

# SEASONAL MIGRANTS, POVERTY ALLEVIATION AND CONTRACT SEX IN THE COCOA PRODUCING CENTERS IN THE LITTORAL QUADRANT OF CAMEROON: A DIAGNOSTIC SOCIO-ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY IN THE POST COLONIAL ERA

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## Introduction

Cocoa production forms a very important part of Cameroon's agro-industrial enterprise particularly along the coastal forest zones along the Littoral Quadrant. There are several communities in the South West region of Cameroon, which economies rely heavily on the cocoa industry. These communities that include areas like Munyenge, Bafia, Bai Bikum, Ekata and many others operate seasonal economies that depend on the fluctuating harvest of the cocoa farmers. The peak periods of harvest in these cocoa producing communities are usually periods of boom that have a serious ripple effect on these communities' economy. The cocoa industry in these areas is well organized and it has attracted migrant labor from far and near. There are migrants from far off places in the North West and Western regions of Cameroon who come and settle in cocoa producing areas in the South West Region<sup>2</sup>. In these areas, there are different categories of cocoa plantation operators: those who own cocoa farms as sole proprietors, while others

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<sup>2</sup> SOWEDA Focus: An Integrated Rural Development Newsletter of the South West Development Authority. December 2008.

work as paid labor and others as *Two-party* operators.<sup>3</sup> In these producing areas, there are other categories of workers like the cocoa buyers who act as intermediaries between the farmers and the exporting companies like TELCA. Cocoa buyers are agents who buy cocoa directly from the farmers and intend to sell to exporting companies. Some of the cocoa buyers are independent operators while others act as agents to cocoa exporting companies. These companies alongside the Cameroonian's government have contributed enormously to develop the cocoa sector, which is an important export exchange earner. The government of Cameroon through regional bodies like South West Development Authority (SOWEDA) and the Rumpi Participatory Development Project<sup>4</sup> have taken interest in enhancing the cocoa industry because of the role that it plays in the development of these particular areas and the nation as a whole. The growth and expansion of the cocoa sector in these areas has attracted a huge influx of migrants and it is against this backdrop that this paper establishes a link between cocoa production, seasonal migration and some of the social ills associated with these seasonal movements.

### *Contextualizing the study*

In contextualizing this study it is important to establish a link between cocoa production, seasonal migration, and prostitution as a means to fight poverty in the studied area. The cocoa producing centers are susceptible to seasonal migrants of different categories. People who leave home and migrate to other areas in search of jobs are forced into new patterns of life that can be beneficial as well as detrimental. In these cocoa producing localities in the Littoral Quadrant, several factors account for the high influx of migrants. These factors include the need to get employment that cannot be gotten in the immediate neighboring plantation environment because of certain constraints. The commercial cocoa plantation communities rely on migrant workers, an extensive system of out-grower schemes and linkages with neighboring urban centers. The current study is not on the entire seasonal migrants who move into/out of these areas during the peak harvest seasons.

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<sup>3</sup> Two party operators are workers that do not own farms and at the same time, they don't work as paid labour. Rather, the owner of the farms, who cannot work because of ill health or other encumbrances, can give out their farms for labour to work and the two parties will share the proceeds.

<sup>4</sup> The Rumpi Participatory Development Project is a project that is financed by the African Development Bank (ADB) and the Cameroon Government, which covers a wide area in enhancing rural development and reducing poverty among the rural household in the South West region.

It focuses on a particular group, that is, the seasonal sex workers, who leave the urban centers for cocoa producing centers during the peak seasons of harvest with the aim of making high turnovers, and the resultant consequence of their activities.

Thus, the paper focuses on cocoa production, seasonal migration with particular attention on commercial sex workers and the social network of operations in the cocoa production centers during periods of cocoa boom. As earlier mentioned, the increased income levels of the different categories of farm operators during peak seasons often create a different social climate that is characterized by lavish spending, heavy drinking, prostitution and other social vices. Before getting into the core discussions in this paper, it is important give a vivid picture of what characterizes these cocoa plantation localities.

### *Indexing the cocoa plantation localities*

The cocoa plantation areas described in this work are characterized by acute poverty, low per capita incomes, low human development indexes, undiversified economic structures dominated by cocoa operations and modest economic growth rates.<sup>5</sup> In these societies, agriculture as a whole and cocoa production is the most important sector in terms of the number of persons directly and indirectly involved. This is to say that the main occupation of the people in these areas is cocoa production. Usually the cocoa farms are interspersed with other non-cash produce like plantains, which people market for survival during low-key harvest periods.<sup>6</sup> The people own large-scale commercial farms covering several hectares and labor in these farms usually come from far off areas in the West and North West regions. During low harvest periods, the cocoa farmers in these areas live in abject poverty. On the other hand, the periods of heavy harvest or boom are considered periods of heavy spending and a warm social atmosphere because this is when they make sky-rocketing profits from their cocoa operations.

