

Insights

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Cocoa Farmers' Livelihoods and Sector Sustainability - Preparing the Ground for a Multi-Actors-Partnership in Ghana

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In Cooperation with Cocoa Sector Stakeholders in Ghana

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Editorial



Cocoa farming allows about 800.000 families in Ghana to earn – more or less – their livelihood – a sixth of the country's population. The high number of family farms is out of proportion with the far lower share that cocoa production and marketing has in the country's Gross

Domestic Product. Thus, cocoa in Ghana has a massive problem with labour productivity on the farms. Social problems and environmental degradation make the list of challenges still longer. In contrast, rapidly growing valued added from cocoa products features as part of manufacturing industry, yet this industry's total amounts itself to less than 10 percent of the national product, as elsewhere in the barely industrialized Sub-Saharan Africa. So, where does Ghana's cocoa (production) stand, from a developmental point of view?

Joining an Exposure and Dialogue Programme in Ghana's cocoa sector is one way to deal with such questions. A group of 15 experts and activists from different stakeholders based in Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and also from Ghana did exactly that. We stayed with cocoa

farmers in three different administrative regions and learnt from them. We tried to understand support mechanisms as diverse as government-led cocoa business training, NGO-led community development initiatives (funded by a private corporate foundation) or FAIRTRADE inspired cooperative management. The 'Ghana Cocoa' picture we hustled to discern is *disturbing, fascinating and mind-boggling*, all at the same time. Reading the EDP participants' pieces in this Newsletter may provide just some imperfect and sketchy glimpses into this universe of intermingled challenges and badly needed interventions; and it may also reveal a kind of vanishing 'hope for the better'.

Very important, though: Even if there were no political economy or governance problems within the sector, managing cocoa represents a redoubtable technical and financial task not only for the hard-working farmers or firms but for every government. In fact, it is startling to observe that challenges to properly manage a seemingly simple tropical crop are barely less complicated than many fancy sectoral issues in advanced economies. You would hardly expect any German, Dutch or British government of these days to run cocoa better. Meanwhile, cocoa family farming in Ghana is confronted to a protracted crisis threatening its very existence.



There are several scenarios, but one may look like the actual demise of 'Ghana Cocoa' along with the dominant small-scale family farming system. In the end, international buyers would turn elsewhere. Ghana would then feature oil, gold and crops like cashew nut or palm oil for export, only! This might become a reality within just two decades, unless relevant stakeholders mobilize the political will to truly stop the current "business as usual" as it had been coined during the *World Cocoa Conference* at the end of April 2018 in Berlin. *Business as usual?* I dare to translate that into: 'Talking a lot *about* cocoa farmers, but doing very little *together with them and on their behalf*, especially in terms of comprehensive agricultural policy reform.' Who, then, has the *mandate, the knowledge* and the political will to work consequentially on modernising family farming, for instance, towards productive share-cropping systems, with reinforced and revamped input and service provision and thorough revision of the price structure; i.e. putting Ghana's family farms on a completely different, sustainable footing?

Prof. Dr. Helmut Asche, Anthropology and African Studies - Mainz University

A day in the life of Esi* - the voice of a lady cocoa farmer in Ghana's Central Region

Basically, the days are all the same. I get up around five o'clock in the morning, sometimes earlier in order to fetch some water at the well on the other side of the village. It has been drilled by an NGO in the mid-90s and slowly but surely the source is coming to an end. Water pressure is low. I better get going at three o'clock, if I want a full bucket but cannot wait in the queue for an hour and wait for another half an hour to fill the container.



Afterwards I do the usual sweep and clean around the house before the men of the family arise. Even though cleaning a dusty pebble ground is a relative term, but everything that doesn't belong including little plastic pieces and organic material needs to go. The girls help bringing the rubbish to the village's open dumping landfill. Around six o'clock I wake the remaining family members. The kids need to get ready for

school. The little one gets special cleaning treatment in front of the house while the two older ones can take care of themselves. I help cleaning their clothes and ironing the school uniform. They leave the house shortly past seven and – when their day is good – they would return around 2pm. If the day is not so good at school they would actually be sent home to cook for their teachers. My visitors from Europe do not believe that this is possible, but it is true. Oh yes, school is just so, so *important!* I wish I would have gotten the chance to continue my secondary education. It would have opened quite some doors and I might have ended up elsewhere than on a cocoa farm. Sorry, I need to say that, even though I do love my husband and the kids. It is not a bad life as such, but no one here in the village had a choice.



