

## EXAMINATION OF SUPPORT TO COCOA FARMERS IN KAILAHUN DISTRICT

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### ABSTRACT

Cocoa farming plays a significant role in the livelihood of rural communities in Kailahun District, Sierra Leone, contributing to economic development and poverty alleviation. This study examines the types and effectiveness of support extended to cocoa farmers in Kailahun District by various parties involved in the cocoa value chain. The research looks at the role of government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and local institutions in assisting cocoa farmers with training, access to resources, market linkages, and financial aid. The study seeks to identify challenges faced by the farmers and assess whether the support mechanisms have resulted in improved productivity, income, and overall well-being of cocoa farmers in the district.

**Keywords:** Agricultural support, cocoa farmers, financial aid, market access and rural development.

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Cocoa farming is an essential agricultural activity in Kailahun, situated in the Eastern Region of Sierra Leone. With its favorable climate and soil conditions, the region holds great potential for cocoa production. However, despite its importance, cocoa farmers face numerous challenges that hinder their productivity and sustainability. The challenges include inadequate access to quality inputs, low yields, poor market access, lack of financial support, and inadequate knowledge of best farming practices. In recognition of these issues, various stakeholders, including the Sierra Leone government, international development organisations, and NGOs have extended support to the cocoa farming communities in the District. This article examines the extent of the support provided to cocoa farmers and assesses the impacts on their livelihoods.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

#### 2.1 The objectives of this study were to:

1. Identify the institutions that support and assess the types of support provided to cocoa farmers in Kailahun: This includes evaluating government interventions, the role of NGOs, and private sector involvement in providing technical, financial, and infrastructural support.

2. Evaluate how effective the support structures are in improving the productivity and livelihoods of cocoa farmers in the District: This includes assessing the impact on crop yields, income levels, and quality of life for farmers.

3. Identify the main challenges faced by cocoa farmers in spite of the existing support mechanisms: This objective seeks to uncover barriers such as resource limitations, market access issues, and other socio-economic factors that impede progress.

4. Recommend strategies for improving support systems to enhance sustainability in cocoa farming: Based on the findings, this objective aims to propose actionable recommendations to strengthen current support mechanisms and address existing gaps.

### 3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Support provided to farmers in developing countries, including Sierra Leone, comes from diverse sources, each targeting specific areas of improvement. Government support programmes frequently focus on policy frameworks, infrastructural development, and subsidies for agricultural inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides. NGOs and development organisations often fill gaps left by the government by providing specialised training, market access initiatives, and microfinance options. Studies on agricultural support in Africa, such as those by Belemvire et al. (2019) and Nkrumah (2017), emphasize that successful interventions combine technical assistance with market-oriented solutions. However, the success of these interventions is contingent on the farmers' ability to access and adapt to the support provided. The literature further suggests that the lack of coordination between stakeholders often weakens the overall impact of support programmes.

### 4.0 METHODOLOGY

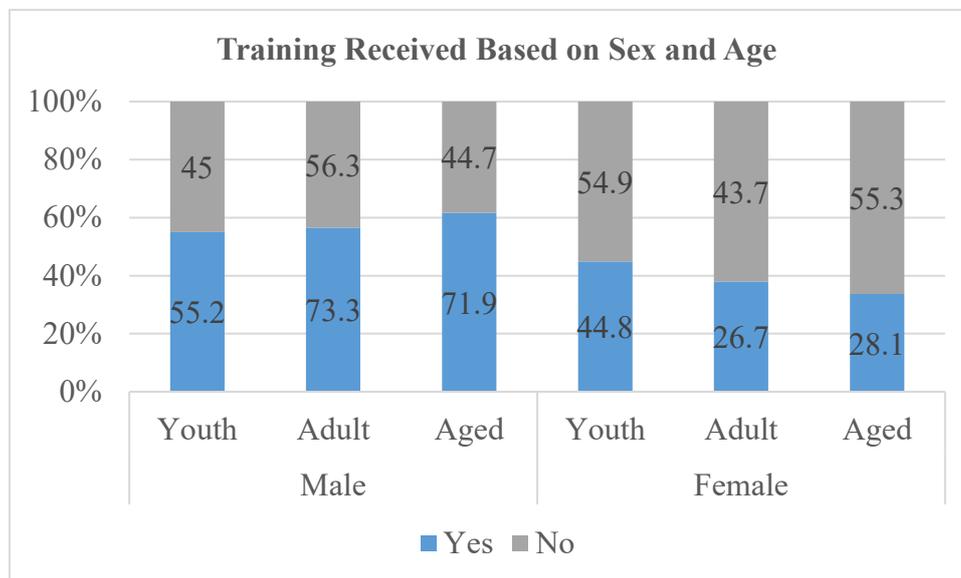
The study employs the mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research techniques. Primary data were collected through surveys and interviews with cocoa farmers, local agricultural extension officers, representatives from NGOs, and policymakers in Kailahun. The surveys gathered data on the types of support farmers received, their challenges, and perceived benefits. Interviews provided deeper insights into the farmers' experiences with the support systems and the barriers they face. Secondary data were obtained from reports, studies, and records from the Ministry of Agriculture and other relevant organisations. Data analysis involved statistical techniques for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative data.