Poverty is considered an important social indicator in this paper because the farm operators who suffer from poverty during the low harvest seasons consider periods of boom as seasons of high spending. Poor commercial sex workers in the urban centers also consider such periods as favorable seasons for sex deals and contract marriages as a means to

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<sup>5</sup> Coulter, Jonathan, NR Group and Pierre Etoa. Study of Value Chain Finance for Coffee and Cocoa in Cameroon. p.9

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

fight poverty. The increasing living standards in the urban centers and the growing number of prostitutes often push some of them to look for fortunes elsewhere. The periods of cocoa boom in the cocoa producing localities is seen as a period of gains granted that these migrant prostitutes will collect more from the farmers in their sex exploits and spend little, since they are in a rural set up where the living standards are comparatively low.

Poverty can therefore be considered a major push factor responsible for the huge influx of migrant prostitutes into the cocoa producing centers during periods of boom. The definition of poverty is often as elusive as the phenomenon itself, because it is seen differently from different disciplines—economics, political science and sociology. Existing literature across disciplines clearly reveals the diversity in definitions of poverty and where the emphasis is being placed. In the context of the present study, poverty is perceived largely as an economic condition that can be solved using primary economic solutions. Improvement in national income levels, for example, has tended to characterize the contemporary analysis of poverty.<sup>7</sup> The broad terminologies of poverty and migration are interwoven and complex, because one has a direct bearing on the other, that is, poverty can lead to migration and migration can either alleviate poverty or elevate it. The relationship between poverty and women's employment in the informal sector is quite understandable because poverty can push women into the so-called *distress sale of labor* and prostitution is just one way. In his sense, commercial sex workers migrate from the urban centers into cocoa producing centers during periods of cocoa boom to sign contract marriages and commercial sex deals. They often last for the duration of this boom. These sex workers have made it a seasonal occupation and when they move to any cocoa producing center, they sign contracts with different categories of cocoa operators including farm owners, laborers and, in some cases, cocoa buyers.

## Methodology

The methodology adopted for this study is interdisciplinary because the study cuts across history and the social sciences. The study examines issues related to cocoa production and seasonal migration, which are concepts that are directly linked to geography. Poverty and prostitution are associated with human conditions and behavioral patterns, which can be looked at from sociological and anthropological perspectives. The foregoing justifies the adoption of

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<sup>7</sup> Oliver Saasa and Jerker Carlson. Aid and Poverty Reduction in Zambia.

the interdisciplinary design. Concerning instruments of data collection, this researcher relied heavily on primary sources because of the scarcity of secondary sources on the subject under discussion. Talking about primary sources, some records were collected from SOWEDA, minutes of meetings of farmers groups and oral interviews. In conducting oral interviews, the target group was the cocoa operators and the prostitutes that migrate into the cocoa producing milieus during peak seasons. Other stakeholders involved in this sector were equally contacted for vital information. The participant/observer approach was utilized given that this researcher from time to time spent holidays around these localities. His interactions with the farmers and, to a certain level, the prostitutes in these localities enabled him to gather vital information for this study. In terms of analyzing data, a qualitative design was adopted to establish a relation between cocoa production, seasonal migration and prostitution.

## Rationale of Study

The current research remains very significant because it establishes a link between cocoa production, seasonal migrants and poverty alleviation through prostitution. Perusing through the literature that exist on cocoa production and labor in Cameroon there is a missing gap on how the cocoa industry had attracted seasonal migrants and particularly migrant prostitutes on a seasonal basis. It is this lacuna in existing literature that makes the current study relevant. A study of this nature provides a vivid picture of the changing social environment around the plantation localities during periods of cocoa boom and during low-key seasons of harvest. Apart from filling a gap in existing literature, the study enlightens the reader on new patterns of urban-rural seasonal migration provoked by cocoa operations. Additionally, it shows how these kinds of operations have increased the spread of HIV in some local communities in Cameroon.

