

## **COCOA PRODUCTION IN CAMEROON**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Cocoa remains the main cash crop to more than 75% of the population in Cameroon. Its production is mainly by peasant farmers who, even though they are the main producers of the high demand crop, do not earn sufficient income to meet their needs and maintain a moderate standard of living. They are left to suffer, which endangers the cocoa sector and their entire livelihood.

Some factors account for this situation, which are outlined below:

- Neglect of the sector by the government since this sector was privatized without necessarily letting the peasant farmers know what privatization was all about, as initially under the National Produce Marketing Board (NPMB).
- Poor knowledge on the exact period to apply fungicides and pesticides on the cocoa fields, and resistance to insect's pests on particular chemicals.
- Lack of inputs available for the farmers such as fungicides, pesticides, as well as lack of transportation and production resources such as trucks to convey cocoa from farms to homes, and homes to market, diggers, vessels, tarpaulins, and ovens.
- Lack of warehouses to store dried cocoa.
- Lack of sound market knowledge to avoid prices been dictated to farmers by buyers.
- Poor farm-to-market roads.
- Lack of cocoa drying facilities.
- Poor and falling prices, e.g., Local prices fell from 450 FRS cfa to 150 FRS in 1997 and from 1200 cfa to 400 FRS cfa in 2004.

Due to these factors, the cocoa Agro forestry sector has been threatened, with very negative consequences such as a rural exodus of the youths and working age population who are leaving to pursue better opportunities abroad or in cities. This leaves the old poor and children in villages to fend for themselves and tend to the cocoa. This contributes to increased poverty, poor health conditions, prevalence of diseases especially HIV/Aids, malaria and hunger within villages, increasing child labor, and no child education. Moreover crops like Cassava, Yams, and Cocoyam are cultivated instead of cocoa trees, hence deteriorating soils. These crops are staple food and must grow only when all vegetation is cut off. The tubers absorb many nutrients from the soil and do not produce much biomass for replenishing the soil.

These problems need to be arrested. Cocoa production offers significant opportunities for poverty alleviation and sustainable development if the necessary infrastructure and support is facilitated.

**Keywords:** Agroforestry, cocoa production, diseases, farm to market roads, poverty and privatization

## **INTRODUCTION**

Cocoa remains the main cash crop to more than 75% of the population in Cameroon. Its production is mainly by peasant farmers who, even though they are the main producers of the high demand crop, do not earn sufficient income to meet their needs and maintain a moderate standard of living. They are left to suffer, which endangers the cocoa sector and their entire livelihood.

The three main factors affecting the cocoa agroforestry sector in Cameroon are:

1. Poor knowledge on the part of farmers
2. Community poverty
3. Government influence

### **Poor Knowledge**

Lack of education in all forms has been very devastating in cocoa producing communities, rendering almost every family helpless. Consequently these communities depend on their traditional lifestyles and they remain voiceless in decision making about their own resources. Issues of poor knowledge go beyond education alone and cover all activities from production through to marketing. Poor knowledge includes the following issues:

- Poor knowledge of privatization and how it affects the cocoa producer.
- Poor marketing knowledge that would allow producers to search for better markets
- Poor technical knowledge of pest and pesticides application
- Poor knowledge to engage in alternative income generating activities
- Lack of education on modern farming methods
- Poor knowledge of processing and marketing of cocoa and cocoa products
- Poor knowledge of their rights to land and the environment

### **Poverty**

Poverty has caused millions of families to suffer and die due to minor illness. Illiteracy has also been on the rise. Poverty also limits capital available to farmers. Lack of capital has had huge impacts on cocoa production, including:

- Lack of capital to purchase inputs such as spraying machines, fungicides, diggers, and shovels
- Lack of capital to purchase and build cocoa drying ovens
- Lack of capital to purchase transportation equipment
- Lack of capital to build warehouses to store dried cocoa
- Lack of capital to construct farm-to-market roads



Dry cocoa beans in bags



Cocoa beans transported locally



Black pod cocoa disease

### **Government influence**

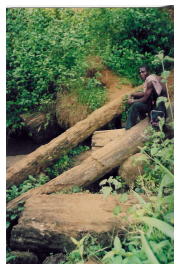
Government officials tend to collaborate with stakeholders in the sector to impose prices on the farmers, use fake scales with the farmers. There is no longer any assistance from the tax control department of the ministry of finances, as was previously used to effectively monitor and trap merchants using illegal spring balances and scales to purchase cocoa and cocoa products. Additionally, they have not provided any education on best practices for the use of these products.

Neglect of the sector by government due to privatization without sensitizing the local population about what privatization is all about:

- Collapse of the National Produce Marketing board due to embezzlement of funds and corruption of the Board of Directors and stakeholders of the sector who have never been put to question up to present date.
- Failure of the government to recognize the problems of these communities like lack of farm to market roads, social facilities like hospitals, schools and school teachers
- Failure for the government to recognize and fund projects forwarded by associations, communities and other stakeholders to support the cocoa Agro forestry sector



Wood Bridge



Collapsed Wood Bridge



Farmer crossing river on Foot

### **Consequences of these factors on cocoa production and communities**

The impacts of these factors have been vast, including resistance of insect pests to particular chemicals.

Also, there has been rural to urban migration by the working population to search for better opportunities around the world leaving the old and the young back home helpless. This often contributes to the use of child labor, poor hygienic and sanitation facilities, disease prevalence, hunger and malnutrition. When the youth and working population are away the old and the young cannot keep their own surroundings clean. This can encourage the spread of mosquitoes and malaria that has been promoted by close bushes. Moreover these communities will also lack money to obtain medicines to prevent the spread of a disease if there is an outbreak.

There is increased waste in the production of cocoa since there is reduced labour force and lack of adequate fungicides to combat black pod cocoa disease that requires constant and adequate application during heavy rains which is very common in the equatorial rainforest of Cameroon.

Many families then prefer to grow other crops like Cassava, Yams, Mellon, which on their part do not grow well among other trees and as such leads to the complete clearance of the vegetation and trees causing rapid land degradation, loss of top soil quality, erosion, drought with negative impacts on biodiversity.



Typical forest.



Fallow after 5 years.



Dialoguing with Community leaders

### **Damages and wastes**

Damages and wastes in cocoa production is a common experience among the farmers, with an annual loss of 30%.

- From insect pests like the capsides bugs causing ripening of immature cocoa pods
- Damages from parasites causing death of cocoa trees e.g. mistletoe
- Damages from cassava cultivators who by the cause of tilling the ground cut the roots of cocoa trees
- Damages caused by Black pod Cocoa disease when fungicides are applied at the wrong times and especially during heavy storms. Sometimes these pesticides are labelled to give a different image of a particular product where as they may be dangerous to crops and farmers.
- Damages caused by overheating and stress when trees are exposed to direct sunlight.

### **Solutions**

The cocoa agroforestry sector in Cameroon remains the best means of managing and protecting forests, land, water and all other issues of biodiversity as a means to promote sustainable development and combat rural poverty and hunger especially as 75 % of the country's population depends on its production. Solutions will be to increase capacity building within these

communities, build infrastructure, provide government support for effective production, loans for infrastructure development for farm to market roads, farm-to-farm roads. Support will also be needed for capital loans to purchase inputs like, spraying machines, fungicides, transportation vehicles (trucks), and build warehouses to preserve dried dry cocoa.

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