

# Management practices to improve the cocoa bean value chain in Sierra Leone: Cocoa bean production in Sierra Leone

Aliou MOININA<sup>1</sup>, Rachid LAHLALI<sup>2\*</sup>, Mohammed BOULIF<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Agriculture, Government Technical Institute (GTI) Kailahun, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), Sierra Leone

<sup>2</sup> Department of Crop Protection, Phytopathology Unit, École Nationale d'Agriculture de Meknès, Morocco

<sup>3</sup> School of Agriculture, Fertilization and Environmental Sciences, Mohammed VI Polytechnic University, Ben Guerir, Morocco

\*Corresponding author  
rlahlali@enameknes.ac.ma

Received 28/03/2023

Accepted 03/04/2023

## Abstract

The cocoa bean value chain creates the largest source of employment and livelihood in the agricultural sector of Eastern Sierra Leone. The present review spans solutions to poor management practices, thereby improving the quality of cocoa beans and, by extension, the income of cocoa farmers. The major problems leading to the low yield of cocoa are unimproved varieties, low soil fertility, inadequate phytosanitary practices, climate change, aging of some plantations, and poor postharvest handling practices. The Sierra Leonean cocoa farmers adopt cocoa agroforestry systems. However, the typology of plantation management practices (climate-smart agriculture, organic agriculture, and conventional agriculture) that influence the cocoa quality parameters remains little known. Fairtrade, UTZ certified (Rainforest Alliance), Ecocert, and USDA Organic are the external certification organizations regulating the phytosanitary requirements of dried cocoa beans in Sierra Leone. The certifications influence the prices of cocoa bean export which remain vague to the farmers. The concise review helps recommend the conceptual framework of the cocoa bean value chain to all actors. There is a need for specific certification skills training courses in the country for proper inspection and audit of cocoa phytosanitary practices.

**Keywords:** Cocoa production, postharvest handling practices, phytosanitary regulations, cocoa bean value chain, Sierra Leone

## INTRODUCTION

Cocoa is one of the main cash crops in Sierra Leone. The country produces dried cocoa beans between 14,000 and 20,000 metric tons per year, with an average yield of 410 kg/ha. In 2017, the country was ranked 17<sup>th</sup> for both production and area harvested among all cocoa-producing countries because of its poor management practices (FAOSTAT, 2020). The World Bank Trade Statistics in 2017 records Sierra Leone's cocoa export earnings of US\$ 14,461 million (EU, 2019) despite the low yield as compared to other West African countries. As a major cash crop, cocoa farming is the main source of livelihood of rural inhabitants of Eastern Sierra Leone.

However, cocoa production in Sierra Leone is confronted with problems along its value chain. Indisputably, the major problems of poor quality cocoa beans in the country are poor research on cocoa quality parameters, sub-standard inputs, climate change, farmer's knowledge and skills in managing cocoa plantation, and inconsistent transparency in marketing. The latter has huge impact on a cocoa farmer's income as they only become more impoverished (MAF, 2019).

For any disruption along cocoa value chain, farmers become more vulnerable than any other actors in Sierra Leone. Lack of structured good management practices greatly affect the quality of dried cocoa beans from production unit to commercialization unit as a result of the entrance of inexperienced export participants (FAO, 2007). The quality parameters are often imposed on the produce of inexperienced farmers by the middlemen

and cocoa export agencies. They provide the necessary quality parameter indicators to farmers *in situ* of transaction. Moreover, the naivety of most cocoa farmers in marketing of their produce is a source of gross wealth of the middlemen and their associates. Despite the annual inflation in dried cocoa prices, making cocoa agribusiness more lucrative (Oluyole, 2005), Sierra Leonean cocoa farmers incur drastic price discounts because of the little knowledge of grades of their cocoa beans. According to Levai *et al.* (2015), licensed middlemen companies hardly respect bean quality and buying operations set by farmers. To avoid the stress from the companies operating on intermediary services, cocoa farmers could sell to anyone ready to buy dried cocoa beans. Appropriate actions are not considered regarding to the quality control of the produce. In Sierra Leone, the aforementioned quality parameters have not been officially reported and made known to farmers. As such, the quality is decided by the middlemen to the detriment of the cocoa farmers.

Another aspect that requires more transparency and technical skills are the cocoa certification schemes in Sierra Leone. Predominantly, organic cocoa farming is practiced with the knowledge to few farmers. Through contract farming between middlemen and farmers, the farmers are supported to produce cocoa beans based on the specifications. The certifications schemes regulating cocoa production in the country are Fairtrade, UTZ Certified (Rainforest Alliance), USDA Organic, and EU Organic (Ecocert). The specifications set by these are not clearly known to both the government authorities

and the farmers. As a matter of fact, these certification courses are not introduced in the educational system in Sierra Leone. The certification is only known to the exporting agencies due to the auditing requirements. According to Uribe-Leitz and Ruf (2019), the certification challenges have impeded the improvement of cocoa value chain and farmers' income. Consequently, the hindrance extends to the contribution of cocoa sector to the agricultural GDP.

Through in-depth review of literature, the authors seek to make a conceptual framework of cocoa bean value chain adaptable to the context of both smallholder cocoa farmers and large scale cocoa producers in the world.