## Sustainability of the cocoa industry and attraction of migrants

SOWEDA and other NGOs have contributed in sustaining and expanding the cocoa industry in many areas in the South West region. These organizations have promoted development in farming techniques through training seminars and workshops and this has contributed enormously to

expand cultivation and improvement on both quality and quantity. The cocoa sector is presently generating huge wealth for the farm owners and this sector gainfully employs thousands of youths. SOWEDA and NGOs have also contributed immensely in the construction of modern ovens that are used for the drying of cocoa and the provision of other related facilities.<sup>8</sup> At first, the farmers of these areas depended on local drying techniques and this affected the quality of cocoa that Cameroon exported to the world market. In the face of increasing competition, the government of Cameroon decided to embark on a campaign to build modern cocoa ovens through the mission that is assign to SOWEDA. In this effort, some NGOs, cocoa exporting companies and many other stakeholders have assisted the government. Considering the fact that the development of the cocoa industry is an ongoing process, which requires huge financing and multi disciplinary teams of experts, SOWEDA has over the years tried to cover aspects like the construction of ovens that can create a huge impact on the population, with limited financial resource put at its disposal by the government. The combined effort of these different stakeholders has contributed in expanding the cocoa sector in these areas. This expansion has seen the increasing influx of migrants including the commercial sex workers and other categories of social workers.

### *The cocoa industry, multiplier effect and labor migration*

The growth and expansion of the cocoa industry has a serious multiplier effect on business operations and the attraction of migrant population including sex workers. Statistics have shown that apart from the family labor, more than 80 percent of paid labor around these commercial cocoa plantations are imported laborers. Some of the laborers imported into these areas are permanent workers, while others are temporary workers who are recruited seasonally. It is this category that is prone to commercial sex deals, either because most of them are not married or have abandoned their families back home. One of the key problems that confronted the early cocoa operators from the onset was their inability to secure labor in the immediate surrounding localities. Several arguments have been advanced to justify why securing labor around these cocoa plantations was problematic. Among these problems is the fact that those who could have ceded themselves as laborers preferred to operate their own farms for long-term benefits.<sup>9</sup> Again, it was

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8 SOWEDA Focus in Pictures: An Integrated Rural Development Newsletter of the South West Development Authority. December 2011. P.4.

9 Coulter, Jonathan, NR Group and Pierre Etoa. Study of Value Chain Finance for Coffee and Cocoa in Cameroon.p.4

argued that the potential laborers around these cocoa plantation localities were familiar with the tedious nature of cocoa cultivation and consequently preferred to operate as small-scale holders or large commercial farmers. It was against this background that many of the cocoa plantation operators had to move far away in search of labor for their plantation operations and the preferred choices were young men that were not married. The Western and the Bamenda highlands were discovered as suitable grounds for the recruitment of labor.<sup>10</sup> From the survey that was conducted in these areas it was learned that some of the workers came from areas like Esimbi, Beba, Kom, Nkambe, and some other ethnic groups in the Western region of Cameroon and Lebialem Division in the South West region. However, statistics attests to the fact that labor in the cocoa producing sector in some of these communities were dominated by laborers from Kom in the North West Region of Cameroon. This labor when recruited was grouped into different categories depending on the kind of operation that was performed.

### ***Categorization of labor operations in the cocoa plantations***

Laborers who migrate into these commercial cocoa plantations operate under different categories depending on the types of contracts they go in for and the kind of operations they carry out. Some operate as permanent workers with an annual pay while others operate under periodic arrangements and who are paid through piece or time ratings. In some instances, a percentage of the total produce is surrendered to the worker as payment. For permanent workers that were paid annually, a block amount was agreed upon as payment at the end of the year. However, this often excluded feeding allowances and hospital bills. For workers that were paid in percentages of harvest, they actually received payments twice a year – the low harvest season and the peak harvest period<sup>11</sup>. Their payments are calculated depending on the amount of cocoa that is harvested for each season and this too has an implication on the kind of contracts that the workers engage with sex workers. With regard to payments and compensation of workers, an outstanding feature that was noted by this researcher was the *Two-party* arrangement. It is important to reiterate the fact that the nature of the contracts that were engaged by the workers contributed in defining the commercial sex deals they went into.

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Pa Folefac Abraham Ngulefac. Cocoa Farmer, Munyenge, June 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Jacob Mbeh, Labourer in Ikata, June 2015.

