



STCP Voices 01

S U S T A I N A B L E T R E E C R O P S P R O G R A M

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Lucie Edzimbi lives in the village of Elat, Southern Cameroon. She is a rarity. She is one of the few women who own cocoa farms in their own right. Elat is about 40 km from Yaoundé, the capital of the country. This is a major cocoa producing area. It is also the place where STCP have a farm field school (FFS). Lucie's father planted two cocoa farms in the 1960s, one of 1 ha and the other 3 ha in extent. Lucie grew up here, and her father showed her how to grow cocoa. When he became too old to manage the farms, he gave them to her.

Now 44 years old, Lucie lives with her husband and seven children ranging in age from 23 to 6. She manages the 4 ha of cocoa with the help of her children and her elderly father. The International Food Policy Research Institute conducted a survey in 2002. They concluded that growing cocoa enhances the status of women in West Africa and provides them with an important source of income. Also, when women cocoa farmers have the same access to inputs as men, their farms can be just as productive.



Lucie Edzimbi and some FFS participants of Elat village, southern Cameroon

Martin Mesongui is a 22 year old cocoa farmer who also lives in the village of Elat. Martin lives with his girlfriend and their three children, a girl of 7, a boy of 4, and a baby girl of 18 months. Martin inherited three cocoa farms, with a total area of 3 ha, from his father who established the first farm some 40 years ago, in the 1960s. The largest farm, of just above 1 ha, is planted with local cocoa varieties while two smaller farms are planted with hybrids.

But producing cocoa is never an easy job. It has been a constant struggle against the pests and diseases that threaten to reduce yields, and hence family income. Lucie and Martin sprayed insecticides and fungicides regularly but were unsure about the correct dosage. Sometimes Lucie applied the right amount; sometimes she mixed several chemicals together. She spent CFA41,000 (US\$77) on chemicals but harvested only one and a half bags of cocoa, about 90 kg in 2003. In the same year, Martin sprayed his farm every 2 weeks against black pod. He spent CFA95,000 (US\$178) and harvested four bags, about 240 kg.

Desperate to reduce costs and increase their cocoa production, Lucie and Martin registered to attend a farmer field school (FFS), the second school to be run in their village.

The school is facilitated by a woman government extension agent and has 20 participants ranging in age from 20 to 60 years. Lucie and Martin make time in their busy schedule to attend 4-hour sessions twice a month over a period of 9 months (from March to December).

As she observed results on the FFS farm, Lucie remembered childhood days spent on the cocoa farm with her father. She recalls "My father knew many of the techniques we are learning in the FFS but he forgot about them so I never learned them". Lucie decided to try out the new techniques on one of her farms (i.e., the 3 ha plot). She cut the branches of the shade trees that made her farm dark and encouraged the spread of black pod disease, pruned her cocoa trees, and removed diseased pods.

"Although the trees have not produced a lot, I have seen a change. Last year in September, the whole 3-ha plot was attacked by black pod. This year, after I had applied the new techniques, only six trees are affected ... More importantly, I have not sprayed even once yet! For sure, this year, I expect to get more than the half bag I harvested last year from that farm."

- LUCIE EDZIMBI

Six months after he started attending the FFS, Martin has already applied two of the techniques he learned on his 1-ha farm: pruning and removing disease-infected pods. From agro-ecosystem analysis in the FFS, he has also become a keen observer of his cocoa trees and their immediate environment to learn what causes pests and diseases to increase.



Photo 2: Martin Mesongui, FFS participant at Elat village, southern Cameroon

By September 2004, Martin had sprayed his farm only twice with fungicide, compared to 11 times by the same time the previous year. This amounts to saving CFA34,000 (US\$64). For a small-scale cocoa farmer, this seemingly small saving means a lot, as Martin explains: “I have been able to use the money saved from buying less fungicide to solve other problems. For example, my 4-year-old son was admitted in a hospital in Yaoundé and needs an operation. I will use the money saved from using less fungicide to pay his hospital bills.”

Before she attended the FFS, Lucie was losing money by spending on chemicals. The current situation is different, as she explains: “I use the money saved to pay for other things, in particular, school fees for my five school-aged children.”

In addition to learning about new production techniques, Martin and Lucie learned about an important social issue: the dangers of using child labor in cocoa production. Martin explains: “In the FFS, I am learning what kind of farm work children should and should not do. I learned that children have the right to rest, they should not work in the cocoa farm doing heavy tasks such as pruning, spraying pesticides and carrying heavy loads. It is OK for children to help on the farm by carrying water to put in sprayers or carrying light loads.”

“Before the FFS, I had planned to have my son spray the farm. Now, I realize the dangers of using children in certain tasks in cocoa farming. To safeguard them, I will make sure that my children never do this type of work.”

- LUCIE EDZIMBI

As to the future, Martin says “I think I can make improvements in my cocoa farm based on what I am learning in the FFS. I am very happy with the results so far... Everything I have learned has reduced the money I spend on my cocoa farm.”