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Challenges for Cocoa Farms Diversification Towards a Sustainable Scheme in the Peruvian Amazon

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Abstract

Cocoa (*Theobroma cacao* L) is a plant from the Latin American rainforest and the main economic resource for the welfare of many farmers in such areas. In fact, the Juanjui municipality in the San Martin department is characterised as one of the most important centres for storing, drying, and marketing cocoa beans in the Peruvian Amazon, and this place is the meeting point for farmers who sell their products. However, the high dependency on this crop makes the smallholders vulnerable, affecting their economy and food security, a situation which, under the Covid-19 pandemic became even worse. Therefore, this study aimed to analyse the agricultural practices for cocoa production and the species available to produce annual and perennial fruits, timber, meat and eggs, and non-timber forest products within the farms of small producers in the municipality of Juanjui. The methodology was based on a focus group discussion with a total of 20 farmers to analyse the effects of the production and sale of cocoa beans in the context of the pandemic, a survey to 20 cocoa producers, and 2 interviews with the association manager. The results obtained show that although farmers have some other species associated with cocoa on their farms (citrus, mango, coconut, medicinal plants, fast- and medium-growing timber species), as well as a few farm animals (guinea pigs, chickens, pigs, and ducks), these alternatives are not being used towards a diversified production model at a commercial level. Another outstanding result was that the Covid-19 pandemic has delayed cultivation tasks, and the price of cocoa has been quite affected. In consequence, the group of farmers decided to create a cocoa association with the target to apply for credits, incentives, and access to better markets. The focus group discussions revealed the eagerness of the farmers to know more about the productive, commercial, and environmental potential of the species other than cocoa present in their farms. Therefore, this study proposes models and strategies for diversification as alternatives to achieve a more profitable and sustainable production.

Keywords: Agroforestry systems, farm diversification, pandemic uncertainty, Peruvian Amazon, *theobroma cacao* L

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