### ***Two-Party arrangements and mortgages in the cocoa industry***

The Two-Party arrangement was a kind of deal that was conducted by farm owners who could not immediately manage their farms for several reasons. In some instances, these farmers lacked the finance to run these farms. In some cases, some were unable to run their farms because of ill health and lack of commitments. From the foregoing reasons, farm owners could lease out their farms for durations ranging from two years to up to five years. These arrangements or agreements were made in such a way that the *leasees* had total control over the farm and the produce, but a certain percentage of the annual income generated by the farm had to go to the *lessors* as benefits until the contract elapsed.<sup>12</sup> These kinds of contracts existed because the farm owners were not always ready to sell out rightly their farms; rather they preferred temporary leases that still guaranteed their ownership. It is these different categories of farm operators that constitute the target of the migrant commercial sex workers during periods of cocoa boom. Whether farm owner, permanent worker or Two-party operator, all of them are engaged in the business of prostitution.

### ***Cocoa Boom and seasonal migration into cocoa plantation areas***

During the peak periods of cocoa boom, the cocoa plantation localities record a huge influx of seasonal migrants in the category of cocoa buyers, petit traders and seasonal sex workers. These different categories of migrants move into the cocoa plantation environment in search of seasonal gains. Apart from the fact that the cocoa industry directly contributes to the development of these areas, the cocoa industry in places like Munyenge, Bafia and Bai-Bikum has also created different circles of economic and social operations with positive and negative outcomes. Typical of the social network of operations created are the many prostitutes that leave the urban centers and migrate to the cocoa producing localities seasonally and particularly during the peak periods of harvest. The periods of cocoa boom are usually characterized by other temporary businesses that are operated as a multiplier effect of this boom. Among the petit businesses, that spring up from the boom is the contracted marriages and commercial sex deals that are made for short periods. According to a survey that was conducted in Munyenge, Bafia, Bai-Bikum and a few other areas, a cross section of the migrant prostitutes contacted pointed out that they were coming from Mutengene, Limbe, Douala, Tiko and other major towns in Cameroon. These prostitutes move

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

into these areas and sign temporary sex contracts (contracted marriages) ranging from one month to about six depending on the terms of the contract and the duration of the boom. These contracts are signed with cocoa dealers of different categories ranging from the farm owners to the workers and buyers. These contracted sex deals usually include rents, feeding and dressing allowances for the prostitutes.<sup>13</sup>

Poverty and the search for survival strategies have remained a major push factor in these operations. Cross sections of the girls that carry on these operations are girls that can barely survive and are living below the poverty margin in the urban centers. Unemployment, high living standards and the ever-increasing poverty have pushed these girls to be looking for alternative survival strategies apart from their conventional sex exploits in the urban centers. The business of prostitution in the urban centers is even becoming more and more unrewarding because of many other factors, namely, the growing number of prostitutes that have flooded the urban space and have made the business not too lucrative.

Again, the incidence of Aids and other sexually transmitted diseases also act as a deterrent to the business of prostitution in our urban spaces. Above all, the high level of sensibilization and family consciousness has made the prostitution industry to suffer from retardation especially with the growing number of Pentecostal churches. Numerous NGOs are campaigning against HIV and other negative vices like prostitution. These organizations are well established in the urban centers in Cameroon. Even though many will argue that in the face of these deterrent factors, the commercial sex industry is still booming. However, these factors have imposed to a certain extent a decline on commercial sex activities in our urban environment.

Besides the seasonal migrant prostitutes that penetrate the cocoa farms, there are other migrants like the petit traders who move into these areas to exploit the gains of cocoa boom. Some go there to sell medication while others go there with petit items like soap, maggi and many other items. Some of the merchants are specialized in selling insecticides that are used in the cocoa farms. In recent times, the incidence of migration of temporal workers including commercial sex workers has been increased by the liberalization of the cocoa sector. The liberalization of this sector has raised the number of buyers moving into the cocoa producing centers particularly during peak seasons and this has a ripple effect on the other sectors ion operation.

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Josephine Mabengu, a Commercial Sex Worker, Ikata Village June 2015.

### *The liberalization of the cocoa sector and the increasing influx of migrants*

After independence, a state-controlled marketing system was established for the buying and marketing of cash crops like cocoa and coffee. This system prevailed until the beginning of the 1990s. This system functioned under the aegis of the National Commodity Marketing Board (ONCPB), which in Francophone areas operated as a *Caisse de Stabilisation*, while in the Anglophone areas, it followed the Marketing Board paradigms<sup>14</sup>. Following this kind of arrangement, both areas of cocoa and coffee were supplied through a monopolistic structure, consisting of primary societies, regional cooperative unions with very few private exporters. ONCPB allocated to the buyers their respective quotas and buying zones.<sup>15</sup> There was an official scale (*bareme*) fixing the margins throughout the value chain, while the difference between the scale-determined and real export prices was attributed to ONCPB; if the difference was positive, it was turned over to ONCPB, and if negative, ONCPB reimbursed the exporters for the loss incurred.<sup>16</sup> In practice, positive differences were absorbed into general finances, such that ONCPB could not develop its stabilization fund. It became highly indebted to cooperatives, and these ended up delaying payments to farmers, for periods of three years or more.<sup>17</sup> ONCPB became so indebted that cocoa producers received only half the guaranteed price during the 1989-1990 seasons.