## COCOA PRODUCTION IN SIERRA LEONE

Cocoa bean is predominantly produced in the Eastern region of Sierra Leone of which Kailahun District accounts for about 114,125 ha, followed by Kenema District (58,086 ha) and Kono District (43,232 ha). It is also commercially produced in Bo District with an area of 11,715 ha (Statistics Sierra Leone, 2017). For the past two decades, cocoa yield in Sierra Leone has been varying on average, between 300 kg/ha to 400 kg/ha (FAOSTAT, 2020) (Figure 1). However, calculated yield in 2019 was higher than 500 kg/ha. Among the major West African cocoa belt, the cocoa yield in Sierra Leone is greater than that of Nigeria and Liberia but closely compared to that of Ghana. Surprisingly, the cocoa yield of Côte d'Ivoire which is the world largest cocoa producing country, has been linearly decreasing in the last decade.

## Climate of cocoa-producing region in Sierra Leone

The country has a tropical climate with principally two seasons; the dry season, which lasts from October to March, and the rainy season lasts from May to October. Rainfall levels range between 1,500 mm in the interior areas of the country and 5,100 mm in the coastal areas. According to the interval of rainfall in the West Africa Cocoa belt, the rainfall in Sierra Leone is very favorable for cocoa production (Schroth *et al.*, 2016). The interior plateaus, mountains and inland valley swamps of the eastern region of the country are suitable for the cultivation cocoa.

## Varieties of cocoa in Sierra Leone

Cocoa was introduced in Sierra Leone in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by the Portuguese sailors. Also, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were cocoa varieties from the present day Ghana. Today, Sierra Leone has over 49,000 cocoa farm families which are predominantly found in the Eastern region of the country. Moreover, there has not been any official report on the collection of the cocoa varieties (MAF, 2019). Due to the phenotypic characteristics of cocoa cultivars, Criollo and Forastero are grown in the country. The Amazon variety, which belongs to Forastero varieties, is widely grown in the cocoa-producing districts in Sierra Leone. Even though there is little information on Amazon cocoa in Sierra Leone, the Forastero variety is divided into the Lower and Upper Amazon. Amongst other characteristics, these varieties are known for their vigor growth, large beans, good yields and disease resis-

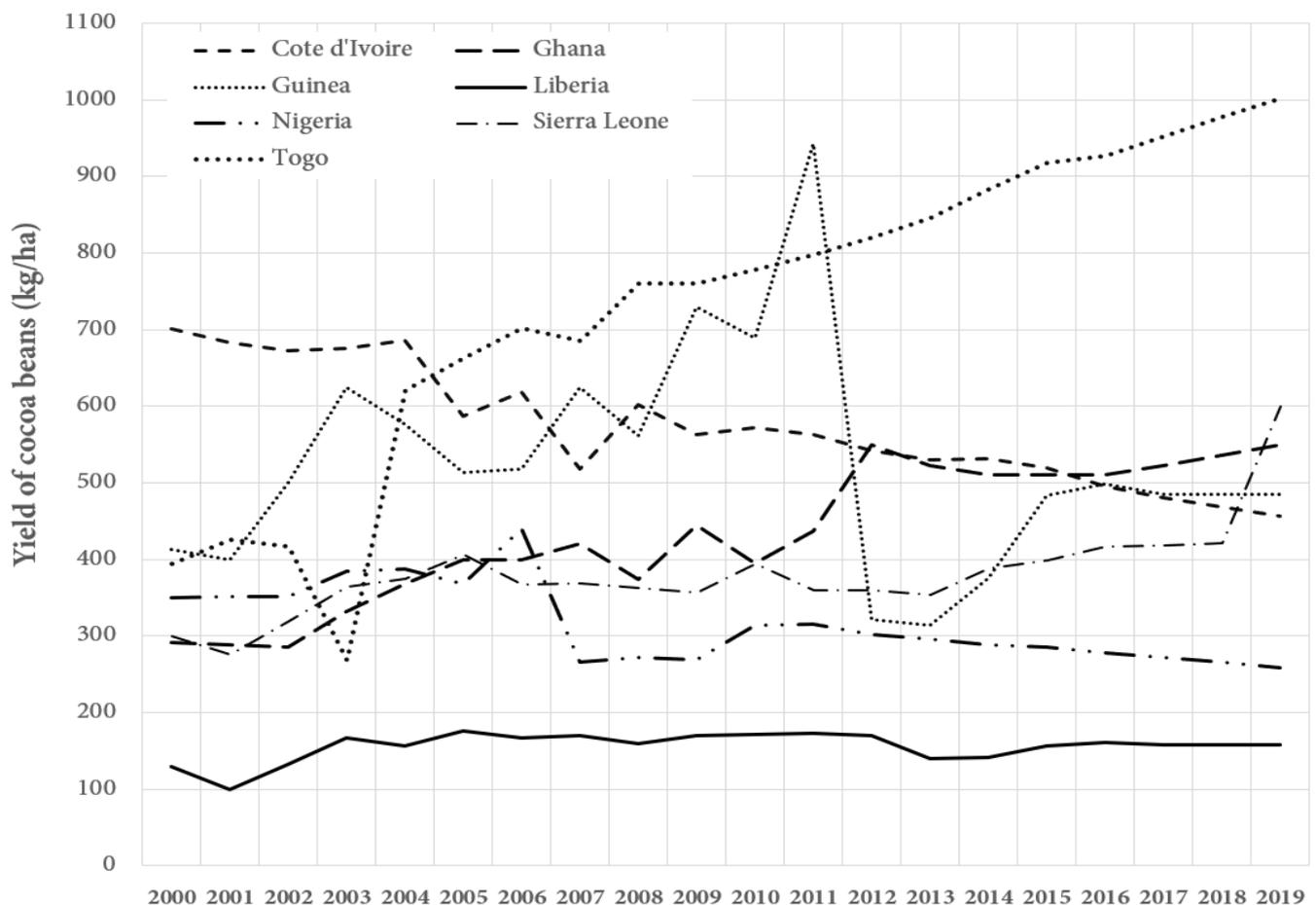


Figure 1: Comparing cocoa yield in Sierra Leone with other West African countries (FAOSTAT, 2020). Data retrieved from FAOSTAT on cocoa bean production (data from 6 January 2020)

