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“Can agroecological farming feed the world?
Farmers’ and academia’s views”

How agroecology can help overcome governance challenges to cocoa mass spraying in Ghana

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Abstract

There are growing concerns about rising pesticides (i.e., herbicides, insecticides, fungicides) used in global agriculture. These concerns include mounting evidence that excessive pesticide use obliterates biodiversity, contaminating groundwater and food while risking humanity’s exposure to carcinogens. Consequently, in a recent report, the FAO, UNDP & UNEP call on governments to repurpose, starting with reviewing how existing subsidy programs affect livelihoods and nature. This paper responds to this call by critically analysing Ghana’s cocoa mass spraying programme (CMSP), which the government introduced to improve the country’s cocoa production and foreign exchange earnings. Data were collected from 125 actors, including government officials, cocoa farmers, cocoa purchasing companies, and non-governmental organisations in Ghana’s Juabeso district through interviews, focus groups and process net maps, and content analysis to identify the actors’ experiences with the CMSP. The findings reveal a complex mix of actors riddled with multiple governance challenges that impede the effective delivery of the CMSP. The CMSP has nurtured a pesticide treadmill within the communities. However, because the programme cannot address farmers’ agrochemical demands adequately, multiple farmers use lower doses of agrochemicals or explore unapproved agrochemicals, posing health and safety risks to the farmers and increasing the chances of creating agrochemicals resistant pests and diseases. Moreover, farmers are already losing a good part of their cocoa to pests and diseases, affecting their incomes and wellbeing. The findings raise questions about the sustainability of the CMSP and cocoa livelihoods. Therefore, we reflect on how adopting agroecology approaches can help mitigate the existing pesticide treadmill and improve the chances of future-proofing cocoa production to protect lives and livelihoods in the region.

Keywords: Cocoa agroforestry, food systems, pesticides, subsidies