That is the real issue because if you do not have a choice you become a cocoa farmer. Also the financial means can never cover more than the most basic. For the kids we are doing our best to offer them more opportunities than we had. All we earn from taking care of some dedicated parts of the plantation we save for them so they will be able to visit secondary school. To be honest, this is tough because the farm does not belong to us, we are just caretakers. The sales are divided by three already, but we try and do the best we can. My husband and me go to the farm, weed, harvest the pods, open them and ferment the beans usually in the morning while the kids are in school. Beyond the harvesting season we do not spend more than a maximum of four hours a day on the farm. The rest of the day is needed at home to cook, clean and maintain the place. My husband helps me doing little repair works on everything that needs a fix, while I spent roughly five hours a day preparing meals. The routine helps to be fast but if almost everything, besides the fish in the tin, is prepared from scratch

it takes quite some effort. It makes our women strong though. Our bodies tell a story of hard physical work. The hands of that German lady visitor did not even withstand two hours of weeding and doing one portion of FuFu before tearing apart.

True – our food is quite different, so my visitor barely ate, even though the physical labor requires a high calorie intake. After dinner I enjoy a little bit of free time, studying with the kids, exchanging with the neighbors or just watching a little bit of TV. After all we are in this together. In our village we look after each other. Well, outsiders would say, “*we sustain a high level of social control.*” Speaking of them, I had hardly any questions to my visitors. Really, I have no idea of what to ask them. My village is my world. *Beyond that...* I have no clue. And actually – if that other German guy who came to prepare for this visit would not have told us what cocoa beans are being used for – I would *not* know. Seriously! We just do this work because there are no other options. I just do hope there is a way for those visitors to tell others about us. Maybe they bring their insights up to these high levels where the big men (and maybe some few women) decide over cocoa and the farmers. Maybe, they help us find a way to make our livelihood in cocoa farming a thriving business, one day!

Anna Hundhausen, Bühler AG

**Names have been changed*

Self-organization, management and infrastructure – and one of the keys to develop rural Ghana

My host lady is a stranger. Five years ago she moved to that village in Ghana's Central region, after staying 20 years in a village nearby her cocoa plantation. However, she has gained respect and prestige due to the hard work she does. The villagers recognize the quality and the amount of work she handles and see that she takes care of her house and courtyard all by herself. Additionally, she provides the village with food from her little shop. Since she is a respected woman she was elected to organize the women's group that was started by *CARE International*. She makes the women participate in the meeting once a week and does recruit new members when possible. A lot of women are interested and have already registered but still some women remain skeptical. Interestingly, there was no kind of self-organization before *CARE International* has initiated this women's group. The women did not have the wish or the idea to come together. Maybe everybody was too busy in order to make a living that they simply did not have time to spend in group meetings. But could they be also afraid of changes? Or had the people just given up?



I thought if you have very little, even small changes could make a big difference, since the little that is available could also be consumed or destroyed. The women group that my host facilitates wants to cultivate chili. This is a useful plant that both grows and can be harvested and sold during the low cocoa season where income levels are even lower. I still trust that joining forces and having a mutual ambition can have a great effect, so those women really do something to improve their situation. However, in this village the sense of togetherness seem to be impaired.

The current state of infrastructure and the lack of electricity are the biggest challenges. Due to the bad roads and lack of adequate transport the women can sell their crops in a limited radius, only. Furthermore, the nearest hospital is quite far away. Patients must be carried to the hospital, literally!