### 5.0 RESULTS

The results indicate that the support provided to cocoa farmers in Kailahun is multifaceted. Key forms of support include:

i. Training and Capacity Building: Several NGOs such as the Gola Rainforest Conservation Limited by Guarantee, Welt Hunger Hilfe/Lizard Earth, Solidaridad; Cocoa Dealers such as Tradin and TAS Stores, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry; and Cocoa Farmers' Cooperative have been instrumental in training farmers in best practices for cocoa cultivation. These include methods for improving soil fertility, cocoa agroforestry, shade management,

planting distance, cocoa rehabilitation, Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA), Pest and Disease Control, and post-harvest handling. However, some farmers reported not to have been part of any such training programmes while others reported inadequate follow-up support to reinforce the skills acquired during training. Besides, more male cocoa farmers than their female counterparts reported to have received training as shown in figure 1 below. Also, among male cocoa farmers, more adults and the aged received training than youth. This is because some male youth might have taken up scholarly jobs, some in academic institutions (Senior Secondary Schools and Tertiary Institutions) while majority of others have taken to bike riding. On the contrary, more female youth than adults and the aged received training. This is because when the male youth leave the rural communities, they leave behind female youth. This is why young ladies in rural areas are usually married to elderly men. As such, the return of the young men to the villages foments tension as the elderly feel suspicious about their presence considering their relationship with their wives.

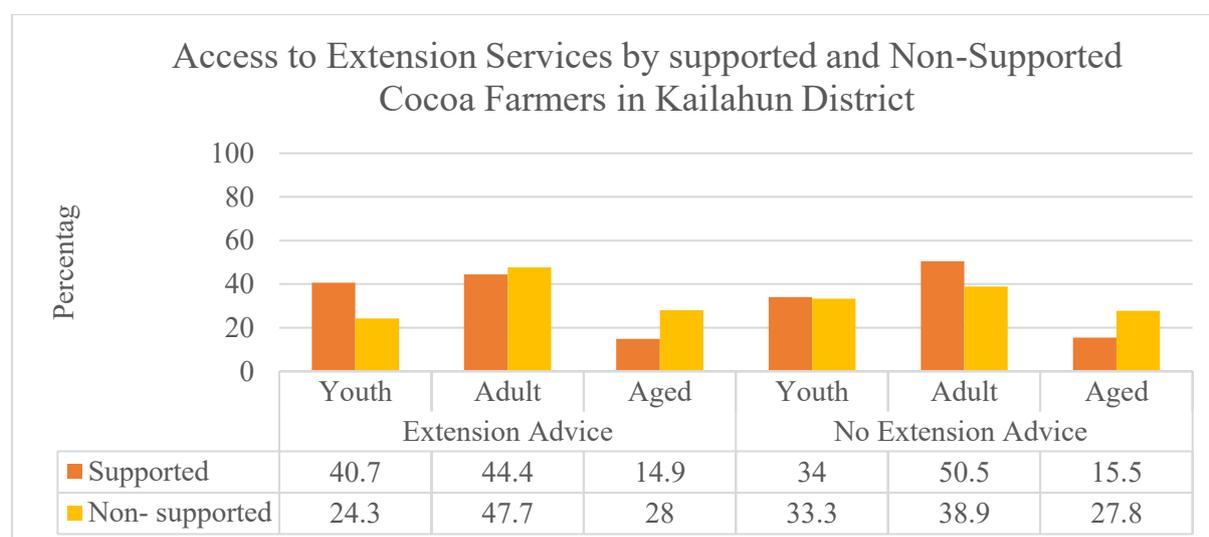


**Figure 1. Training Received Based on Sex and Age**

Figure 1 shows that among the male cocoa farmers 55.2% of youth, 73.3% of adults and 71.9% of the aged received training while among the female cocoa farmers, 44.8% of the youth, 26.7% of the adults and 28.1% of the aged received training. Between the sexes, 66.8% of male cocoa farmers received training while 33.2% of female cocoa farmers received training. Child bearing and nurturing affected the participation of female cocoa farmers in training programmes organised outside their immediate communities as they could not afford to neither leave the young children behind, nor take them along with them to the training locations. This was so because of the consideration of care giving to the children during the course of the training.

Access to Extension Advice: Extension advice is relevant to cocoa farmers by helping them adopt modern and sustainable farming techniques, such as proper spacing, pruning, pest and disease control, and post-harvest handling, which enhance productivity and quality; it increases cocoa farmers' yield and income by applying improved methods recommended through extension services, it gives access to market information by helping farmers understand pricing

trends and access to better markets, it promotes practices that are environmentally friendly practices such as integrated pest management and agroforestry, which help maintain soil fertility and biodiversity; it promotes empowerment and capacity building by training on financial literacy, record-keeping, and group dynamics. Empowered farmers make informed decisions and strengthen farmer organizations. Extension services also promote gender inclusion and social equity by addressing gender disparities through the inclusion of women and youth in training and decision-making processes in the cocoa value chain. Extension advice can also help cocoa farmers adapt to climate change by introducing climate-resilient agricultural practices and alternative income-generating activities. Table 2 shows cocoa farmers’ access to extension services in Kailahun District.



