these chains. They are subject to systems of rules and standards imposed by buyers, whether these are industries or distribution actors. They have no participation in the development of these systems of standards, yet they are forced to bear their costs to be certified. It is important to understand the interconnections in agri-food chains governed by these systems.

In buyer driven chains, dominant players define and manage quality and set the rules of inclusion/exclusion. The case of the oil palm chain and the Round Table on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) is a good example.

In this paper, we demonstrate that the adoption and imposition of the RSPO certification by the agribusiness corporations responds to instrumental (increase competitiveness) and relational (to seek legitimacy) reasons. The research shows that a media campaign of Greenpeace against Nestlé in 2010 originating from the deforestation of rainforests in Asia has repercussions for oil palm producers

in Chiapas, state of southern Mexico. In this region, oil palm cultivation was heavily promoted by the government from the 1990s onwards in wetland areas at the Coast and in Lacandon jungle. Oil palm cultivation has spread because it is the most profitable and resistant of all crops; it expanded mainly over areas previously dedicated to other crops and livestock. In this context came the demand from corporations, the end consumers of palm oil, for their suppliers to be RSPO certified, which implies certifying all actors downstream the chain; for agricultural producers, it represents more work and costs without them seeing clearly the reason for it. If they don't accept, in a few years they won't be able to sell their product.

Palavras-chave: palm oil; certification; rspo; chiapas mexico.