In response to this situation and pressure that was made to bear on the administration by the Breton Woods through the Structural Adjustment Program, government policy swung towards liberalization of the cocoa sector. From the mid 1991, exporters were allowed to export directly and licensing conditions for local traders were suspended. At the same time, ONCPB continued to fix all marketing margins, and an official stabilization fund was created at the National Coffee and Cocoa Board (ONCC) to regulate inter-annual price fluctuations. Unfortunately, this system came under increasing pressure, the stabilization fund was declared bankrupt, and ONCC and management charges continued to mount. The impact of the liberalization of the cocoa sector on the current subject of discussion is that it increased the influx of migrant workers into the plantation areas, as the rural cocoa producing neighborhoods were flooded with buyers.

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14 Coulter, Jonathan, NR Group and Pierre Etoa. Study of Value Chain Finance for Coffee and Cocoa in Cameroon. p.7

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

In 1994/95, this first set of reforms was followed by another set of changes, with the abolition of the price scale and the stabilization fund. One of the objectives of these second set of reforms was to “professionalize” the players in the cocoa and coffee sectors. For example, cocoa buyers were to get organized in order to be able to negotiate contracts with exporters and financing with the banks, and to ensure compliance with international standards. Producers were to organize to bulk their produce and negotiate with buyers, to control product quality and acquire inputs through tenders. It was this liberalization of the cocoa sector that brought in private operators in the cocoa marketing department. Private companies like TELCA and SAMFO exploited this liberalization and their buying agents were sent to every direction including the above-mentioned cocoa producing areas. The buying agents constituted part of the labor hierarchy in these areas and given that they were forced to establish semi-permanent dwellings in these cocoa localities, they quickly got involved in the prostitution business. It is important to note that most of the cocoa buying agents who moved into the cocoa producing centers were either not married or had abandoned their families where they permanently resided. Their seasonal activities as buying agents forced them into new circles of social operations. Some contracted temporal sex deals while others went into contract marriages.

### ***The reversed trend of seasonal migration as an offshoot of the cocoa industry***

Talking about the trend of migration, it is common and usual to see migrant workers especially female migrants leave the rural set up for urban centers in search of greener pastures as prostitutes or as domestic servants. The belief is that urban centers have more job opportunities and are far more lucrative habitats for prostitution given their cosmopolitan characterization such as many drinking places, cinema halls, and other relaxation centers. However, in the context of the present study, the reverse is true because rather these commercial sex workers and other categories of workers move into the rural milieu from urban and semi-urban centers seasonally. The commercial sex workers leave the urban milieu for the rural cocoa producing centers during particular periods of the cocoa harvesting season with the aim of making fast cash. This urban to rural network of movement by this category of sex workers is necessitated by two principal factors, namely the timing of the peak harvest season and the outlook of these migrant prostitutes leaving the urban centers for the cocoa communities compared to the other women around the neighborhood. Concerning timing, it is important to mention that

the peak harvest season usually falls around November prior to end of year celebrations during which everyone need money for end of year festivities. On the outlook of the migrant prostitutes, the cocoa operators often consider them to be of high quality because of their flashy nature compared to women around the cocoa plantation localities. Even their style of dressing can be enticing to the cocoa operators who only come across these women because of their seasonalness<sup>18</sup>.

These new networks of social operations that are created during the peak of cocoa harvesting seasons have very serious implications on these communities. While early outbreaks of HIV/AIDS were deemed predominant in the urban centers, the majority of people living with the disease are now in the rural areas because of ignorance and the gradual migration of prostitutes into these rural communities for seasonal sex exploits. Among the different categories of women who have today embarked on the urban-rural migration trend are the seasonal commercial sex workers who temporarily carry their prostitution activities to areas of cocoa boom during particular periods of the year. It is important to mention that these sex workers do not have any permanent destination but they are driven by the lucrateness of their sex contracts. Therefore, where the contracts are lucrative, they can always go back there in the next season. It is important to mention that different contracts are signed depending on the category of the cocoa operator and his income level. These sex deals and contract marriages form part of the network of social operations in the cocoa producing centers.

