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The ‘Livelihood’ Challenge and Sustainable Agriculture: Evidence from Smallholder Cocoa Farming Households in Nigeria

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Abstract

Global trade includes commodities produced by smallholder farmers from countries, such as Sub-Saharan Africa; as such their ability to participate in agricultural value chains in a sustainable way is important. The complexities underlying farmers’ choice within the agri-food systems are often neglected in debates on conventional or agro-ecological agriculture. This study examined such complexities within the Agricultural Policy Research for Africa (APRA) consortium with a focus on Nigeria’s Cocoa Value Chain. The trajectories into the sector; current production practices and commercialisation models were examined using a mixed methods approach. A sequential exploratory design was adopted; data were collected through Key Person Interviews, Focus Group Discussions and observation; and surveys. The discussion themes included the development along the value chain; the survey included production, commercialisation, and livelihoods data. The communities were selected through a multistage sampling technique from Osun, Ogun and Ondo states; the respondents were selected through a random sampling procedure from these. The information was analysed using themes; problem tree analyses; descriptive and econometric tools. The results show that trajectories into the cocoa sector include inheritance, labour-employment and marriage; these have several implications for land ownership, control and rights- such as tension between land owners and renters which is boosting illegal mining and logging. Access to land, labour and credit facilities are barriers to participation in the sector; current production practices include a similitude of organic and conventional approaches; farmers have ‘mixed’ economic trees for multiple streams of income and for social reasons; the commercialisation models show high dominance by produce buyers. The probit analysis shows that planting improved variety could improve the poverty status of farmers; while the tobit analysis shows an evidence of ‘over’ commercialisation. At the micro level, farmer’s decisions on resource allocation are driven by own goals- options that bring immediate ‘prosperity’ are favoured; the meso level shows existing rural land, labour and credit markets governed by economic and socio-cultural factors; the macro level shows a major failure with respect to rural infrastructure, markets, land and mining policies. Policies that will ease these multi-level complexities need to be implemented if the world would be fed.

Keywords: Agro-ecological, livelihood, multi-level, policies, trajectories, value chain

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