tance in West Africa (Iwaro *et al.*, 2000). Farmers prefer Forastero variety because of its bigger pods, double bearing per year and yields than the other locally available variety, the Amelonado (Lower Amazon Forastero) (MAF, 2019).

### WAYS OF IMPROVING COCOA BEAN VALUE CHAIN

#### Improving cocoa farmers' knowledge and practices

The low technical skills of the majority of Sierra Leonean cocoa farmers hinder their crop productivity. Training in understanding and adopting good agronomic practices is essential (Figure 2). Plantation management skills, including soil conservation, shade management, pruning and spacing are essential pre-harvest activities which very few farmers can carry out properly (Diawo, 2022; MAF, 2019). Moinina *et al.* (2018) emphasized on the importance of improving the farmers' knowledge and practices in tree crop production and such practices should be adaptable to the measures against climate change.

Another skills training the farmers should have access to is cocoa certification. The cocoa farmers should know and apply the specification practices of a particular certifying body prior to farming. This opportunity underpins the sustainable income availability through their contract farming as cocoa is a permanent crop. Ruf *et al.* (2019) and Uribe-Leitz and Ruf (2019) mentioned the challenges that affect cocoa certification procedure and farmers' access to the knowledge and skills. Until the transparent transfer of information and technical skills expected of cocoa farmers are met, the cocoa value chain and its impact on the national economy remain unreli-

able. Farmers also fail to meet their standard operating procedures because of lack of knowledge and financial means. This has led to early degeneration and early death of cocoa trees which is now apparent in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana (Wessel and Quist-Wessel, 2015).

The participatory approach training through farmer field school (FFS) should be transparently reinforced so that farmers acquire the desired training. The extension service providers need to convey the rightly information to the farmers with highest professionalism. Demonstration farms should adopt the best practices so that farmers will not hesitate to emulate cocoa production and postharvest management practices. More emphasis should be placed on improving farmers' knowledge on digital information sharing. Witteveen *et al.* (2017) reported on the usefulness of digital farmer field school (DFFS) in training for improving farmers' knowledge and skills along the cocoa value chain. This type of training is very useful in times of crisis, like the lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic.

#### Choice of cocoa production systems

One of the fundamental challenges in Sierra Leonean cocoa industry is the knowledge and application of a specific production system. The cocoa farmers in Sierra Leone adopt agroforestry system with incorporation of diverse crops in their plantation. However, the choice of cocoa agroforestry management practices such as climate smart agriculture (CSA), organic farming, and conventional farming affect the market value of dried cocoa beans (Akrofi-Atitianti *et al.*, 2018). Massaquoi *et al.* (2022) highlighted the random use of synthetic agro-chemicals by cocoa farmers in Sierra Leone. Whether knowledgeable or not, an illiterate farmer can use any input at their disposal without considering the negative impacts.

