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## **SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS MODELS: BEAN-TO-BAR GENERATION VALUE IN THE COCOA PRODUCTION CHAIN**

### **Abstract:**

After a historic period of conventional cocoa bean production, southern Bahia has shown a strong trend towards diversification and inclusion in the special cocoa market. Producers in the region are cultivating fruits of superior quality and low environmental impact. Inserted in a production model based on the concept of sustainable business, these producers, agrifood entrepreneurs, seek to promote experiences to their consumers in their different alternative lifestyles, such as the philosophy of the Bean-to-bar production model. Elaborated as a theoretical essay, the development of this article aims to identify the contribution of the Bean-to-bar process in generating value in the cocoa production chain, inserted within a context of Short Circuits of Commercialization in the generation of innovative business. It is noted that a good monitoring of the entire process of transforming the input into a product allows entrepreneurs to explore with greater vigor the organoleptic properties of cocoa beans. Among the main initiatives that boosted the performance of the cocoa production chain in southern Bahia, Fortaleza Slow Food, the creation of the Cocoa Innovation Center and the Geographical Indication stand out. The strategies developed make it possible to diversify and foster rural communities. It is essential to understand the dynamics of these processes of local productive arrangements from the integration of public policies in the promotion, valuation of family farming products, sustainable cocoa beans with superior quality and local development. The search for recognition of the value attributed to cocoa products in the southern region of Bahia, from production (bean) to transformation into the final product (bar), intensifies the environmental perspective on the part of cocoa farmers. In this process, the sociocultural dimensions are present mainly in the cabucra production system, valuing and strengthening local family farming. The commercialization of almonds in the short chain segment enables business efficiency, giving space for increased profitability and reduced environmental impact. The frugal innovation model, oriented towards sustainability, becomes a path for the development of innovative businesses that generate value in the cocoa production chain. In this sense, for this topic to become solidified as a field of research that can bring relevant theoretical and practical contributions, it is suggested that new studies focus, among others, on business models that prioritize the cause and not simply the trends.

### **Keywords:**

Agri-food chains. Entrepreneurship. Social business. Sustainability

**JEL Classification:** L26, Q01, Q19

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era, the importance of the ideation of business models and products that generate positive social impact and present alternatives for sustainable environmental solutions becomes increasingly noticeable. In a context where society lives connected with more and more advances in technology and the dissemination of information, favoring changes in the consumption behavior of the population, expectations regarding the origin of food and environmental protection are intensified, making it possible to understand the impact that this can bring to organizations (OLIVEIRA; FREITAS FILHO, 2017).

Food is big business worldwide. Understanding the food market requires the need to cross social and geographic boundaries, aiming to identify better Insight in creating trends that can differentiate the business in the competitive market. Terminologies such as Terroir, origin, sustainable, healthy, ancestral and artisanal (TONIETTO, 2007; DANTAS et al., 2020) are emerging concepts that have been extensively explored by the food market in search of better characteristics and quality of products and by-products offered.

Aware of market diversification and changes in consumer behavior, *Theobroma cacao*, popularly known as cocoa, fruit of the cocoa tree, is not exempt from participating in these new business models. Based on sustainability and certification of quality and origin, the product follows the pioneering chains of innovations such as the coffee and wine sector (DANTAS et al., 2020).

Following the slow food philosophy, in this new structuring of the fine cocoa market, there is a movement of international scope that would promote a new concept for the chocolate market, the “Bean-to-bar” method, in its simplest form. translation “from cocoa beans to chocolate bar”. This movement, started in the mid-2000s, in the city of San Francisco, USA, consists of a reinterpretation of artisanal chocolates produced until then. The proposal is the creation of a sophisticated product, with specific aromas, attributed to a value chain based on fair and sustainable trade (OLIVEIRA, 2013). In this scenario, small chocolate factories and cocoa roasters appear that receive the beans from sustainable producers, and manufacture their own chocolate bars, innovating in the discovery of new aromas and flavors (VIOTTO; SUTIL; ZANETTE, 2017; YAKAH, 2017).

This perception of producing differentiated chocolate on a smaller scale brings the final consumer closer to the producer. They are looking for products that meet their expectations in terms of sustainability, ethics, quality, reliability, sensoriality, pleasure, healthiness and well-being. In this model of shortening the distance and/or the production chain, consumers explore their desires to express their ethical, social and environmental ideals, in a new context of food production and distribution (SCARABELLOT; SCHNEIDER, 2012).

