

THE SUSTAINABILITY OF CAMERON COCOA ECONOMY

A) BACKGROUND

Cocoa production was introduced in the coastal zone of Cameroon since 1892 from the South America. Cameroonian cocoa belt represents about 37% of total cultivated soil of the country. With about 180.000tons, Cameroon is the fourth producer after Cote d' Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria.

Cocoa is grown mainly in two areas. The coastal zone and the Center South East region. The coastal zone extends from the area around mount Cameroon to kribé. Attitude is generally below 400mm except in area around mount Cameroon. The main annual rainfall pattern is between 2000mm to 5000mm. The mean temperature varies from 22°C to 29°C. The second most important area covers the Center, South and Eastern provinces. The attitude ranging between 500m and 850m. The mean temperature is around 25°C and mean annual rainfall between 1500mm and 2000mm

B. THE LEADING ROLE OF THE COCOA SECTOR IN CAMEROON

Cocoa is one crop, which has in the past played a preponderant role in the economy of our rural communities in particular, and Cameroon in general. Within the last 10years production for Cameroon rose from 130.000 to 180.000 tons

Within the same period, export earnings equally registered a decline because of the drastic fall in world market prices during the same period. However, cocoa still remain the pillar of our export economy. Furthermore, cocoa is one main activity, which has guaranteed employment for the bulk of our rural population. In fact, the overwhelming majority of our rural community derives at least 90% of their income from this activity.

Now, this is certainly not good performance if we consider the potential in our farmers and of course our extremely rich soils. Besides, some other countries like Cote d' Ivoire seem to be doing enviable well.

C. THE SUSTAINABILITY OF COCOA ECONOMY OF CAMEROON

In this topic we shall look at the current situation of cocoa production, quality, marketing and capacity building with farmer organizations and actions to be taken to guarantee sustainability.

1. PRODUCTION COMPONENT

CURRENT SITUATION

Generally, farms are overwhelmingly quite old. The average age of a farm is about 25 years. As old as these farms are, they are not properly maintained. They are low density and in need of rehabilitation or renovation. They require better management in terms of pruning, grafting and maintenance. About 80% of these cocoa farms produce 300kg/Ha. Farming population is aged. Very little is undertaken in terms of farms extension because it is common knowledge that old people hardly open new farms. We definitely need younger and more vibrant workforce.

Cocoa research continues to be handled by the Institute for Agronomic Research (IRAD). IRAD is our only research Institute that researches on perennial crops (cocoa, coffee, fruit, oil palm and rubber) and marketable tubers (root tuber, market gardening crops, and plantains).

In Cameroon there are specialized cocoa research Institutes. These Institutes handle every thing concerning cocoa research. There is shortage of cocoa nurseries. Seedpods and seedlings production as well as distribution is done in a very limited capacity.

There is high dependency on chemical control with weak performances. There is the use of farmer Field School to train farmers on integrated pest management, by the sustainable tree crop program and other Institutions.

ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN.

- a.) Implement a farmer extension scheme, which shall principally be geared towards young farmers insertion with the necessary attractive incentives. The future belongs to the youths and we believe that inserting our youths is a positive step in the right direction. First of all the problem of the youth unemployment would have been solved and the future of the entire cocoa sector would have been ensured.

A) Special package for youths insertion could be :

- 50% subsidy in the cost of planting materials
- A grant be given to youths to purchase farm tools
- Free phytosanitary fight against black pod disease and capsids

When we talk of long term sustainability, we are simply referring to projections in the deployment of productive factors, the management of the immediate environment and expectations in productive capacity and returns. Of course we are placing the youths squarely in the future.

B) Government should eliminate price speculations, and hikes of fungicides, insecticides, and pesticides in our local markets during peak seasons. Such speculations have constantly placed extra burden on the precarious income of our farmers.

C) Government should eliminate extortion of farmers by middlemen and unscrupulous buying agents who supply chemicals to farmers at the beginning of the season and to collect at the close of the season, produce worth about 200% of the market value of chemicals initially supplied. This practice is morally wrong. Besides, farmers are reduced to enclavement through such practices.

D) Government should eliminate chemicals of doubtful quality. Chemicals of doubtful quality have flooded the market in recent years. People with little knowledge of chemical composition carry out mixtures. This consequences are far reaching and with a bearing on long-term productivity of farms. The state should move to completely eliminate this practice and to ensure that only standard quality chemicals are in use.

E) Government should provide cooperatives the means to work with other financial houses to better handle the chemical scheme.

F) There is need to involve the big cocoa buying companies, put a revolving fund to buy chemicals in sufficient quantity and quality and provide to farmers. This shall in reality guarantee the quality of our cocoa.

G). The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural development needs to train farmers on the use of integrated pest management in cocoa farm

H) Diversification within the cocoa farm. If the price of cocoa is very low, farmers need to diversify to the cultivation of Non Timber Forest Products or other crops.

I. Best Agricultural practices should be applied in farms in terms of

- Choice of planting materials
- Spacing/planting density
- Shade management
- Chemical application
- Pruning
- Farm management system
- Rehabilitation technology
- Harvesting and post harvest practices

J) Cocoa production is projected to attain 200.000mt by the year 2015. This would be achieved through assistance to farmers by the government to support programs for cocoa tree crop nurseries with high yielding hybrid varieties.

MARKETING COMPONENT

POST HARVEST

CURRENT SITUATION.

