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

Agroecological strategies among Ivorian cocoa farmers links between farm characteristics and varying ecological cultivation strategies

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Abstract

Over the past decade, in West African cocoa production, efforts to deliver trainings on more sustainable production techniques have been undertaken by various public and private actors. While initially the focus was mainly on Good Agricultural Practices, agroecological elements have entered mainstream sustainability projects and respective trainings have been delivered, for instance in the frame of certification projects or development cooperation. Yet, there are still little insights on adoption rates and the reasons why cocoa producers decide to opt for agroecological practices or intensification based on conventional practices.

Focussing on the variances between different farm types and farmers’ perceptions regarding most pressing challenges and difficulties with the application of training contents, this study seeks to contribute to an improved understanding of impact factors for the successful application of agroecological cocoa cultivation practices in Côte d’Ivoire. The main research questions are as follows: How do farm and household characteristics impact cocoa farmers’ perceptions towards livelihood and production challenges, including the ability to adapt agroecological practices? Where do cocoa producers from different farm types see most need for change regarding sustainability interventions and in their local enabling environment? What are cocoa producers’ attitudes towards ecological cultivation practices?

In the frame of accompanying research, this study investigates perceptions of cocoa farmers in five cocoa areas in Côte d’Ivoire (Abengourou, Aboisso, Agboville, Divo and Yamoussoukro) targeted by the Pro-Planteurs project. Over the past two years, these cocoa farmers receive training in Farmer Business Schools, diversification and agroforestry systems. To assess farm type differences and related impacts, focus group discussions with targeted cocoa farmers will be held as well as a participatory multi-stakeholder workshop on implementation challenges and experiences conducted. Additionally, a household survey among approximately 300 targeted cocoa farmers will be realised in order to quantify farmers’ perceptions towards implementation and other livelihood challenges. Based on socioeconomic, production, geolocation, and institutional factors, the farms of respondents will be clustered by typical characteristics, in order to allow for a more nuanced analysis on how these shape the position and perceptions of cocoa farmers on challenges and project interventions.

Keywords: Agroecology, cocoa, Côte d'Ivoire, farm clusters