## Network of social Operations during cocoa booms

In analyzing the network of social operations in the cocoa producing centers during the peak period of harvest, it is important to mention that cocoa farm owners/workers are people with seasonal incomes. These seasons can be referred to as the small peak seasons and the high peak seasons. Small peak seasons are when the farmers can boast of minimum harvest, that is, the farms can produce just a few bags of cocoa. The high peak seasons are periods of maximum harvest that is when the farms produce at their peak. Out of these two periods, the rest of the farming season is usually characterized by heavy spending on the farms because the farm owners need to buy chemicals for the spraying of cocoa and equally have to take care of their workers. This is to say that from the peak harvest period, the rest of the

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with Bobe Nsom Abraham Kimbi, Cocoa Laborer Munyenge 27<sup>th</sup> August 2015.

farming season is usually characterized by low-key social activities because of the scarcity of money.

Concerning the spending on the farms, a majority of the farmers depend on borrowing to be able to raise capital to buy insecticides and other chemicals. In some cases, the farmers even embark on a kind of trade by barter to be able to survive. That is some of the cocoa buyers supply them with chemicals and other farm implements in return for cocoa during the harvesting season. These kinds of arrangements were usually backed by contract agreements that were oral or evidenced in writing in front of witnesses to avoid future conflicts. There were also occasions where the farmers gave cocoa to the cocoa dealers with the intention of collecting insecticides and other chemicals in the next farming season.

### ***Cocoa boom and the social space around cocoa plantations***

Cocoa boom in the context of the present study refers to the peak periods of heavy harvest. This period is characterized by high circulation of cash due to the money that is pumped into these areas by cocoa buyers. The multiplier effect of this cocoa boom is usually negative and positive. Positively, because it increases the living standards of the rural masses, which are reflected in their diet, pattern of living and other positive vices. During this period, the farmers can afford to send their children to school, expand their farms and construct better houses. Even their women benefit from this boom because of the money their husbands can afford to give them. The atmosphere around these cocoa producing centers is usually that of lavish spending.

On the other hand, the social atmosphere in these localities during the period of cocoa boom is fraught with many social vices. These areas witness a high level of adult and youth delinquency during the peak periods. There is usually an increase in the number of beer parlors and a tremendous increase in alcohol consumption in these areas. This increase in alcoholism leads to an expansion of crime wave, sexual immorality and other vices. During the peak seasons, it is commonplace to see Brasseries Trucks (the Brewery company that produces beer in Cameroon) carrying tons upon tons of beer into the cocoa producing towns of Munyenge, Bafia, Bai and other areas on a daily basis due to high consumption. It is during such periods that adultery and fornication take centre stage in the people's social life. As means of expressing their seasonal wealth, the cocoa workers and particularly farm owners import prostitutes from urban centers like Douala, Mutengene and Limbe and sign seasonal sex contracts (contract marriages) with them

that can span for up to six months. These are temporary marriages that last only during peak periods of cocoa commercialization around these areas. The workers, who import these sex workers, take responsibility to pay their rents, fruit their medical bills and feed them during the duration of the contract. Additionally, a weekly or monthly amount is agreed upon as payment for the sex worker. This amount is often paid at the beginning or at the end of the contract depending on the terms<sup>19</sup>. It is important to note that most if not all of these contracts are usually verbal contracts.

The number of court cases in these areas increase as well, because the cocoa farmers at this time claim to have money and will not take any challenge from anyone. This is to say that matters that could be negotiated and resolved at the levels of the local councils became court cases. Hence, cocoa boom does not only come with only positive vices; it equally breeds conflict and other social ills. From the sources interviewed, it was revealed that Cameroon forces – the police and the gendarmes, take advantages of these local farmers during these periods to move into these areas, fuel cases and extort money from the concerned. The roads leading to these areas during the peak season are usually characterized by many control points because the security operatives also extort money from the cocoa transporters. Therefore, the boom period has a multiplier chain that is both positive and negative. Among the social operations that are conducted because of cocoa boom, prominent are the short-term marriages that are contracted during this period.