In the Center South and Eastern regions of Cameroon, the climatic condition favors the sun drying of cocoa. The rainfall in this area is not much. Unlike in the South West Province where the rain fall is very high and heavy, sun drying during the rainy season is far fetched. Hence cocoa drying during the rainy season is by the used of artificial dryers. These artificial dryers originally, were not properly designed and maintained. Hence fume and smoke are bound to appear on the cocoa beans. Thanks to the European Union that provided 2500 Samoan ovens to the South West Farmers within a period of eight year. At least 20% of the demand was satisfied. Farmers were very glad. About 70% of the farmers still used local materials, which are very poorly designed. Recently the European Union has raised the problem of Polycyclic Aromatic hydrocarbon contamination, which is not showing the sustainability of the cocoa sector in Cameroon. PAH is a class of

chemical compound that are very harmful to people. One of the most possible sources of PAH in cocoa is contact of cocoa beans with fumes, smoke and hydrocarbon.

ACTION TO BE TAKEN.

Sensitization of the farmers through the Farmer Field School and other communication means on preventive measures to be taken to avoid Polycyclic Aromatic hydrocarbon contamination .

- Cocoa beans must be sun dried.
- When artificial dryers must be used, they must be properly designed and maintained to avoid any fumes and smoke.
- Drying cocoa beans by the roadside should be avoided.
- Drying cocoa beans near open fire must be avoided.

FINANCING

CURRENT SITUATION

In Cameroon the farmer is unable to obtain credit to boost production. Since the disappearance of FONADER, our farmers do not have any reasonable credit scheme and this is serious because our banks are commercial and not very interested in farming projects.

ACTION TO BE TAKEN

Government should open an Agricultural bank and institute a cocoa revolving credit fund for the farmers of Cameroon.

CAPACITY BUILDING OF FARMERS ORGANIZATION

CURRENT SITUATION

With the appearance of the new cooperatives law of 1992 in Cameroon, there has been no policy to sustain the cooperatives by giving them a good bargaining power. There has been no opportunity of giving the cooperatives the capacity to handle the marketing of cocoa as it was during the days of the National Produce Marketing Board. Following the liberalization of the cocoa sector, many cooperatives have been unable to compete against new traders/exporters who have access to cheaper internationally raised finances. Membership in the cooperatives have reduced tremendously. There has also been a

proliferation of common Initiative groups with no basic structures, making the markets to be chaotic.

The only complete solution would be for the Government to empower and/or assist in the development of genuine cooperative organizations as an important step to retailing various services to small farmers. These services could include financing, price hedging and research/extension. Some assistance could be considered by donors to strengthen the capacity of cooperatives in acquiring necessary skills in finance, storage, marketing, quality and business development. There is the necessity to have a formal business relationship between the big importers of cocoa and cooperatives. This could help monitor the quality and trace ability. Government could set up a financial mechanism for the cooperatives to render central service to its members. Government could decide to take a certain percentage of the cocoa fund for the reinforcement of the cooperatives.

Take for example marketing of cocoa, the current situation is that there is no fair relationship between the buyers and the cooperatives. Individual buyers are dealing with individual farmers. There is lack of a centralized quality control unit. Each buyer makes his quality the way that suit him. About 75% of the cooperatives in Cameroon are hardly carrying out the marketing of members produce because of their weak financial situation. The members are not loyal to their cooperatives and the cooperatives spirit is hardly there. If the cooperatives are empowered they shall play a strategic role at the level of production, quality and marketing. Through the cooperatives Agricultural chemical, could begotten even on credit and supplied to farmers in sufficient quantity, better quality and at affordable prices because of bulk sales. This is the same with farm tools. The revamping of the phytosanitary treatment of cocoa farms which has a direct impact on the quality of our cocoa can only work well with the cooperatives involvement. Through the cooperatives, farmers will know prices of cocoa easily. And if the prices are favourable to farmers this shall generate them more income and be encouraged to produce more. Through the cooperatives, data could easily be collected from farmers. All statistical data are therefore readily available and the cooperative is the easiest means of translating information to farmers.

Farmer organization is bound to improve with a more vibrant grassroots and the restructuring of their organization as an executing Agency and a Re-energized Farmers Organization is one of the best guarantees for long term sustainability.

We should be quite particular with the extent to which the participation of farmers' Organization and the entire beneficiary population takes center stage. Besides, decision making at all levels of the cooperatives should stick to its democratic principle of effective representation. This is a no small weapon for continuity.

OTHER MEASURES TAKEN TO GUARANTEE THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE CAMEROON COCOA ECONOMY

- Measure taken by the International Labour Organisation in Cameroon together with the local Non Governmental organization to sensitize the population on child labour issues in cocoa farms.
- The yearly exhibition by the American Embassy to sensitize the Cameroon population on the fight against child labour
- The tree crop Production, marketing and livelihoods project sponsored by the United States department of Agriculture and executed in the Centre and South West Province of Cameroon by the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA)
This project is being implemented under four major components
 - Production Activities
 - Income Generating activities
 - Capacity building activities
 - Micro credit activities
- The launching of the cocoa fund by the Government of Cameroon shall have a great impact on the sustainability of the cocoa economy
- The Cocoa Coffee inter-professional Board of Cameroon with its mission to guarantee a healthy and fair competition between operation within the sector, To facilitate transactions in internal markets and at exportation to defend the origin of our cocoa.
- The National Cocoa and Coffee Board of Cameroon with its policy to check on quality of our cocoa, collect statistic, facilitate export, and represent our cocoa industry abroad.

- The penetration of alternative markets such as the organic single origin, fair trade markets which offer a better return because of the price premium they earn. Some farmer's organizations are already benefiting from this.
- Government should encourage the promotion and consumption of cocoa – development of cocoa consumption habits. Cameroonians should be sensitized on the nutrition and health values of cocoa products.
- Government should fund effectively research on cocoa
- Government should improve the farms to market roads in the sustainability of the cocoa economy of Cameroon.

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