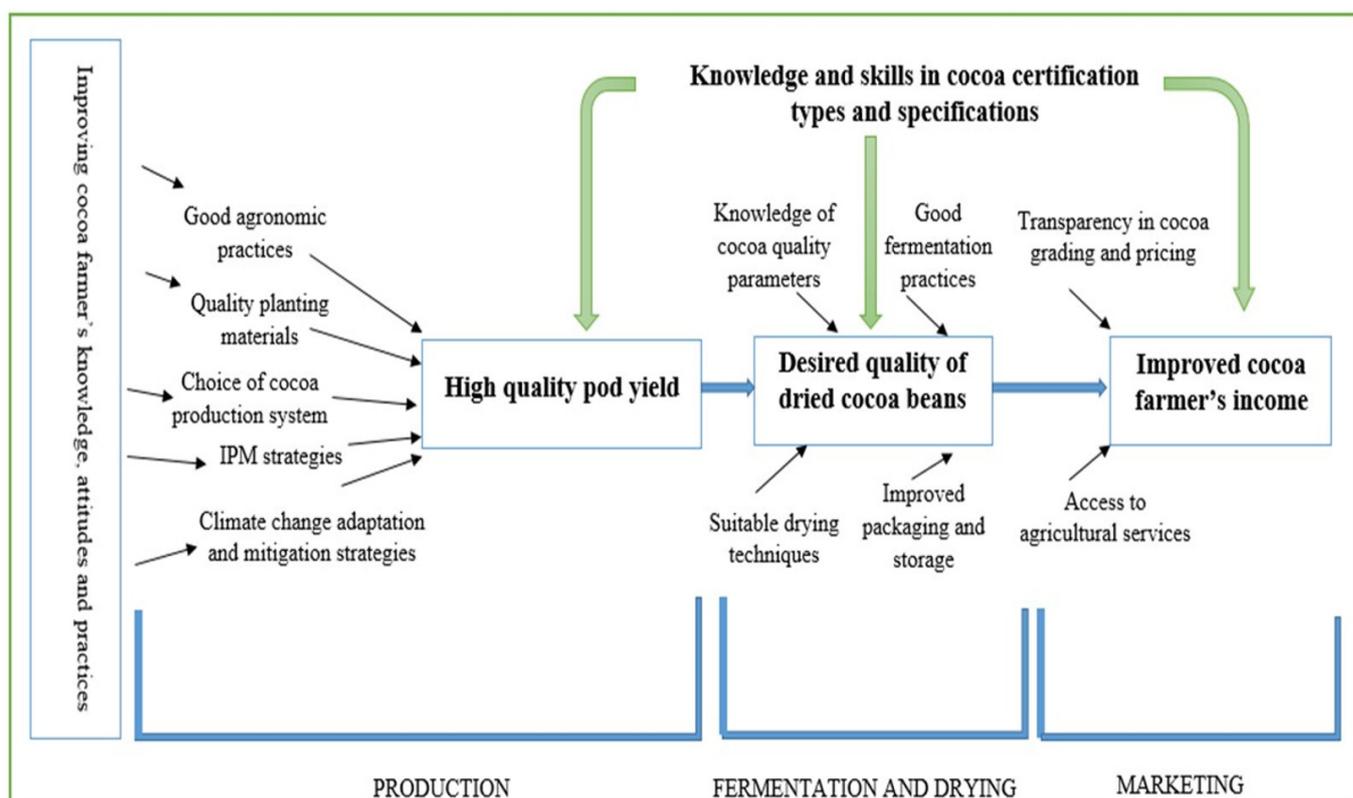


Figure 2: Cocoa bean value chain conceptual framework

For cocoa beans quality and environmental protection, the cocoa value chain stakeholders should make a consensus with farmers about best cocoa production options and create market for their produce. The production system often comes in consideration during the sales of dried cocoa beans. The classification of agricultural production systems based on agro-chemical input use are organic, conventional and integrated productions. The choice and skills in each of the production systems determine the market. However, because of unstructured productions, farmers could even market their organic cocoa beans at their own losses.

### Climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies

Climate change is the major environmental factor that hinders cocoa farming in Sierra Leone. When farming is well structured, cocoa agroforestry will help sink carbon thereby mitigating the harsh impacts of extreme climatic events. Climate vulnerability is globally one of the main limiting factors to cocoa production. Climatic suitability is projected to decline markedly in line with the increase in maximum temperatures, while the more coastal parts of Liberia and Sierra Leone are projected to remain climatically highly suitable (Schroth *et al.*, 2016). In 2016, the 846,000 ha of the land in Sierra Leone was more than 50% of climate suitability for cocoa production. As projected for 2050, 48,000 ha of that area will be unsuitable for cocoa farming (Schroth *et al.*, 2016) if appropriate climate adaptation and mitigation measures are not taken. Oyekale *et al.* (2009) emphasized that along the cocoa value chain, climatic variability is one of many factors affecting the growth of cocoa industry. The dry season and wet season do no longer have apparent duration as weather events occur abruptly.

Good mitigation and adaptation strategies will help curb the impediments of climate change to cocoa industry. The climate-smart agriculture in its entirety could substantiate a sustainable solution. In a conformed agroforestry management, incorporation of other crops will help not only reduce the impact of climate change but also diversify a farmer's income (Amfo *et al.*, 2020; Schroth *et al.*, 2016). Farmers must be aware that the practices that increase climate variability exponentially reduce their income. Most Sierra Leonean cocoa farmers practice organic farming mainly because of their non-access to synthetic agro-chemicals. Therefore, there should be a reinforcement of extension services regarding climate change and farmers' livelihood improvements.

### Improved cocoa seeds for cultivation

Forastero cocoa is the main variety cultivated in Sierra Leone. Aside from the seed selection practiced by the farmers, improved seeds are always imported from other West African cocoa belts. "Amazon cocoa", "Ghanaian cocoa" and "Ivorian cocoa" are the names coined by Sierra Leone farmers owing to their origin. There has been no official cocoa seed multiplication enterprise in the country. The use of planting material, especially the seeds, should be resistant to disease and adaptable to some climate variations. According to MAF (2019),

the market for purchasing seeds is not regulated. As a result, the smallholder farmers receive non certified seeds. This hinders cocoa production in the country. Moreover, little research has been undertaken to develop the cocoa industry.

The agronomic and climatic requirements of the certified cocoa seeds from the other countries could relatively differ from that of Sierra Leone. Victor *et al.* (2010) explain that farmers should also be knowledgeable of cocoa seed multiplication once they obtain the adaptable varieties from the sustainable point of view. Furthermore, there is a need for sale of certified cocoa seedlings to ease the production.

### Adequate agronomic practices

Inadequate soil fertility in a cocoa orchard is one of the major causes of poor yield of cocoa pods in the tropics. In the early establishment of cocoa seedlings, the soil fertility might be high. With improper replenishment, the quality of the soil will degrade over the years (Ogunlade *et al.*, 2009). Cocoa plant takes in large amount of plants nutrients. If the nutrients are not correctly replenished, this will result in poor growth as well as poor yield. In cocoa agroforestry system, the competition for nutrients is very high and management of soil nutrients has to be a difficult task especially for smallholder cocoa farmers.