Given this scenario, the work proposal problematizes: how does the Bean-to-bar production process contribute to the growth of innovative business models in the cocoa production chain? In response to this problem, it is envisaged to visualize the importance of creating new social and sustainable business models that generate value in the production chain, seeking to understand how the productive links are organized and how the participating agents in the chain benefit.

The work proposed here is based on studies on short agri-food chains, in order to portray the theme presented. That said, the main objective of the article is to identify the importance of the Bean-to-bar process in the generation of value in the cocoa production chain in the south of Bahia, inserted within a context of Short Circuits of Commercialization in the creation of innovative businesses.

The present research is characterized as a theoretical essay with a view to discussing the characteristics that contribute to the generation of value in the cocoa production chain. According to Meneghetti (2011) the main contribution of a theoretical essay is to jointly consider several theoretical frameworks in an integrative perspective. For the author, an essay presents a new conceptual perspective that helps the individual to understand reality.

## **2. BEAN-TO-BAR: INNOVATION AND STRATEGY IN THE COCOA MARKET**

The growth of the world population has as one of the consequences the demand for greater quantity and more quality of food. These influences move the food industry and represent a paradigm shift from the perspective of a simple exchange of goods to a perspective of co-creation of value. This new look allows consumers an active experience between production and consumption processes. As stated by Boaventura et al. (2018, p. 256) “products are no longer appreciated only for their intrinsic properties, but also for the experiences they promote”. Some innovative food practices have stood out in the current scenario. The Slow Food movement, started by journalist Carlo Petrini in Italy in 1986, appears as a counterpoint to the standardization of fast meals, the Fast Food (OLIVEIRA, 2013). The Slow Food philosophy seeks to rescue local cuisines, traditional products and the preservation of biodiversity. According to Bayão and Damous (2018) it is important to highlight that Slow Food does not only refer to a way of producing and consuming food, but a Lifestyle in connection with the Slow movement.

Theobroma cacao (cacao) is recognized as one of the most valuable agricultural products for the state of Bahia. Its production has been reborn in the south of Bahia, especially that dedicated to fine cocoa, produced by cocoa farmers who grow fruits of superior quality, presenting a differentiated product in the market and resulting in its insertion in the national and international production chain of special or premium products. (COCOA MARKET, 2020). Growing cocoa in southern Bahia has become an art of enhancing the fruit's original notes,

flavors and aromas (SETENTA; LOBÃO, 2012). According to Dantas et al. (2020) chocolates produced from almonds grown in the South of Bahia have four nomenclatures: Fine, Gourmet, Origin and Premium.

In the direction of Slow Food, other developments of the movement are starting in different parts of the world that seek to strengthen the relationship between society, food and nature. With strong retaliation from consumers from the main American artisanal chocolate industry Scharffen Berger to the giant Hershey's, in the mid-2000s, loyal consumers of original and healthy chocolate look for methods to produce their own chocolate, starting the production process Bean-to-bar (YAKAH, 2017).

The appreciation of less industrialized, more natural, more transparent and healthier products defines the philosophy of the "Bean-to-bar" movement, which provides countless possibilities to rediscover the true sweet taste of chocolate, trying literally unique products. Chocolate stimulates a stronger connection, something intimate between the consumer, the brand and the farmers (TRACY, 2016; MARCADO DO CACAU, 2020).

The Bean-to-bar concept (from the grain/seed/almonds to the chocolate bar) is a chocolate production method in which the manufacturer has control over the entire production chain. Producers are responsible for almost everything until reaching the final stage of production. It transforms raw material into chocolate in an artisanal way (VIOTTO; SUTIL; ZANETTE, 2017).

Behind the Bean-to-bar movement, values of fair trade emerge, without slave and child labor, with low environmental impact, with an organic or semi-organic production process and a provider of local and sustainable development. It reflects both the valuation of products and the economic and social development of the producing location (LAGO et al., 2007; WOOLLEY; POZNER; SOUCEY, 2021).

Production chains, such as cocoa, vary in their order, which makes it easier to strategically modify them. Chain shortening, according to Sellitto et al. (2018) can maximize some advantages to the actors involved from the production process to commercialization. This ascending market, characterized by a short production chain, or Short Commercialization Circuits (CCC), brings the relationship between producers and consumers closer, favoring interactivity and allowing both to know each other's purposes. These initiatives are presented as a social innovation that has been providing new opportunities for family farmers and contributing to new local development processes (SCARABELOT, 2012; FERRARI, 2011; SCHNEIDER, 2007). According to Scarabelot and Schineider (2012), the repositioning of agri-food systems in short marketing circuits allows for the valorization of the place of origin of production, in addition to filling gaps in the relationships of trust between producers and consumers.