Moreover, there is also certain mistrust which obviously hinders self-organization and professional management. For instance, my host did not tell anybody that her children had moved to the *city for work* like many - if not most - young adults do. Instead she had told other people that her children would study. This is a means to avoid people asking money from her or posing other demands. Hence, the social norm that *'in the village one would help and support each other'* seems to hinder personal and family development and may have become rather superficial.

These facts raise the question, if an increase in (cocoa) income, only, would help the people in this area. Additional factors such like the farm size, yields (i.e. productivity) and farm gate prices as well as generating income beyond cocoa by agric diversification or any other additional household activity are important as well.

My question is what it is that *companies* can do about this situation? Where to start? My impression is that developing the situation of rural areas has got to do much more with the basics of structural and agricultural development than is being discussed in many of the Western industrialized nations' fora.

I also learnt that my host does not seem to be unmotivated although her everyday life with its recurring tasks looks monotonously. She is not even dissatisfied about her situation. What differentiates her from the other villagers is that she has a purpose, and seems to follow two

objectives. One, together with her husband (who also lives in town) they work very hard so they can finance their children's education. Second, they want to retire to a home in Accra when they get older. This is what they work for every day!

Theresa Bickeböller

Need for reform in Ghana – the example of the cocoa sector

Since 2017, Ghana is one of Germany's reform partner countries. We support Ghana in improving and extending sustainable energy, in improving energy efficiency and in the development of the financial sector. Ghana is obliged to realize own reforms provided by state institutions. Cultivation of cocoa plays an important role for the economic development of the



country. Nearly three million people work in the sector of cultivation, harvesting and processing or in similar sectors. Cocoa is mainly cultivated by small farmers on about three hectares of land, with a yearly production of 450kg of cocoa beans per hectare, only.

Due to the bad condition of the roads, the journey to my host family took longer than expected. There are a few places where there is public lightning provided in the evenings. The houses are made of wood, partly of stone, and are often not completed. There are drying tables in front of many houses where the cocoa is put on to dry. You can only get water from public water pumps. There are two primary schools in the village, but no secondary schools. In front of the huts, women are sitting with children, preparing Fufu for dinner, which is a mash made from manioc or yams and bananas. This process takes strength and endurance.

My host is a pensioner, but he does not receive any pension.

When he is not working on the farm, he is running a pharmacy shop in the nearest city. Especially my host lady and other women are responsible for the cocoa plantation. Walking there takes them an hour and they have to carry the tools and their food on top of their heads. After work, they take the same way back, but what they carry then has at least doubled during the day. When harvesting the ripe fruits, they are cut off the trees with a machete, called 'cutlass', collected and brought to a collecting point. As soon as this process is finished, all farmers meet there to open the fruits and get out the beans, which are then stored in the forest for fermentation, covered with banana leaves. It remains uncertain if my host's two sons will take care of the farm in the future.

The farm gate price for cocoa is defined by the state. Cultivation, harvesting and first level processing are all done by hand. Hybrid planting material, fertilizer and pesticides are given to the farmers for free. This is not a good thing, as my host says. The free handing leads to an uncontrolled use of the chemicals, which has a strong impact on the environment. There are hardly any workshops for the farmers where they learn to use the chemicals, although there are many workshops provided by several organizations where farmers can learn about 'good agricultural practices'.

From my point of view, the fact that the farmers' productivity is too low, the lack of essential tools and means of transport and too little creativity when it comes to making the process of post harvest handling of cocoa beans more efficient, present the biggest problems. Micro finance services could help making the work easier and increasing the productivity. What I conclude: The days I spent there impressed me. The people are happy, if the host is taking part in their daily routine, learns some Twi and is interested in their lives. My facilitator and the inhabitant Exposure-colleague from the Cocoa Health Extension Division always managed to make me, as a visitor, feel as if I was part of the family.

