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**SOCIAL LIFE CYCLE ASSESSMENT OF DIFFERENT COFFEE VALUE
CHAINS IN BRAZIL AND THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO**

Braida Thom (bthom@ethz.ch)

Lea Fabritius (lea.fabritius@gmail.com)

Stephan Pfister (stephan.pfister@ifu.baug.ethz.ch)

Gabriela Schneider B. Souza (gabriela.schneiderbs@gmail.com)

Johanna Jacobi (johanna.jacobi@usys.ethz.ch)

While coffee production provides income for millions of farming families, it also carries a considerable environmental footprint. At the same time, persistent inequalities along the value chain create social implications such as health risks, food insecurity, and low incomes. Literature on coffee sustainability focuses mainly on biophysical criteria and environmental challenges, while often overlooking how social factors interact with and influence environmental. For coffee producers however, social aspects, like for example the benefits of being organized are sometimes seen as the most important aspect, while environmental aspects are only secondary. Social life cycle assessment (S-LCA) represents an underexplored approach for evaluating social impacts throughout

a product's life cycle. In this research, we operationalized the S-LCA methodology for application in the coffee value chain and assessed the social impacts of nine case studies in Brazil and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The nine case studies represent diverse production systems and organizational structures. We built on the S-LCA framework introduced by United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry (SETAC) and adapted the methodology to the local context by developing 53 tailored indicators and reference scales across 27 impact subcategories. Our assessment drew on primary data collected from 170 interviews with workers, farmers, and plantation and cooperative managers and owners from the nine case studies. The results demonstrate that while methodological standardization remains important, context-specific indicators are crucial for producing locally meaningful assessments. Using only secondary data, as is currently mostly done in S-LCA, risks distorting on-the-ground realities and overlooking positive and negative impacts. This research offers valuable guidance for advancing social sustainability in coffee production. It also highlights key areas where the S-LCA methodology can be improved, especially in reflecting local contexts, addressing systemic inequalities, and evaluating hard-to-reach stakeholder groups.

Palavras-chave: sustainability assessments; social impacts; social benefits; social risks; global value chains.