Among some bottlenecks in the development of the sustainable cocoa production chain in the South of Bahia, Sanches (2019) points out the absence of a dialogue between the main actors in the chain, leading him to propose alternatives for adding value to the product and validating the sustainable model.

According to Viotto, Sutil and Zanette (2017) cocoa and fine chocolate producers face the challenge of legitimizing their products in a highly competitive international market. For the authors, national products struggle to match imported products, hoping to gain cultural-cognitive legitimacy and settle in the Premium segment. Seeking legitimacy in the market implies giving a meaning of excellence to Brazilian chocolate, personifying and valuing the national Terroir. The constitution of a Terroir implies symbolic and subjective factors of the worker's relationship with the land, involving the action of a social collectivity, its family and cultural relationships, traditions of common defense, solidarity and exploitation of products. It is a mix of natural and human factors, including intangible aspects (BARHAM, 2003; OIV, 2008).

When verifying the main trends and specifications of the chocolate market, Amaral (2011) warns that: chain agents that aim to meet the new market requirements must include in the composition of their products components that allow them to say, with certainty, that the your chocolate has one or some characteristics such as: organic, natural, of origin, high cocoa content, trans fat free, enriched with pro and prebiotics, Diet, antioxidant and ethical.

This new structuring of the cocoa and chocolate production chain with social and sustainable appeal enables the generation of innovative ideas to entrepreneurs outside the productive link, attentive to this new segment of the fine cocoa market, creating and popularizing the consumption of special chocolates. , whether Premium, with certificate of origin, gourmet, artisanal and others.

### **3. GENERATION OF VALUE AND SUSTAINABILITY: RETHINKING THE COCOA PRODUCTION CHAIN IN SOUTH BAHIA**

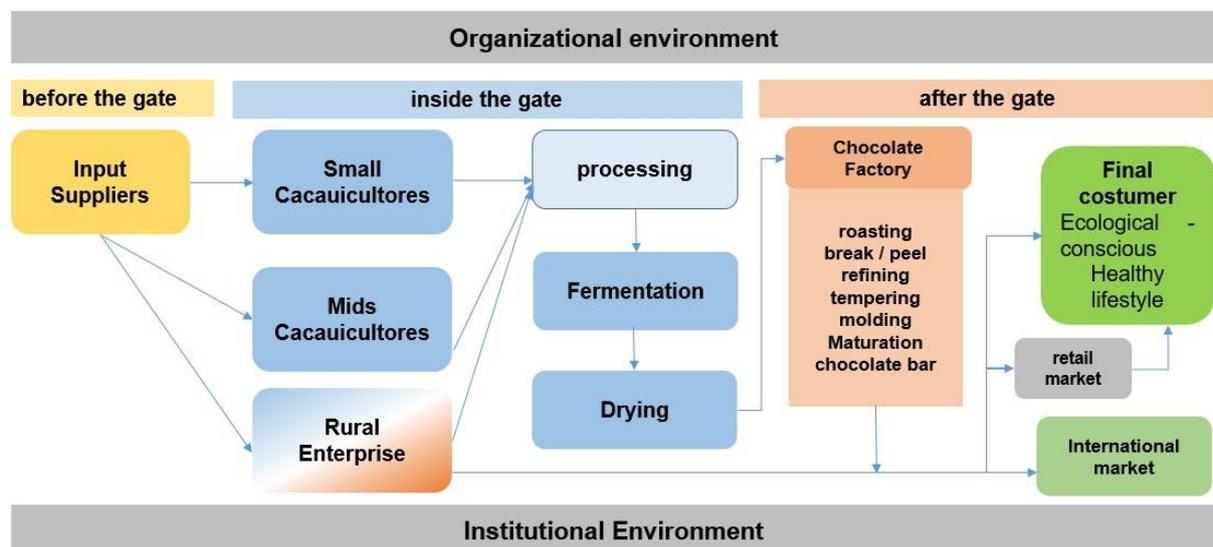
When instigating new business models, entrepreneurs tend to observe consumer behavior to adopt trends that guide the market. In the agri-food segment, the search for ethical, clean, ecological, sustainable and healthier brands has gained strength and impelled enterprises to seek innovative alternatives. Collaborative governance, shared values and transparency support the development of meaning-making strategies to attract customers (WOOLLEY; POZNER; SOUCEY, 2021). Thus, entrepreneurship involves a critical look (AGUIAR et al., 2020) on the value generated from innovative solutions, especially on changes in the habits of man's relationship with nature.

