

Sustainable Tree Crops Program - Liberia

Project Dates: 2006-2011

Country: Liberia

Funders: US Agency for International Development (USAID), World Cocoa Foundation (WCF) and global cocoa industry (through regional core program support), USDA (through ACIDI/VOCA), World Bank, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF)

Implementers: International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (management, production, marketing, policy); SOCODEVI (farmers' organization development); University of Tennessee (marketing)



Overview

Liberia is emerging from a civil war (1989-2003) during which agricultural activities were severely disrupted and the agricultural research system destroyed. Cocoa has traditionally been a key commercial and poverty reduction crop in Liberia. An estimated 28,000 hectares were planted with cocoa by 1987; however recent production levels average around 2,000-3,000 metric tons per year. Nevertheless, cocoa presents an opportunity to improve the livelihoods of farmers and providing a solid platform for rural development.

Production can be restarted, through tree rehabilitation and improved management, followed by replanting with appropriate planting material. Cocoa can generate relatively high incomes, particularly with an improved marketing system, while increasing productivity on existing farms can discourage expansion into forests. The Sustainable Tree Crops Program (STCP), building on its experience in the West Africa Region, aims to address these areas. STCP-Liberia is active in the three major production counties of Bong, Lofa and Nimba; areas that, combined, produced more than 80% of Liberia's cocoa prior to the civil war.

Program Objectives:

- Implement technical packages to raise productivity and product quality
- Strengthen community groups to interface with markets, enhance democracy and ensure sustainability
- Develop efficient marketing options associated with relevant information systems
- Engage public and private stakeholders to address policy and institutional constraints

Progress to Date:

- **Some 7,000 farmers trained through Farmer Field Schools and through farmer-to-farmer diffusion.** Farmers received training on integrated crop and pest management, quality improvement, HIV/AIDS awareness, and farm safety. An additional 1,913 farmers were reached indirectly through farmer-to-farmer diffusion. 2006 graduates received seedlings from Centre National de Recherche Agronomique in Cote d'Ivoire. 21 graduates were trained to provide support to 5 farmer organizations interested in group sales. 97 farmers trained as facilitators, fifteen of whom have graduating to become supervisors of FFS.
- **6 farmer organization agents trained.** The agents (2 per county) were trained to provide support to 10 cooperatives. STCP is working with 3 additional cooperatives in Nimba County to provide support for the cooperatives' organizational development plans.
- **Policy dialogue – extension and cooperative development.** STCP-Liberia hosted several roundtables on extension options to support the Ministry of Agriculture as it develops extension policy and strategy. Roundtables and workshops were also held on topics related to the re-establishment of the Cooperative Development Agency (CDA). Results of the CDA workshops culminated into a draft cooperative law for Liberia.
- **Roundtables on Liberian cocoa sector held.** A May 2006 roundtable identified action points to contribute to the development of the cocoa sector and promote it as an engine for poverty alleviation, job creation and overall economic and social development. A follow-up roundtable

was held in 2007 focusing on the cash crops sector, including tree crops, and their role in food security. Participants at both roundtables included representatives from the local public and private sectors, as well as regional and international experts. Two policy briefs were developed following these deliberations. Copies were presented to the Ministry of Agriculture as policy tools.

STCP-Liberia: Group Selling Arrangements Quadruples Family Income

Mr. Joseph Mbarzey, 68, is said to be the largest cocoa farmer in Duoplay, Gbehlageh District in Nimba County. Until recently, he struggled to support his wife and four children; his earnings from cocoa were not sufficient to meet their needs.

In order to sustain his family, he borrowed money from a Guinean middleman who came to buy cocoa in Liberia.

Mr. Mbarzey says repaying the loan worsened his situation, "At the end of the harvest, I had to pay back with wet cocoa beans. Sometimes what is left is sold to middlemen from Guinea at a price determined by them."

In 2006, he decided to participate in a Sustainable Tree Crops Program (STCP) Farmer Field School to learn more about effective cocoa farming practices.

Through the program, he learned about shade management, drying and fermentation methods. As a result, the quality of his produce improved and yields increased as well.



He also joined the Gbehlageh Farmers Cooperative and took advantage of grouped sales, a process introduced and promoted by STCP and its partner SOCODEVI.

Today, Mr. Mbarzey no longer feels he is the victim of middlemen.

He receives between USD 1.05 and USD 1.21 per kg of cocoa by marketing his produce through the cooperative compared to the USD 0.24 or 0.32 per kg he received on his own.

Mr. Mbarzey recognizes that his wife, 54-year-old Martha Mbarzey, and their four children also benefited from his training.

As a result of his increased yields and participation in group selling arrangements, he can comfortably afford food, medication and school-related expenses for his family's upkeep.

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