The smallholder farmers in Sierra Leone barely apply agrochemical inputs to their plantation. The frequent use of compost and other forms of organic fertilizers will help improve soil fertility and boost cocoa production sustainably. According to Baah *et al.* (2011) and Ololade *et al.* (2010), rational application of organic fertilizer in a cocoa plantation will also help control disease and increase yield. The organic fertilizers such as compost manure, reuse of cocoa pod shells after breaking, green manure obtained during under-brushing, farmyard manure are at cocoa farmers' disposal. The reuse of by-product provides a mitigating solution to climate change and also reduce the cost of cocoa beans production.

Main cultural practices such as pruning, under-brushing and rehabilitation should be well scheduled to enhance cocoa plantation management. These practices will help optimize cocoa pod yield. Asare (2006) explicitly links rehabilitation to climate change adaptation and mitigation practices in a cocoa agroecosystem. The practices will guarantee a cocoa farmer's income due to substantive productivity. As the economic lifetime of cocoa trees is between 30 and 40 years, at least 25 year old farms may qualify for rehabilitation. Detailed field trials in ten cocoa districts in Côte d'Ivoire have shown that on sites with 25 to 30 year old cocoa trees, rehabilitation is feasible and profitable (Asare, 2006). It is paramount that the good cultural practices underpin pest control in the plantation.

### Integrated pest management strategies

Cocoa production is affected by the infestation of a wide range of pests in the West Africa cocoa belt of which Sierra Leone is located. In Sierra Leone, rodents, bats and monkeys are categories of vertebrate pests that attack mature cocoa pods. These pests are very difficult to control in cocoa plantation.

Insect pests have been reported to be devastating in West Africa cocoa belt. The key pests are mirids, mealy bugs, capsids and, moths, weevils and thrips (Wessel and Quist-Wessel, 2015). In Sierra Leone, farmers consider only stored insect pests and cocoa weevil as the pest commonly affecting dried cocoa bean production.

The black pod disease (*Phytophthora spp.*) is the most commonly identified disease in the cocoa orchards in Sierra Leone. Cocoa farmers are however able to recognize its presence due to the black coloration of pods. This disease is caused by two pathogen species, *P. palmivora* and *P. megakarya* (Marelli *et al.*, 2019). The latter species is very endemic to West Africa. Despite its yield loss being unquantified in Sierra Leone, yield loss due to it is about 40 percent and even higher in the sub-region (N'Guessan *et al.*, 2013). Akrofi (2015) highlighted *P. megakarya* infection on cacao as a threat to the economies of countries in West Africa. The disease can attack all the organs of a cocoa plant. The most destructive part of it is its impact on cocoa pod which will lead to the rotting of the fruit. Viral diseases are not easily reckoned with. However, they can cause great damage, especially to the cocoa seedlings. A typical example of virus, Cocoa Swollen Shoot Virus Disease (CSSVD) is found in all the cocoa producing countries West Africa (Wessel and Quist-Wessel, 2015). Other phytosanitary problems like witches's broom (*Moniliophthora perniciososa*), vascular streak dieback (*Ceratobasidium theobromae*), and monilia pod rot (*Moniliophthora roreri*) affect cocoa farming (Marelli *et al.*, 2019).

Understanding cocoa pest management along cocoa value chain is fundamental for quality production. The cocoa value chain actors (both public and private) should make concerted efforts in ensuring that farmers apply proper pest management practices. Cocoa certification schemes need to consider knowledge and technology transfer so that farmers should not only be aware of pest problems but also manage them in line with production specifications.

### Knowledge of quality parameters of dried cocoa beans

The basic quality parameters of dried cocoa beans are major determinant factors influencing the price. Furthermore, the quality of cocoa products obtained from the manufacturing industries is influenced by cocoa beans (Afoakwa, 2014). Samaniego *et al.* (2021) and Vigneri (2010) explained the reasons why a cocoa exporting country receives a given price. Cocoa products manufacturing industries consider the good fat content, fine flavor, low moisture content and low impurities in cocoa beans. In addition, Aroyeun *et al.*, (2009) precisely evaluated fungal development and its interest to estimate global quality of raw materials which may be useful to take decision on their potential use.

Guda *et al.* (2017) categorized dried cocoa beans into two principal grades. Grade I must contain at most 3% of each of the impurities (moldy beans, salty beans, slate beans, and any other impurities). Grade II must not exceed 4% of moldy beans, 6% of slate beans and 8% of any other impurities. Any cocoa beans which are not categorized into the two grades are considered substan-

dard grades. The grading of dried cocoa beans should be done on phytosanitary regulations provided by the government and the exporting agencies.

### Good fermentation practices

After cocoa harvesting and pod-breaking, fermentation technique of cocoa beans is the next activity that farmers undertake. A fermentation technique depends on a container at farmer's disposal. Cocoa beans are fermented in heaps, wooden boxes, woven baskets, and bags. Each of these containers and the quantity of the cocoa beans have influence on quality of fermented beans (De Vuyst and Weckx, 2015; Obinze *et al.*, 2022). Cocoa beans need to be fermented adequately for 5 to 7 days before drying to improve the sensory qualities and prevent pest damage (Figueroa-Hernández *et al.*, 2019).

In Sierra Leone, smallholder cocoa farmers often ferment cocoa beans in bags of small quantity in their dwelling places because of theft. It is important to know that small quantity often resulted in higher number of unfermented beans, and thus poor quality of dried cocoa beans (Tunjung-Sari *et al.*, 2021). When fermented in large quantity the quality high temperature and microbial activities will be induced.

