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Cocoa production in Liberia: Current status and prospects of reviving the sector

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Abstract

The Liberian cocoa industry faces major challenges limiting its contribution to national economic growth and farmers' livelihood. This study assessed the current status of cocoa farms by surveying 241 farmers between November 2024 and April 2025 and is implementing measures increasing cocoa yields and incomes.

The average age of cocoa farmers is 51.4 years, with 75 % being older than 40. Twenty seven % of cocoa farms are owned by females averaging 47.6 years compared to 52.8 for male farmers. Most farmers have one cocoa farm (79.7 %), almost 20 % have 2 farms, few farmers have more than 2 farms. The cocoa farms considered most important for the household, are on average 32 years old, with 35.1 % being younger than 20 years, 27.2 % being 20 to 40 years old, 35.1 % are older than 40 years. The average farm is 1.37 ha, with 42.7 % being <1 ha, 50.2 % between 1 and 2.4 ha and 7.1 % are >2.4 ha with a maximum of 6 ha.

Ninety five% of the farmers reported their farms as organic, mainly due to absence of pesticides or fertilisers. However, only 22 % are certified or under evaluation for certification.

Cocoa yields average 250 kg/ha dry beans in the most important farm, with 59.3 % producing yields <250 kg/ha, 33.8 % produced yields up to 500 kg/ha and 6.9 % attained yields >500 kg/ha.

Surveys indicated older farms being heavily shaded (>50 % cover) and infested with black pod disease (*Phytophthora megakarya*), causing severe losses due to absent crop protection. Mirid and stem borer damages are frequent. Many farms being older than 40 years likely contributes to low productivity.

The GROW⁻² project addresses these challenges systemically by training on “Best Agro-nomic Practices” and testing organic and conventional crop protection methods, depending on certification status. Soil acidity is managed by lime application in all trials and fertiliser is applied where conventional pesticides are tested. Currently 22 trials are established in 5 COOPs in Nimba and Bong Couty. Data on bean yield, farm-gate prices, labour use and input costs are collected to develop recommendations on best suited production regimes to increase overall production but most importantly increase farmers' incomes from cocoa without compromising the agro ecology.

Keywords: Cocoa value chain, crop protection, farm gate prices, input supply

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