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Off-farm livelihood diversification enhances food security among cocoa farmers in Ghana

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Abstract

Cocoa farming in Ghana, a crucial income source for smallholder farmers, faces multiple challenges including limited profitability, sustainability concerns, poor yields, and household food insecurity. To mitigate risks, farmers are increasingly engaging in off-farm activities for income diversification. This research explores the socioeconomic factors influencing off-farm engagement, evaluates its impact on income diversification and output, and investigates the limitations of cocoa production in the study area. Data was collected through interviews and surveys, employing descriptive statistics, regression analysis, and nonparametric tests. The study emphasises the significance of off-farm work in boosting income and output for cocoa farmers. Age, farming experience, and land ownership influence the likelihood of engaging in off-farm jobs. Age and land ownership positively correlate with off-farm engagement (P-value 0.066 and 0.010, respectively). At the same time, farming experience exhibits a negative correlation, suggesting that less experienced farmers are more likely to adopt off-farm jobs. Limited access to credit and health concerns also play a role in off-farm engagement among cocoa farmers. Several challenges associated with cocoa production were uncovered, including limited land size, ageing farmers, child labour, unfavourable land tenure laws, and climate change. Farmers with off-farm jobs demonstrated higher incomes and outputs than those without such diversification. These findings contribute to the understanding of sustainable cocoa farming and rural livelihood strategies in Ghana, emphasising the importance of promoting off-farm opportunities to enhance income and household food security. Based on these findings, policy recommendations are proposed: promote off-farm opportunities, improve access to credit, implement sustainable land management practices, provide farmer education and training, and strengthen efforts to eradicate child labour. These recommendations aim to support sustainable cocoa farming, increase farmer incomes, improve household food security, and create a resilient agricultural sector in Ghana.

Keywords: Challenges, cocoa farming, Ghana, household food insecurity, income diversification, off-farm activities, smallholder farmers, sustainability