In the context of agri-food chains, there are indications that the environmental and social challenges that the food sector faces require innovations in its business model and full

synergy between entrepreneurs and their partners, aiming to explore new sectors and develop creative solutions to the demands of the market (GALLO et al., 2017). Aware of the situation, the chocolate chain has sought to address the social and environmental deficiencies of conventional production by building an alternative model and creating a new market niche, based on the Bean-to-bar production philosophy (WOOLLEY; POZNER; SOUCEY, 2021) aimed at promoting experiences for its consumers in their different lifestyles (OLIVEIRA, 2013).

Among the models, frugal innovation represents a lifestyle connected to a new vision of consumption, valuing products that are sustainable and socially fair. Frugal innovation is about doing more with less. It is possible to see an opportunity in the midst of the scarcity of resources, whether services or products, that meet the needs of producers without giving up adding value to the customer, which implies the creation of a sustainable production model (RADJOU; PRABHU, 2014). According to Amorim et al. (2017) and Weyrauch and Herstatt (2016) frugal innovation promotes sustainable results when social, environmental and economic issues are worked together, in a perspective of sustainable value creation.

The business proposal in the Bean-to-bar concept aims to present a lean production chain, a short commercialization model, aligned with the sustainable production process and generating new possibilities in the food market. To explore this concept in the cocoa production chain, it is necessary, based on scientific findings, to synthesize the links in the production chain (CASTRO et al., 2002), as can be seen in Figure 02.



**Figure 02:** Model of the cocoa production chain in southern Bahia – Bean-to-bar process (material flow) Source: Adapted from Castro et al. (2002) and Yakah (2017).

The model presented of the cocoa production chain, following the Bean-to-bar production process shown in Figure 02, reflects the one shown by Santana and Sellitto (2020) in their studies on agro-industrial chains. The authors explain that by shortening the chain into three links, the cocoa farmer negotiates his production directly with the roasting agroindustry,

which sells directly to the retail market and/or to the final consumer, eliminating the presence of intermediaries. This shortening also occurs in up to two links, when it comes to a rural agro-industrial (Rural Company) that plants, cultivates, harvests, processes, roasts and sells its products. The shortening of the chain reduces transport and storage activities, considered by Santana and Sellitto (2020) as the main generators of environmental impact.

The production of fine cocoa starts with the selection of seeds and choice of varieties used in planting, proper management of cocoa forests in agroforestry systems, choice of fruits, right point of maturation, fermentation and drying, which are essential for a high-quality product. The set of these processes guarantee the chocolate with striking aromas such as red fruits, spices, yellow fruits and even flowers, which are the main characteristic of fine cocoa, also known as Chocolate of Origin (SENAR, 2018).

In the Bean-to-Bar production chain, the “final consumer” link can cover external internal markets for artisanal chocolate products, reaching consumers from three different market niches, namely: a) healthy ones, who value chocolate said healthier, with no additives, preservatives, colorings, flavorings, among others; b) alternatives, or lifestyles, which strive for a different lifestyle, adopting well-being and health as a philosophy; and c) ecologically correct, which favor companies and products that less contaminate and more preserve the environment.

It is verified that the needs and values of consumers - such as health, well-being, quality, reliability, sustainability, among others - associated with the different styles and philosophies of modern life, incite innovations in the commercial strategies of the food industries, in order to obtain greater successes in the creation and development of new products (BLACKWELL et al., 2005).

Towards food market trends, Santos et al. (2016) and the Food Technology Institute (ITAL, 2019) demonstrate that the different segments of consumers in the Bean-to-bar movement seek to find: original chocolates, with a high degree of cocoa concentration; without or with low added sugar, free from preservatives, colorings and other additives that could compromise the originality of the product. In this process, values such as healthy living, food safety, quality of life, environmental conservation, nutritional education and conscious and responsible consumption prevail.

In the Bean-to-bar process, the rural company presents a high degree of coordination of the production system. In addition to cultivating and processing superior quality beans, cocoa farmers also produce their own chocolates, transforming the raw material and creating their own artisanal chocolate brands. For Albertim (2018) the consolidation of agro-industries producing cocoa and chocolate in the south of Bahia raises the degree of improvement and performance of the national cocoa production chain. Among other innovations in the chain,

investments in the production of fine cocoa beans and the establishment of Innovation Centers for Cocoa stand out (VIOTTO; SUTIL; ZANETTE, 2018).