### Suitable drying techniques

Fermented cocoa beans undergo drying by different methods: direct sun-drying, oven-drying or solar-drying. Cocoa drying process requires the spreading of fermented cocoa beans on tarpaulin, cemented ground (drying floor) or locally woven platform. Lasisi *et al.* (2014) explain the advantage of sun dried cocoa beans over the oven dried cocoa beans. The former method presents the better quality parameters that cocoa processing industries demand. Alasti *et al.* (2019), Banboye *et al.* (2019) and Kongor *et al.* (2016) add that a cocoa flavor depends on soil type, age of cocoa tree, fermentation, drying and industrial conditioning. Solar-drying method (greenhouse dryers) is more effective than direct sun-drying because of shorter duration and grade quality. Greenhouse dryers are used by a few number of cocoa companies in Sierra Leone.

The duration of sun-drying process depends on the intensity of sun rays to dry cocoa to below the required threshold of moisture content. Cocoa drying is a crucial process as the beans should be mold-free (Fardkhales, 2014). However, sun-drying process is impeded in the peak of rainy season which can alter the quality of dried cocoa beans in Sierra Leone. Harvesting of cocoa pods occurs in both rainy and dry seasons. Better cocoa pod yield is often expected in the rainy season.

### Improved packaging and storage

Storage of dried cocoa beans is another postharvest handling constraint in Sierra Leone. Because of limited storage facilities and other postharvest handling challenges, most smallholder cocoa farmers in Sierra Leone would prefer to sell their produce at the farm gate through contract farming. Sierra Leonean cocoa farmers store their dried cocoa beans in jute bags. Jonfia-Essien *et al.* (2008) emphasized that the

achievement of a country's food security program depends on its capacity to safely store its agri-food products. Safety storage of cocoa beans will help thoroughly regulate prices and avoid some exporting cocoa companies from impoverishing the farmers. Moisture and stored pests should be well managed in a cocoa warehouse.

### Transparency in grading and pricing

The cocoa sector requires independent entity for inspection and grading. There has been reports about pesticide use among Sierra Leonean cocoa farmers (Massaquoi *et al.*, 2022) and this practice impacts the quality and pricing of their cocoa beans export. The companies involved in buy of dried cocoa beans from the farmers are aware that price varies according to the system of production and the qualities of dried cocoa beans.

There is a urgent need of structured market for dried cocoa beans so that the contribution of the sector to the agricultural GDP of Sierra Leone would improve. This involves the development of a stringent government policy encouraging the transparent investment in the sector. The cocoa value chain's expansion has started in the country where cocoa powder and cocoa butter are locally processed. Massaquoi *et al.* (2022) analyzed that there is a high turnover from sales of dried cocoa beans. However, the farmers received relatively half of what the immediate middlemen (cocoa cooperatives and contracted buyers) would benefit. The vague information and lack of transparency affect bluntly the vulnerable illiterate farmers.

### Access to agricultural services

The likely approach to improve cocoa farmers' income is by making agricultural services available and accessible to them. The main agricultural services that cocoa farmers need can be specified as follows: skills training services, credit services, credible markets, and reliable information. Both public and private sectors regulating cocoa production and trade policies should create a common platform that support farmers. FAO (2007) precisely stressed on cocoa farmers' desire for skills training that improve the prices of produce and livelihoods.

Skills training in cocoa production and processing at both formal and non-formal level should be accessible to farmers and other cocoa value chain actors. At institutional level, there is no official cocoa certification courses at degree level in Sierra Leone. Those involved in cocoa auditing obtain their training courses elsewhere. According to Diawo (2022), less than 40% of cocoa farmers have access to training. Even as such, the training they undergo is often in the form of workshop which often lasts for less than three days. However, the Skills Development Fund (SDF) project in Sierra Leone has helped develop curricula on certificate and diploma courses in cocoa production and quality control since 2021. These courses have pioneered the skills upgrade of few cocoa farmers, cocoa field supervisors and other service providers in Kailahun District. The government should make a sustainable platform for the accessibility

of the aforesaid skills training to a large number of cocoa value chain actors.

Through the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in Sierra Leone, e-extension services were launched in late 2022 to facilitate delivery of agricultural services. The effectiveness of the e-extension services depends on how the stakeholders intend to provide technical and financial support to the innovation program. Elsewhere, Nyarko and Kozári (2020) express concerns that the illiteracy and low living standard of cocoa farmers hinder the use of e-extension services. The knowledge and experience of extension agents in providing technical solutions and transparently delivering inputs to the farmers should be monitored.

There is lack of access to reliable market information. Commercial deals and prices are at best shady, and commodity information including actual market prices is not transparently communicated to producers (MAF, 2019). The stakeholders should fairly ensure credits and improved inputs are at cocoa farmers' disposal.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present in-depth review of literature elucidates the current status and perspectives on cocoa production in Sierra Leone. The cocoa bean value chain in the country has remained unstructured because of related technical and socio-economic reasons. The market has become destabilised with incredible inspection and auditing. Consequently, the cocoa farmers feel vulnerable than any other actors along this cash crop value chain.

