



ORGANIC COCOA IN SIERRA LEONE



Location: Kailahun and Kenema Districts

Small-scale, resource-poor farmers organize fair trade grower cooperatives to market certified organic cocoa exports from post-war Sierra Leone.¹

CHALLENGE

In Sierra Leone, the majority of the population depends on farming for both economic activity and subsistence. Agriculture contributes over 40 percent to Sierra Leone's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).² A 2008 presidential decree ("*President's Agenda for Change*") defined agricultural development and food security as fundamental to the country's economic improvement and poverty reduction strategy.³ Despite government efforts, however, widespread food insecurity and lack of capital investment in rural areas are formidable challenges to reconstruction and development, exacerbating the physical and economic effects of the civil war that ended in 2002.⁴

Cocoa exports from Sierra Leone have traditionally centered on the mass production of low quality cocoa, and thus fetch low prices. The economic viability of small-scale cocoa production was further undermined by the civil war, during which nearly 800,000 people were internally displaced, cocoa farms were abandoned or destroyed, and cocoa farming knowledge was not passed to the younger generation.⁵

RESPONSE

In 2005, the FAO launched the project: *Increasing incomes and food security of small farmers in West and Central Africa through exports of organic and fair-trade tropical products*. The FAO contracted Twin Fair Trading Organization (TFTO), a producer-owned non-profit group, to work directly with Kpeya Agricultural Enterprises (KAE), an association of cocoa farmers. The project organized growers, provided technical training, and developed export market opportunities for the collectively produced, certified organic cocoa from Sierra Leone's Kailahun and Kenema districts. All profits from cocoa sales were reinvested in the supply chain to benefit the farmer collective. When KAE became Fair Trade certified in February 2008, TFTO began to finance the farmers' association; in 2009, it started purchasing KAE's cocoa for sale outside Africa.

The project utilized the Farmer Field School (FFS) training methodology to introduce technical information and train farmers in organic agriculture and cooperative marketing strategies. The FFS consists of groups of farmers getting together to study a particular topic and learn basic agricultural and management skills. In FFS, opportunity is given for debate, observation, and learning by doing, or learning through other farmers' experiences. In Kailahun and Kenema districts, the curriculum included

organic production techniques (planting, pruning, underbrushing (a form of weeding), shade management, harvesting, and field sanitation); post-harvest processing methods (fermentation and drying); marketing-association management, record keeping and information on organic standards and certification. Community members with previous FFS experience were hired as instructors. Project directors adapted the FFS *Sustainable Trees Crops Program* manual⁶ to develop a country cocoa curriculum consistent with certified organic production standards for export crops. After the first year, new modules were added to the curriculum, including collective marketing, KAE membership responsibilities, and gender issues.

RESULTS

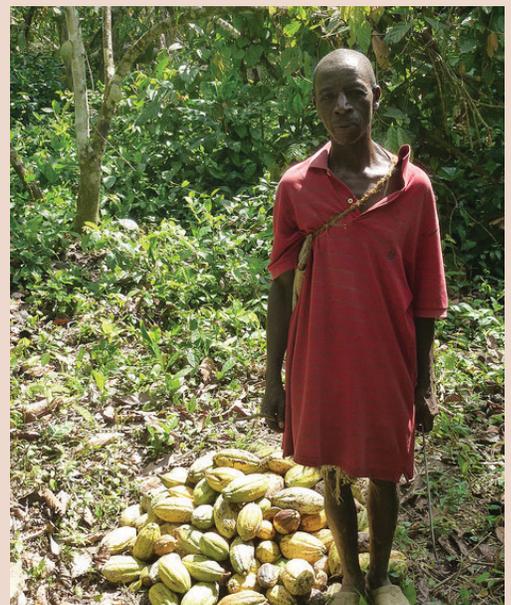
Multiple agronomic and socio-economic assessments were conducted using farmer-survey methods. Data on numbers of participants were gathered at FFS training sessions. A survey instrument developed by FAO was administered to 42 farmers from the six different villages (seven farmers per village) where KAE members reside. The questionnaire was designed to measure project impact on socio-economic, attitudinal and agricultural conditions. Study findings are consistent with the outcomes of larger projects in Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, and Nigeria.⁷