In this new productive reorganization, rural cocoa-producing companies move towards the verticalization and valorization of the production of fine chocolate, of origin and with high added value. With the development of differentiated products in 2019, more than 70 brands of chocolates were identified in the southern region of Bahia (BAHIA DE VALOR, 2019).

From the production process to the transformation link, the Bean-to-bar cocoa production chain is characterized as a short chain or Short Commercialization Circuit, which satisfies principles of reciprocity and introduces aspects of sociability in commercial relationships (BIROCHI et al., 2019). ). This intimate relationship between cocoa farmer and chocolate factory strengthens affective, ethical, trust and loyalty values (SABORIUN, 2011). In this sense, an organized chain can be noted, however, still informal, a fact that can make it difficult for new entrepreneurs to enter this market niche.

Input suppliers are present in the representation of the material flow, but with low impact on the performance of the production chain. According to data from Senar (2018), because it is a sustainable management in an agroforestry system, cocoa farmers only need suppliers of tools, utensils and equipment to carry out the cultural treatments of the cocoa forest. Improvements in rural facilities are necessary for the proper processing of the cocoa fruit, in the process of maturation and drying of the beans. The proper handling of the processing of the cocoa fruit on the farms is extremely important to add value to the product, since during the fermentation and drying stages the precursors of the characteristic flavor of cocoa products are generated. A good monitoring of the entire process allows entrepreneurs to explore more vigorously the organoleptic properties of cocoa beans (SENAR, 2018).

With a strong performance of the organizational and institutional environment, the production of fine cocoa has been re-emerging in the South of Bahia. Local initiatives, government and private entities have been encouraging the generation of value in the cocoa production chain, promoting sustainable local development. Dantas et al. (2020) shows that, among the main initiatives that leveraged the performance of this production chain, the Slow Food Presidium, the creation of the Cocoa Innovation Center and the Geographical Indication of origin stand out.

### **3 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The production and commercialization of high value-added cocoa beans is under development in southern Bahia. They are produced by family farmers/cocoa farmers, in agrarian reform settlements, traditional communities, producer cooperatives, rural companies and/or agro-industries that cultivate superior quality fruits in sustainable management, resulting in their insertion in special product markets. Thus, the generation of income,

employment and establishment of the cocoa farmer in the rural territory is consistent with the main social benefits generated in the cocoa value chain.

The development of the fine cocoa production chain in the South of Bahia, which guides the production of raw materials in order to meet the demand for high value-added products, such as chocolate factories inserted in the philosophy of the Bean-to-bar movement, occurs due to the intense initiative of partnerships between the community, government, public, private and philanthropic institutions.

The strategies developed by the actors that participate in the Bean-to-bar cocoa production chain enable the diversification and promotion of rural communities. It is essential to understand the dynamics of these processes of local productive arrangements from the integration of public policies for the promotion and valuation of family farming products, which transform the food act into a political action, which provides environmental protection and local development.

The search for recognition of the value attributed to cocoa products in the southern region of Bahia, from production (bean) to transformation into the final product (bar), intensifies the environmental perspective on the part of cocoa farmers. In this process, the sociocultural dimensions are present mainly in the cabucra production system, valuing and strengthening local family farming. The commercialization of almonds in the short chain segment enables business efficiency, giving space for increased profitability and reduced environmental impact.

In the expectation of a growing demand from artisanal chocolate factories to acquire superior quality cocoa beans, aiming to provide consumers loyal to the Bean-to-bar movement with unique products with high added value, an effective coordination of the links present in the chain is relevant. short cocoa production. The publicity of reports on beans with special characteristics from cocoa producers in the South of Bahia could strengthen the sector through transparency and communication between the productive links and the processing industry, opening up possibilities for the insertion of new creative and innovative entrepreneurs, precursors of new aromas, who understand different ways to experience the true sweet taste of chocolate.

The frugal innovation model, oriented towards sustainability, becomes a path for the development of innovative businesses that generate value in the cocoa production chain. In this sense, for this topic to solidify as a field of research that can bring relevant theoretical and practical contributions, it is suggested that new studies focus, among others, on business models that prioritize the cause and not simply the trends. It is necessary to recognize the ethical, environmental, social, economic and sustainable attributes and values that delineate the cocoa production chain in southern Bahia.

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