Along the cocoa bean value chain, the fundamental problem affecting quality cocoa yield is the technical skills of the farmers. The skills required to apply sequential cocoa production and primary processing practices is channelled through production level, fermentation and drying, and marketing. At the plantation level, the high quality cocoa pod productivity is hindered due to unsuitable planting materials, low knowledge of production system, poor agronomic practices, climate change issues, improper pest control techniques. Occurrence of any of the aforementioned production problems will have a negative impact on the primary processing, and market value of dried beans. At the postharvest handling stage, the problems to reckon with are cocoa quality parameters.

Incorrect fermentation and drying requirements for cocoa beans negatively impacts a cocoa farmer's income. Irrespective of the quality of the cocoa beans, it is worth knowing lack of transparency and insufficient technical services are impoverishing the farmers.

Succinctly, the cocoa value chain stakeholders (both public and private) should implement best management practices and cascade the services to the farmers and primary processors. To this, the cocoa bean value chain framework provides adaptable management practices encompassing cocoa crop. To ensure sustainable cocoa production in Sierra Leone, the country has to make stringent policies in favor of the cocoa farmers.

## REFERENCES

- Afoakwa E.O. (2014). *Cocoa production and processing technology*: CRC Press.
- Akrofi-Atitianti F., Ifejika Speranza C., Bockel L., Asare R.J.L. (2018). Assessing climate smart agriculture and its determinants of practice in Ghana: A case of the cocoa production system. *Land*, 7: 30.
- Akrofi A. (2015). *Phytophthora megakarya*: A review on its status as a pathogen on cacao in West Africa. *African Crop Science Journal*, 23: 67-87.
- Alasti F. M., Asefi N., Maleki R., SeiedlouHeris S.S. (2019). Investigating the flavor compounds in the cocoa powder production process. *Food Science and Nutrition*, 7: 3892-3901.
- Amfo B., Ali E.B. (2020). Climate change coping and adaptation strategies: how do cocoa farmers in Ghana diversify farm income? *Forest Policy and Economics*, 119: 102265.
- Aroyeun S., Adegoke G., Varga J., Teren J. (2009). Grading of Fermented and Dried Cocoa Beans Using Fungal Contamination, Ergosterol Index and Ochratoxin A Production. *Mycobiology*, 37: 215-217.
- Asare R. (2006). A review on cocoa agroforestry as a means for biodiversity conservation. In *World Cocoa Foundation Partnership Conference*, Brussels, vol. 15.
- Baah F., Anchirinah V., Amon-Armah F. (2011). Soil fertility management practices of cocoa farmers in the eastern region of Ghana. *Agriculture and Biology Journal of North America*, 2: 173-181.
- Banboye F.D., Ngwabie M.N., Eneighe S. A., Nde D.B. (2019). Assessment of greenhouse technologies on the drying behavior of cocoa beans. *Food Science and Nutrition*, 8: 2748-2757.
- De Vuyst, L., & Weckx, S. J. B. o. l. a. b. n. a. (2015). The functional role of lactic acid bacteria in cocoa bean fermentation. 248-278.
- Diawo J. (2022). Training Needs Analyses of Cocoa Farmers in Kailahun District. *International Journal of Scientific and Management Research*, 5: 35.
- EU. (2019). Ex-post evaluation of agriculture for development (A4D). Online, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/a4devalfinalreport.pdf> (Accessed on 17 May 2021).
- FAO (2007). The African export industry: What happened and how can it be revived? Case study on the Cameroonian cocoa sector.
- FAOSTAT (2020). Cocoa beans producing countries. Available online. <http://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#data/QC>. (Accessed on 6 January 2020).
- Fardkhales S.A. (2014). Cacao production and distribution in Sierra Leone from the perspectives of its stakeholders. *Global Journal of Agricultural Economics, Extension and Rural Development*, 2: 11.
- Figueroa-Hernández C., Mota-Gutierrez J., Ferrocino I., Hernández-Estrada Z.J., González-Ríos O., Cocolin L., Suárez-Quiroz, M.L. (2019). The challenges and perspectives of the selection of starter cultures for fermented cocoa beans. *International Journal of Food Microbiology*, 301: 41-50.
- Guda P., Gadhe S. (2017). Primary processing of cocoa. *International Journal of Agricultural Science and Research*, 7: 457-462.
- Iwaro A., Singh V., Barath S., Jugmohan, N. (2000). Germplasm evaluation at the International Cocoa Genebank. Trinidad for resistance to *Phytophthora* pod rot. *Annual Report*, 34-40.
- Jonfia-Essien W., Navarro S., Dator J. (2008). Effectiveness of hermetic storage in insect control and quality preservation of cocoa beans in Ghana. In Proceedings of Eight International Conference on Controlled Atmosphere and Fumigation in Stored Products, Chengdu, China (pp. 21-26). *Daolin G., Navarro S., Jian Y., Cheng T., Zuxun J., Yue L., Haipeng W. (Eds.)*.
- Kongor J.E., Hinneh M., Van de Walle D., Afoakwa E.O., Boeckx P., Dewettinck K. (2016). Factors influencing quality variation in cocoa (*Theobroma cacao*) bean flavour profile—A review. *Food Research International*, 82: 44-52.