- When the project began in 2005, KAE had approximately 700 members. By 2010, the number of KAE members nearly doubled to over 1,200, including 50 separate village committees.⁸
- KAE cocoa-export sales increased significantly during the project period (2005-2009). In 2005/2006, no cocoa was being sold into export markets, and at best, minuscule quantities were sold into the domestic market. In 2006/2007, combined sales (export and local market) increased to 6 tons. By 2008/09 KAE sales grew to a total of 27.5 tons.
- The volume produced and sold outside of KAE started to rise after 2008 as many farmers reported that the FFS training enabled them to negotiate better deals with purchasing agents other than KAE.
- In 2007, individual producers received \$1.10/kg cocoa, which was significantly higher than the average price—\$0.63/kg cocoa—reported by local traders.
- Following FFS education and training, farmers increased the land area dedicated to cocoa production by rehabilitating old plantations or through a combination of planting new orchards and rehabilitating old plots.
- Although production costs—particularly labor—increased following the adoption of new organic farming methods, improved production and post-harvest techniques increased both the quantity



Women farmers in a cocoa plantation in Kono District.
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All profits from cocoa sales were reinvested in the supply chain to benefit the farmer collective.



Farmer with his cocoa harvest. © Mark Hulme, Darwin Initiative

and quality of marketable cocoa. All KAE farmers interviewed stated that they intend to continue to use the organic methods in the future.

- The project facilitated greater participation of women in cocoa growing—traditionally a male activity—and decision-making about the business.
- The project increased employment opportunities for young people, who were encouraged to work on their own farms or as hired labor; in general, there was more work for everyone due to increased cocoa production.
- The combination of FFS training, KAE membership and education about organic production was stated to have a positive impact on farmer health, providing both information about the potential adverse effect of agro-chemicals and income to spend on health and medicine.
- All interviewed subjects mentioned village-level changes; non-participants expressed interest in joining the collective and also adopted better methods of cocoa processing and production.
- KAE members have improved cocoa quality through more careful fermentation, drying, and quality checks developed through the FFS Training. Cocoa quality has now been improved to premium quality standards.

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Cocoa farmers at work during harvest in Kenema.
© Divine Chocolate

Many farmers reported that the FFS training on cocoa prices enabled them to negotiate better deals with purchasing agents.

Under organic certification standards, no synthetically compounded pesticide, synthetic chemical fertilizer or genetically engineered crops may be used. Farmers use compost, cover crops, manures, and naturally occurring pest control materials.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

www.oaklandinstitute.org
www.afsafrica.org

ENDNOTES

- 1 FAO. "Organic and fair-trade exports from Africa." *Increasing incomes and food security of small farmers in West and Central Africa through exports of organic and fair trade tropical products*. <http://www.fao.org/organicag/organicexports/en/> (accessed July 25, 2014).
- 2 WFP. "Sierra Leone." *Overview*. <http://www.wfp.org/countries/sierra-leone/overview> (accessed July 25, 2014).
- 3 *An Agenda for Change. Second Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRSP II) 2008-2012*. The Republic of Sierra Leone, 2008. http://unipsil.unmissions.org/portals/unipsil/media/publications/agenda_for_change.pdf (accessed July 25, 2014).
- 4 *Operation Feed the Nation. Contextualizing PRSP-SL Towards Food Security and Poverty Alleviation*. Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security and Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone, 2005. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTSIERRALEONE/Resources/oftn_oct_05.pdf (accessed November 3, 2014).
- 5 Fanthorpe, Richard and Roy Maconachie. "Beyond the crisis of youth? Mining, farming, and civil society in post-war Sierra Leone." *African Affairs Advance Access* 109.435 (2010).
- 6 *Sustainable Tree Crops Program*. World Cocoa Foundation, (undated). http://www.worldagroforestry.org/treesandmarkets/hvco7_meet/other_materials/IITA%20STCP.%20Regional%20Overview.pdf (accessed November 3, 2014).
- 7 World Cocoa Foundation. <http://worldcocoafoundation.org/> (accessed July 10, 2015).
- 8 "First Fair Trade cocoa from Sierra Leone." Press Release, Divine Chocolate, February 15, 2010. <http://www.divinechocolate.com/uk/press/press-releases/2010/2/first-fairtrade-cocoa-sierra-leone> (accessed July 25, 2014).

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Chocolate made from certified organic cocoa in Kenema. © Divine Chocolate