

Factsheet midterm findings Global Challenges Programme Call 1



Helping poor farmers grow money in Sierra Leone

Summary

Food insecurity remains a key concern in Sierra Leone. This project embeds social science research in an ambitious agribusiness scheme aimed at upgrading smallholder cocoa production in a post-war environment. The overall objective is to enhance the understanding of how processes of globalization, commercialization and agricultural intensification affect local food security, distribution of rents along the supply chain, and informal institutions. To do so, the project studied an intervention that consisted of: increasing the productivity of smallholder cocoa farming (e.g. via trainings, hybrid seedlings, and disease control); and improving the governance of the cocoa value chain (through the introduction of long-term contracts through an outgrower scheme).

The project team collected quantitative and qualitative data related to the interventions over time and across locations. By using state of the art causal inference methods, the impacts of the interferences are assessed. The study provides insights into immediate and direct impacts, such as on cocoa production and productivity (quality and quantity), livelihoods (food security, food crop production, income and vulnerability) as well as longer term and indirect impacts on production relations (labor, informal agrarian institutions, culture and social cohesion).

Interim Research Findings

The research group implemented a baseline survey in 31 villages to capture data on cocoa production, demographics and incomes. The baseline results have strengthened the idea that smallholder cocoa farming is currently at low productivity levels, with ample scope to increase yields and incomes for smallholders. Yields are currently as low as 92 kg per hectare, far below other Western African countries (Ghana: 243 kg/ha), and only a fraction of the world's potential output levels (Indonesia: 2000 kg/ha). The out grower scheme that project consortium partners Theobroma and AMS BV will implement aims to address some of the key constraints in cocoa production by creating new co-owned plantations, with training and access to high-quality inputs and state of the art management schemes.

A key problem facing cocoa farming in Sierra Leone is black pod, a fungal disease. Farmers lose up to a third of their crop to this disease. This is confirmed in conversations with local NGOs and government agencies who see the problem present in all cocoa growing areas across the country. Baseline results indicate that intensifying production (larger fields) and decreasing the age (new farms) can decrease black pod losses.

Messages to

A) Actors from private sector:

The experience of Theobroma and AMS is that land investments in Sierra Leone are complicated. Finding proper land and arranging contracts is difficult. Potential investors should take at least one year to arrange this.

B) Civil society and practitioners organizations:

An early analysis of collected data shows that farmers with bigger farms get higher yields and lower losses to black pod. Promoting larger farms will increase production.

C) Policy makers:

Farmers lose a third of their crop to black pod. Providing inputs (fungicides) can alleviate this problem. Around 90% of farmers are aware of possible prevention strategies. The project team expects training and information campaigns alone will have little effect, thus increasing farm scale and integrated management are needed to effectively reduce the disease load.

Knowledge products

- [A Policy Brief](#) was given to stakeholders (Ministry of Agriculture, agricultural NGOs, private sector partners) in October 2016 that work on cocoa in Sierra Leone and summarizes the research findings so far.
- This [Cocoa Presentation](#) was given at the National Cocoa/Coffee conference in Kenema, Sierra Leone in October 2016. It brought together stakeholders from the sectors but mostly from the government, NGOs and the private sector.

Knowledge networks

The project team regularly attended meetings of the cocoa working group in Sierra Leone. This brought together the private sector, government and NGOs that work on cocoa.

Co-creation

The GCP internal midterm review workshop was very useful, especially because it was in an early stage of the project (the project was delayed due to the 2014-2015 Ebola outbreak). By jointly examining the baseline results with consortium members, the researchers were able to identify interesting new avenues for research. For example, the survey captured accurate data regarding cocoa yields according to the local experts. This was less the case for cocoa farming practices. Furthermore, management practices in Sierra Leone are very hierarchical which differs from more horizontal management styles common to northern countries. Another possibility is to examine institutional change as a result of more direct involvement by northern actors.

Future research and activities

Theobroma and AMS BV are very interested in working more intensely with the qualitative research team as they can answer the questions private partners have on within-village processes that affect the project, such as whether villagers are aware of the implications of the contracts they have signed with the consortium partners.

Furthermore, the project team will contact other cocoa traders and disseminate research findings to them. In the long run, the goal is to scale up the project to the rest of Sierra Leone through Theobroma and AMS BV but also with other private partners.

Consortium Partners

- [Wageningen UR – Development Economics Group \(NL\)](#)
- [Njala University \(Sierra Leone\)](#)
- [Theobroma International BV \(NL\)](#)
- [Agroproduce Management Services Ltd. \(AMS\) \(Sierra Leone\)](#)

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Project website

[F&BKP Research Project page](#)