**Figure 2: Provision of Extension Advice to Supported and Non-Supported Cocoa Farmers by Age**

The figure shows that among the cocoa farmers who received extension advice, there were 44.4% of supported and 47.7% unsupported adults. Among the adults who did not receive extension advice, there were 50.5% supported and 38.9% unsupported adults. 40.7% supported and 24.3% unsupported youth received extension advice while 34% supported and 33.3% unsupported youth received no extension advice. 28% of the unsupported and 14.9% of the aged farmers received extension advice while 15.5% of the supported and 27.8% of the unsupported aged farmers did not receive any extension advice.

ii. Access to Inputs: Some of the cocoa farmers reported to have benefited from seeds provided by both government and NGOs, food for work and tools. Despite this, challenges in the timely delivery of inputs hindered their effectiveness, with some farmers reporting delays in receiving necessary resources during planting seasons.

**Table 1: Sources of Improved Seeds**

Source of improved seed	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Market</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>9.1</b>

<b>Fellow cocoa farmers</b>	<b>699</b>	<b>81.6</b>
Government	10	1.2
<b>NGO</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>7.5</b>
Others	6	0.7
Total	857	100.0

**Source:** Data Collected, 2019

The table shows that the sources of improved seeds were fellow cocoa farmers, 81.6 %; market, 9.1 %; non-governmental organisations, 7.5 %; Government, 11.2% and others, 0.7%.

iii. Financial Support: Microfinance institutions such as Financial Services Associations (FSAs), Community Banks and cooperatives in the district offer loans to cocoa farmers. However, high interest rates and limited access to capital have been barriers for many farmers who struggle to secure funding for expansion or modernisation.

iv. Market Access: Market linkages have improved through partnerships with larger cocoa exporters and cooperative unions that assist farmers in securing better prices for their produce. However, the poor road network especially during the rainy season in the rural communities where cocoa farming is predominant, and fluctuating market prices still undermine the farmers' income stability.

Despite these efforts, the study reveals that many farmers in Kailahun District face significant challenges. These include poor road infrastructure that hampers access to markets, insufficient extension services, and a lack of continuity in support programmes. Additionally, some farmers especially female farmers feel disconnected from the decision-making processes that affect them, leading to a sense of disengagement from the support mechanisms.

## 6.0 DISCUSSION

The support systems in Kailahun District though substantial, face limitations that restrict their effectiveness. The delays in the provision of inputs and the absence of consistent follow-up training programmes have been highlighted as major concerns. Also, trainings provided have been more generic instead of addressing the needs of target cocoa farmers at a given time. Women with children that they could neither take along with them nor leave behind to attend trainings organised outside their localities was another huge challenge that hindered their participation in training activities. Additionally, while the financial support available through microfinance institutions is beneficial, high-interest rates and complex loan conditions have left many farmers unable to access credit. Furthermore, the lack of adequate market infrastructure means that farmers are often forced to sell their produce at lower prices in local markets, which impacts their overall earnings.

While government policies aimed at boosting the cocoa sector are generally well-intentioned, the study suggests that there is a need for better coordination between the government, NGOs, and the private sector. A more integrated approach could streamline the delivery of support and ensure that resources are more effectively utilised. Additionally, it is important to recognise the

role of farmers' organisations and cooperatives in advocating for the needs of their members and ensuring that support mechanisms are responsive to local realities.

## 7.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Support provided to cocoa farmers in the District has had positive impacts in some areas but still faces significant challenges that need to be addressed. It is recommended that:

1. A more integrated approach between government, NGOs, and the private sector should be considered. This will help deliver more effective support and avoid duplication of efforts.
2. Government of Sierra Leone and the Kailahun District Council should have viable investment in rural infrastructure, especially roads and storage facilities which is crucial to improve market access and reduce post-harvest losses.
3. Access to affordable financing with lower interest rates and better loan conditions should be expanded. This will help farmers invest in modern farming techniques and improve productivity.
4. Training programmes initiated should be sustainable and should be accompanied by regular follow-ups to ensure that farmers continuously improve their practices and remain updated on the latest agricultural innovations. Youth (male and female) should be encouraged on board the training since the future of the sector lies in their hands.
5. Training programmes should address the specific needs of cocoa farmers at given times instead of the one size fits all as it has been before. Where possible, training programmes should be held in the immediate locality of cocoa farmers so that female farmers with young children they can neither take along with them to training venues outside their localities nor leave behind to attend can have the leverage to attend.

By addressing these recommendations, the support mechanisms for cocoa farmers in Kailahun can be strengthened, leading to enhanced productivity, greater economic stability and better livelihoods for the farmers in the District and by extension, the country.

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