- Lasisi D., Balogun L., Nasirudeen A., Ogunsola F., Adesola A. (2014). A comparative study of effects of drying methods on quality of cocoa beans. *International Journal of Engineering Research and Technology*, 3: 991-996.
- Levai L.D., Meriki H.D., Adiobo A., Awa-Mengi S., Akoachere J.-F. T. K., Titanji V.P.K. (2015). Postharvest practices and farmers' perception of cocoa bean quality in Cameroon. *Agriculture & Food Security*, 4: 28.
- MAF (2019). National Cocoa Value Chain Policy. Available online: <https://bafs.org.sl/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/SL-Cocoa-Value-Chain-Policy-2019-.pdf>. (Accessed on 14 May 2019).
- Marelli J.-P., Guest D.I., Bailey B.A., Evans H.C., Brown J.K., Junaid, M., Puig A.S. (2019). Chocolate under threat from old and new cacao diseases. *Phytopathology*, 109: 1331-1343.
- Massaquoi S.M., Johnson A., Massaquoi S.B., Mangoh K.L. (2022). Productivity and Economic Analysis of Technical Efficiency of Cocoa Production in Kailahun District, Eastern Sierra Leone. *International Journal of Recent Innovations in Academic Research*, 6: 20.
- Moinina A., Lahlali R., MacLean D., Boulif M. (2018). Farmers' Knowledge, Perception and Practices in Apple Pest Management and Climate Change in the Fes-Meknes Region, Morocco. *Horticulturae*, 4: 42.
- N'Guessan K., Kebe B., Aka A., N'Guessan W., Kouakou K., Tahy G. (2013). Major pests and diseases, situations and damage assessment, protocols in Côte d'Ivoire. Paper presented at the Presentation at regional workshop on integrated management of cocoa pests and pathogens in Africa.
- Nyarko D.A., Kozári J. (2020). Influence of Socio-economic Characteristics of Cocoa Farmers on the Use of E-agriculture in Ghana. *Asian J. Agric. Extension, Econ. Soc.*, 2020: 82-91.
- Obinze S., Ojmelukwe P.C., Eke B.A. (2022). Box fermentation and solar drying improve the nutrient composition and organoleptic quality of chocolate from cocoa beans. *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, vol. 6.
- Ogunlade M., Oluyole K., Aikpokpodion, P.O. (2009). An evaluation of the level of fertilizer utilization for cocoa production in Nigeria. *Journal of Human Ecology*, 25: 175-178.
- Ololade I., Ajayi I., Gbadamosi A., Mohammed O., Sunday A. (2010). A study on effects of soil physico-chemical properties on cocoa production in Ondo State. *Modern Applied Science*, 4: 35-43.
- Oluyole K. (2005). Evaluation of the economics of post harvest processing of cocoa in Cross River State, Nigeria. *Journal of Agriculture, Forestry and the Social Sciences*, 3: 58-64.
- Oyekale A., Bolaji M., Olowa O. (2009). The effects of climate change on cocoa production and vulnerability assessment in Nigeria. *Agricultural Journal*, 4: 77-85.
- Ruf F., Leitz E.U., Gboko K.C., Carimtrand A. (2019). Useless certifications? Asymmetric relationships between cooperatives, standards, and cocoa smallholders in Côte d'Ivoire. *Revue Internationale des Etudes du Développement*, 240: 31-61.
- Samaniego I., Espín S., Quiroz J., Rosales C., Carrillo W., Mena P., García-Viguera C. (2021). Effect of the growing area on the fat content and the fatty acid composition of Ecuadorian cocoa beans. *International Journal of Food Sciences and Nutrition*, 72: 901-911.
- Schroth G., Läderach P., Martinez-Valle A. I., Bunn C., Jassogne L. (2016). Vulnerability to climate change of cocoa in West Africa: Patterns, opportunities and limits to adaptation. *Science of the Total Environment*, 556: 231-241.
- Statistics Sierra Leone (2017). *Sierra Leone 2015 Population and Housing Census National Analytical Report*. Available online: [https://www.statistics.sl/images/StatisticsSL/Documents/Census/2015/sl\\_2015\\_phc\\_thematic\\_report\\_on\\_agriculture.pdf](https://www.statistics.sl/images/StatisticsSL/Documents/Census/2015/sl_2015_phc_thematic_report_on_agriculture.pdf) (Accessed on 17 May 2021).
- Tunjung-Sari A.B., Firmanto H., Wahyudi, T. (2021). Small-scale Fermentation of Cocoa Beans and on-Process Monitoring. *Pelita Perkebunan (a Coffee and Cocoa Research Journal)*, 37(1).
- Uribe-Leitz E., Ruf F. (2019). Cocoa certification in West Africa: The need for change. In *Sustainable global value chains* (pp. 435-461): Springer.

Victor A.-S., Gockowski J., Agyeman N.F., Dziwornu A.K. (2010). Economic cost-benefit analysis of certified sustainable cocoa production in Ghana. (No. 308-2016-5113). [https://ageconsearch.umn.edu/record/97085/files/33.\\_Cost\\_benefit\\_of\\_cocoa\\_in\\_Ghana.pdf](https://ageconsearch.umn.edu/record/97085/files/33._Cost_benefit_of_cocoa_in_Ghana.pdf)

Vigneri S.K. (2010). Cocoa in Ghana: Shaping the Success of an Economy. *Yes, Africa can: success stories from a dynamic continent*, 201: 258643-1271798012256.

Wessel M., Quist-Wessel P.M.F. (2015). Cocoa production in West Africa, a review and analysis of recent developments. *NJAS - Wageningen Journal of Life Sciences*, 74-75: 1-7.

Witteveen L., Lie R., Goris M., Ingram V. (2017). Design and development of a digital farmer field school. Experiences with a digital learning environment for cocoa production and certification in Sierra Leone. *Telematics and Informatics*, 34:1673-1684.