### *Contract marriages and commercial sex deals*

Prostitution is an old institution that has prevailed in so many parts of the world particularly in urban and semi-urban centers. The fervent argument usually advanced for women getting involved in the business of prostitution is poverty. However there are other social and anthropological pundits who argue that not every woman get involved in prostitution because of poverty; some get involved because of their high sexual libido. However, one cannot deny the fact that cross sections of the prostitutes are women who are from very poor homes, living below the poverty margin and who can barely provide their daily needs. Poverty can push women into employment, often in informal jobs and prostitution is one of the informal sectors that they commonly found themselves. In most developing countries, women often seek wage employment in response to crises and difficult family circumstances such

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Fotabe Raymond, Cocoa Buyer, Munyenge. 17<sup>th</sup> June 2015

as separation or widowhood. The women who today prostitute in our urban centers are not only young girls but many of them are divorcees and widows who are struggling for survival.

The difficulties encountered by prostitutes in the urban milieu is gradually pushing them to seek alternatives and moving back to the rural set up is often considered an option. Alternatively, a good number of the prostitutes are now moving across the borders to countries like Equatorial Guinea and Gabon while others who cannot afford to get to these countries move to cocoa producing communities to reap temporary high benefits in their sex exploits. It is therefore commonplace to see prostitutes who seasonally migrate from areas like Douala, Limbe, Tiko, Mutengene and other urban centers in Cameroon to places like Munyenge, Bafia, Bai and other cocoa producing areas to contract temporary marriages. The terms of these contract marriages are usually very clear.

The farm operators import these girls, rent rooms for them and furnish the rooms with beds and other furniture. These girls are usually put on daily feeding allowances and their health during the period of the contract is the responsibility of the cocoa operator. Alongside these facilities, the girls are given a sum of money that ranges from 150,000 Frs. Fcfa to 300,000 Frs. Fcfa depending on the terms agreed upon at the end of the six months period.<sup>20</sup> In return for all these, the farmer/cocoa operator is expected to have constant sex with the prostitute at any time desired for the duration of the contract. These prostitutes also accompany these men during their drinking spree after work. There are cocoa operators who keep more than one prostitute in a single cocoa season depending on his financial prowess. As earlier mentioned, the new social climate that is created around the cocoa plantation localities during periods of boom has far reaching implications on such localities.

### ***Contract marriages and social ills in the cocoa plantation neighbourhoods***

It will not be surprising to point out that even though the cocoa operators/farmers see the contracting of temporary marriages as a means to display wealth and social aggrandizement, this operation comes with many social problems like broken homes, school dropouts, increase in polygamy and the spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with Jacob Fobiteh. Cocoa Farmer at Ekata, Muyuka Sub-Division, 17<sup>th</sup> June 2015.

According to a survey conducted in the field, it was discovered that some of the farmers who encountered these prostitutes ended up abandoning their families and this mostly occurred when their wives discovered their sexual dealings with the prostitutes. The effect of this was that some of the children lost their fathers to prostitutes and this affected their education since their mothers could not single-handedly sponsor them. This is a very common phenomenon in the cocoa producing areas. In some instances where the married women could accommodate the prostitutes, their husbands ended up becoming polygamies. These peak periods of cocoa boom in most of these communities resulted in the break-up of families because those farmers who went into these contract marriages paid much attention to these prostitutes than their wives. From the informants contacted it was discovered that the number of family crisis during such seasons was very rampant including recorded cases of divorce. The worst incidence recorded as a negative vice of the cocoa boom in these localities is the rise in the number of aids cases that were recorded in the different localities in which this survey was conducted.

### *Mobility-induced vulnerability to HIV/AIDS in these Cocoa localities*

HIV/AIDS is a long-standing issue for many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa including Cameroon and it is claimed that migrant workers are especially vulnerable to this disease. A study to confirm this hypothesis was undertaken in 1999 CARE Thailand/Raks Thai Foundation, with the support of the Japanese Foundation for AIDS Prevention covering some Third World Countries. This study does not, however, provide information regarding evidence about or the extent of HIV/AIDS among migrant workers. Rather, it tried to identify the risk in the behaviors of migrant workers in some selected areas including commercial agricultural plantations.

In the context of this paper, this author examines how the conditions and structure of the migration of these commercial sex workers from the urban centers to the rural areas during periods of cocoa boom may increase HIV vulnerability for migrant sex workers and the inhabitants of the cocoa plantation localities, thus illuminating key challenges. It is important to note that HIV infection rates in the rural areas are hard to measure and likely to go unreported.<sup>21</sup> While early outbreaks in Cameroon as whole and the South West region in particular were reported predominantly in the urban centers, a majority of people living with HIV/AIDS are now in rural areas, as a result

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<sup>21</sup> The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and International Labour Organization: Gender Dimensions of agricultural and rural Employment, Differentiated Pathways out of Poverty. P. 28.

of many male migrant workers with AIDS symptoms returning to their villages. The incidence of HIV in these cocoa plantation areas is increased by the presence of commercial sex workers who visit these localities during periods of cocoa boom. One key concern in this paper is that population mobility can be responsible for the spread of HIV, since these people might carry the virus from place to place.

