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How Is the Issue of Overageing of Cocoa Farming Households Influenced by their Endowment with Livelihood Capitals?

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Abstract

The ageing of rural populations will negatively affect agricultural productivity and impact the socio-economic structure of rural communities. In Alto Beni, Bolivia, 70% of the cocoa producers are over 50 years old and this ageing of cocoa farmers could lead to less productive cocoa farming and accelerate migration to urban areas. This study aims to describe the problem of ageing cocoa farmers in Alto Beni, how coping with old age is linked to households' endowment with livelihood capitals and proposes measures to address the problem of ageing. 11 qualitative interviews were used to identify different perspectives on the problem of ageing in cocoa production in Alto Beni. Based on a survey with 120 farming households, it was assessed how households are equipped with different livelihood capitals and how a household's livelihood endowment influences the way they deal with old age.

The analysis of the qualitative interviews showed that older cocoa farmers work as long as their health permits. The main reasons for continuing working in old age are insufficient financial resources, a lack of formal pension and social security systems. If elderly farmers lived with their children, they were taken care of. Such farmers living alone belonged to the most impoverished group in Alto Beni with the lowest livelihood endowment. In addition, it is difficult for the older cocoa farmers to secure the farm take-over. The younger and partly also the older generation do not consider cocoa farming to be a livelihood-securing activity. Reasons for that perception are mainly low and fluctuating cocoa market prices and the use of inefficient cocoa production practices. The analysis of the livelihood survey showed that how cocoa farming households cope with ageing does not depend on the family's endowment with livelihood capitals. The main influences on coping with old age are socio-cultural perceptions of cocoa farming and the insufficient pension system. Training and education in cocoa farming practices, more collaboration between cocoa farmers, their cooperatives and actors from international organisations, science and government could offset the ageing of cocoa farmers in Alto Beni.

Keywords: Ageing of rural population, Alto Beni, Bolivia, cocoa production, livelihood assessment, rural development