

POLICY BRIEF No. 1
OCTOBER 2019



POLICYMAKERS IN A DILEMMA: **COCOA PRODUCTION AND FOREST CONSERVATION IN WEST AFRICA**



ACINTaD
AFRICA CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL
TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT

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Cite as: Arthur, I. H. (2019). Policymakers in a Dilemma: Cocoa Production and Forest Conservation in West Africa. Africa Center for International Trade and Development, Accra, Ghana.

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Impact of Cocoa Production on Tropical Forests

While cocoa production is a major source of income for families and contributor to GDP of many economies, there has been increasing and alarming rates of deforestation. In the past two decades, the landscape has been significantly modified by logging and land use. Increase in cocoa production has replaced large parts of the original forest. A key forest conservation challenge is how to “find ways of enhancing biodiversity conservation in the agricultural matrix without negatively affecting production” (Green et al. 2005, Fischer et al. 2006, Perfecto et al. 2009). In West Africa, where two-thirds of the world’s cocoa is produced, there has been a great public concern of the impact of cocoa production on tropical forests. In Cote d’Ivoire (the world’s largest producer of cocoa) for example, the government is in dilemma: can it foster conservation while preserving the country’s position as the world’s leading producer of cocoa (Reuters 2015)? This has not only been a challenge for Cote d’Ivoire, but also the world’s second largest producer of cocoa, Ghana. Continuous conversion of forests into cocoa production fields contributes to deforestation, which is a major concern to the government. Both countries have major concerns and worries over this development and should jointly identify sustainable solutions to this challenge. The recurrent question often is, should they pursue their cocoa production goals at the expense of conservation?

Cocoa production goals are in direct opposition to forest conservation goals (Norris 2008). Even though it is believed by cocoa farmers and governments that felling shade trees increases cocoa pro-

Introduction

Cocoa, a cash crop from which chocolate and cocoa butter are made, is known to be one of the most biodiversity-friendly agricultural crops in the wet tropics, particularly in Africa. In recent times, researchers have tried to study and understand the synergy between cocoa production and forest conservation. Some preliminary studies have been conducted to understand this nexus between cocoa production and forest conservation. However, most of these studies are either too scientific or theoretical and do not sufficiently reveal the policy dilemma that most governments have regarding this tricky issue. In fact, most policymakers are at the crossroads.

ductivity and consequently, most cocoa producing regions have shown a reduction of shade tree densities in recent years (Ruff 2011), I strongly would promote the practice of forest conservation. This is because forest conservation helps to clean the air, store carbon and purify water for the entire planet. It is possible to increase the practice of planting and maintaining forested areas not only for the benefit of current generation, but also sustainability of future generations. Forest conservation should definitely not be achieved at the expense of cocoa production or vice versa. The way forward to address this dilemma will involve a number of factors, as there is no specific simple solution to this challenge.



Sustainable Cocoa Production

Growing cocoa in a more sustainable way should be a continuous practice. Shade trees are still important in the cocoa farm, despite claims that it reduces productivity. In fact, it is believed that the more shade in a cocoa farm, the more humidity it provides, particularly during rainy season. However, it is very important to ensure a balance of the level of shade in the farm to avoid the incidence of black pod disease, which is often the case if there is too much shade.

In most countries where there is a challenge of cocoa production versus forest conservation, the problem has often been because there are no strong institutional frameworks, policies to rehabilitate the landscape and conserve the forests.



The Way Forward

Environmental sustainability and policy helps to address key policy issues that continue to pose environmental threats to sustainable cocoa production and also strengthens the institutions that work in the sector. The government should make these policies to target addressing deforestation issues and increasing sustainable cocoa production.

Policies should be made with the people of the community and not to be thrown at them. Community participation in policy making has always yielded a positive outcome: it produces ownership and ensures compliance. Cocoa farming communities are key stakeholders in the nexus between cocoa production and forest conservation and will play a major role in the implementation of any environmental policy that addresses deforestation

while increasing cocoa production. The use of certain technologies to restore the biodiversity and forest have proved successful in other jurisdictions. For example, the SAFTA (Sistema Agroflorestal de Tome-Açu" or Tome-Açu Agroforestry System) technology which has been tested and proven successful, especially in the Amazon.

Conclusion

To ensure that the world is not deprived of the sweet chocolate and the cocoa butter we use, it is very important for farmers to use the various methods to scale-up sustainable cocoa production without compromising on the conservation of the forest. Efforts need to be made to restore biodiversity and forest, and promote cocoa-based agroforestry, as well as improve the livelihoods of small-scale cocoa farmers in poor communities. It is possible for governments to focus on increasing cocoa production and at the same time maintaining the forest and biodiversity.

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