Andreas Lämmel MP, Member of German Parliament

Different. Sustainable. Unique. My Experience in Ghana

About 1,500 stakeholders participated in the World Cocoa Conference (WCC) in Berlin, 22 – 25 April 2018. It is considered the *'leading event for the global cocoa and chocolate sector'*. Its result is marked by this quote: *"Business as usual... is no longer an option. We have to break the mould,"* Dr. Jean-Marc Anga, Executive Director of the International Cocoa Organization (ICCO) said. The stakeholders dealt with a host of sustainability challenges and came up with the [Berlin Declaration](#). The realization of these commitments has a direct link to the people I met in Ghana few weeks before. Though I did not become a cocoa expert like many of those who convened in Berlin, I am rather convinced in saying: Within these three to four days I stayed with a female cocoa farmer in Ghana's Central region, I could not have learnt more about the living and working conditions of the farmers. I got a very authentic impression. I met very warm-hearted and hard-working people, especially women.

Poverty has many faces and dimensions. You can feel well with only a little. You can be busy all the time – but not productive. Life in rural Ghana is very much ruled by tradition, religion and rituals. Also, there is both little energy and motivation for improving living circumstances, and this may contribute even to an outright 'lack of development'. As imperfect and fragmentary my reflection may be; I take the liberty to ask questions touching upon some of my concerns:

The inadequate access to (functioning) infrastructure and reliable information seems to be one major reason for slow development. In terms of information, it is a question of *"give and take"* or *"give and ask for"*. Who is in charge of doing what? Who is responsible?

The role of the government and its institutions and their services to the farmers are not sufficiently transparent. What is the reason for this? How to change this?

The lack of personal initiative of farmers to change their situation is at least irritating – or did we just scratch the surface? If not, how to overcome such lack of personal initiative without external intervention?

If the stakeholders do really want to interact with the farming communities on a level playing field, how far can they go? How effective can external interventions become?

The cooperation and co-creation between government-based cooperation, NGO cooperation and corporate investments are fundamental for sustainable development. How can we strengthen complementarities instead of forcing competition? How to solve a huge country-wide problem by small, more or less isolated projects, even if these are many?

However your answer may look like: Both foreign and national (direct) investments as well as business solutions should be the first choice, accompanied by cooperation and assistance in creating a legal framework for respective interventions.



Working and living with a cocoa farmer was an extraordinary experience and reality check. Reading books and papers, watching documentaries and even the briefing of our project officers have not been as helpful in deepening my understanding as this immersion, since I became involved personally and shared in the daily life and work of a cocoa farmer and her community. This is of fundamental concern: As a development professional the reduction of poverty is part of my business; but *how do we get to know* about the realities of poor people?

EDP is one way to immerse for a moment in this reality. Though I would not "know better" how developmental change in the cocoa origins may come about, I nevertheless recommend this program to everybody because it is *different, sustainable and unique*.

Why “different”? If you do a business trip you usually meet hand-picked dialogue partners, drive in a 4WD air-conditioned car and sleep and eat in five-star houses. You have an hour here and there to go *“to the field, meet the farmers and see the chief”*. After this, you go back to your “Expatriate-Reality”. With EDP you dive deeper. You become part of it. Sure, you remain a stranger with a return flight ticket in your pocket. But being an ‘immersee’ having a hands-on experience you *truly share* the life of the people you meet.

Why “sustainable”? (Almost) every experience in your life time stays in your head. This is how human brains work. Your exposure experiences will have an influence on how you see the world and how you act as a development professional, corporate manager or politician. Even if cocoa were not part of your business, the lessons learnt will become an enriching part of your personal and professional life.

Why “unique”? All members of our group, former EDP participants and those in the future will come up with more or less similar experiences, lessons learnt and conclusions – but I am sure that the individual learning, the little things we all draw lessons from are completely different. They are unique. In addition to the individual takings the *HOW* is unique as well. The organization of this EDP was highly professional and at the same time very personal.

Annette Bernholz, GIZ - Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit

EDP – Development has got a face

Exposure and Dialogue Programmes are offers for further training and dialogue to promote sustainable and responsible acting carried out in developing and newly industrialized countries. They enable management staff and decision-makers from field of politics, business, church and civil society to have intense encounters and dialogues with people living in poverty.

Imprint

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