Indeed, much of the literature confirms that migration has clearly facilitated the spread of HIV in different parts of Cameroon over the past two decades. Many studies have found that the link between HIV and migration appears to be close and complex while other reports argue that there may not be a casual relation between migration per se and the transmission HIV<sup>22</sup>. Other pundits have argued that the spread of infectious diseases such as HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases is not only the result of individual actions and behavior, but is also influenced by political, social and economic organization of society. Notwithstanding, it has been increasingly recognized that mobile population may be more vulnerable to HIV infection than non-mobile population and that migration does not only facilitate the rapid spread of the virus along the so-called corridors of migration, but also foster behavior and situations that can facilitate transmission from one person to another.

## Conclusion

The cocoa sector in the Littoral Quadrant of Cameroon just like in many areas across West and Central Africa remains an important catalyst to economic and social transformation. The localities that host these cocoa farms in the Littoral Quadrant of Cameroon are gradually being transformed in terms of the new values that go with the operation of large commercial cocoa farms. The high influx of labour migrants is itself transformative because the migrants move with their language and other socio-cultural values. These localities have attracted not only labour but other categories of migrants like petit traders, cocoa buyers and the seasonal commercial sex workers. The fluctuating fortunes of the cocoa harvest that falls under the low key harvest season and the peak harvest season has accelerated business around these localities. The peak harvest seasons are considered periods of boom and this period is identified with high spending on the part of the cocoa operators. Because of temporary gains, the cocoa operators indulge in different kinds of social activities that have both positive and negative consequences. Positively, there is expansion in business that has a serious multiplier effect on these

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22 FAO. 2003. HIV/AIDS and agriculture: impacts and responses. FAO, Rome (also available at <ftp://ftp.fao.org/dorep/fao/006/Y5145E/Y514E00.pdf>).

communities in terms of living standards, education and social welfare. Negatively, a new social climate is created that breeds delinquency at various levels. These areas in seasons of peak harvest often witness high consumption of alcohol, adultery and fornication resulting in the spread of HIV/AIDS. The sustainability and expansion of the cocoa in these localities is thanks to the effort of the government and other NGOs that have contributed to the development and expansion of the cocoa sector in these areas. This growth in the cocoa sector is accompanied by economic and social changes.

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## ABSTRACT

The current study establishes a link between cocoa production and the migration of seasonal workers, particularly commercial sex workers, from urban centers to cocoa production centers during certain periods of the year. Cameroon as a whole operates at the primary level of production with agriculture dominating economic operations. Cocoa production constitutes an important component of the studied area's economy, with the Cocoa producing towns of Munyenge, Ekata, Bai, Bafia and many others usually attracting seasonal migrants especially during periods of cocoa boom. Cocoa boom creates a different social space that attracts different categories of social workers – petit traders, cocoa buyers and commercial sex workers who migrate into these areas with the intention of making fast gains from their sex exploits. Upon arrival in these areas, the sex workers go into prostitution, contracted sex deals and contracted marriages that last for the period of the boom. The sex workers are usually from urban centers like Douala, Mutengene, Tiko and Limbe. Cocoa booms around these areas are usually characterized by a kind of social euphoria that is animated by the importation of sex workers, heavy drinking and lavish spending. This kind of social atmosphere around the cocoa production centers increases the vulnerability of the sex workers and cocoa operators to HIV/AIDS. To accomplish the objectives of this study, an interdisciplinary approach was adopted because it cuts across the Social Sciences and History. It was employed a qualitative design of analysis. Participant/observer mechanisms were equally an efficient instrument for gathering data. The scarcity of literature made this researcher to rely mostly on oral sources. From the findings, the cocoa producing centers of Munyenge, Ekata and many others record a huge influx of migrants during periods of cocoa boom including commercial sex workers. Contracted marriages and sex contracts are common in these areas during those seasons resulting to a growth in mobility-induced vulnerability to HIV.

## KEYWORDS

Seasonal Migration; Contracted Sex; Poverty Alleviation; Cocoa Production; Littoral Quadrant Cameroon.

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