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1 **Knowledge and perception of Ghanaian cocoa farmers on mirid control and their**
2 **willingness to use forecasting systems**

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12
13
14 **(Running title: Forecasting systems for mirid control)**

1 **Abstract**

2

3 Annual losses of cocoa in Ghana to mirids are significant. Therefore, accurate timing of

4 insecticide application is critical to enhance yields. However, cocoa farmers often lack

5 information on the expected mirid population for each season to enable them to

6 optimise pesticide use. This study assessed farmers' knowledge and perceptions of

7 mirid control and their willingness to use forecasting systems informing them of

8 expected mirid peaks and time of application of pesticides. A total of 280 farmers were

9 interviewed in the Eastern and Ashanti regions of Ghana with a structured open and

10 closed ended questionnaire. Most farmers (87%) considered mirids as the most

11 important insect pest on cocoa with 47% of them attributing 30-40% annual crop loss to

12 mirid damage. There was wide variation in the timing of insecticide application as a

13 result of farmers using different sources of information to guide the start of application.

14 The majority of farmers (56%) do not have access to information on the type, frequency

15 and timing of insecticides to use. However, respondents who are members of farmer

16 groups had better access to such information. Extension officers were the preferred

17 channel for information transfer to farmers with 72% of farmers preferring them to

18 other available methods of communication. Almost all the respondents (99%) saw the

19 need for a comprehensive forecasting system to help farmers manage cocoa mirids. The

20 importance of accurate timing for mirid control based on forecasted information to

21 farmer groups and extension officers was discussed.

22

23 **Key words:** Extension, questionnaire, farmer groups, insecticides, mirid, cocoa

24

1 **Introduction**

2 Mirids (*Sahlbergella singularis* (Haglund), *Distantiella theobroma* (Distant), *Helopeltis*
3 spp. and the *Bryocoropsis* spp.) are economically significant insect pests in cocoa
4 production, particularly in West Africa (Padi and Owusu, 1998, Anikwe et al., 2009),
5 where around 71% of the world's cocoa is grown. Mirid damage is caused by both
6 adults and nymphs, which pierce their feeding mouth parts into pods, chupons and soft
7 portions of branches. This creates a characteristic vivid circular lesion which turns
8 brown and later black after a couple of hours on pods and elliptical dark lesions on
9 chupons and young stems (Entwistle, 1975). In Ghana, mirid damage is a contributory
10 factor to low yields (Dormon et al., 2007). It is estimated that approximately 30% of
11 cocoa beans in Ghana is lost to mirids annually (Adu-Acheampong et al., 2014).
12 Control of mirids has mainly been through the use of conventional insecticides applied
13 to mature cocoa with a motorised knapsack spraying machine (Eguagie, 1973, Awudzi
14 et al., 2009, Sonwa et al., 2008). The current recommended time for the start of
15 insecticide application is August since historical reports have shown that the pest
16 increases in numbers in that month (Owusu-Manu, 1995). Recent mirid population
17 studies carried out by Awudzi (2014) suggests that rapid mirid population build-up
18 starts from June and not August. This may be due to the use of hybrid (progenies from
19 bi-parental crosses made in seed gardens) materials producing pods all year round and
20 changes in climate over the years. Adu-Acheampong et al. (2014) also studied the
21 population dynamics of the major mirid species in 1991, 1999, 2003 and 2012 to
22 determine the appropriate timing for the application of insecticides for the control of the
23 pest. They recommended a needs-based system for pest control on cocoa, a shift from
24 the current calendar-based recommendation.

25 Over the years, various insecticides with different active ingredients have been used for
26 mirid control (Entwistle et al., 1959, Eguagie, 1973, Awudzi et al., 2009). Most of the

1 insecticides used in the 1960s are no longer in use because of their high mammalian
2 toxicity levels and because of new maximum residue levels (MRL) introduced by the
3 European Union (EU) (Raw, 1959, Prins, 1965, Bateman, 2009). Until recently, only
4 three insecticides were recommended for the control of cocoa mirids in Ghana (Awudzi
5 et al., 2009). Their active ingredients are bifenthrin, thiamethoxam and imidacloprid.
6 The Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana (CRIG) conducts research into the safe use of
7 these insecticides and gives recommendations on dosage and application techniques.
8 However, since coverage of extension services in Ghana is limited (Baah, 2002), it is
9 not clear to what extent farmers have access to such information. Lack of adequate
10 information may result in incorrect timing of insecticide applications and mirids
11 numbers reaching their economic thresholds before insecticides are applied.
12 Furthermore, the use of unapproved insecticides, resulting in unacceptable residues in
13 beans and other health problems, can arise if farmers feel their crop is threatened by
14 severe mirid damage. Mirids have developed resistance to some insecticides in the past
15 due to incorrect application (Dunn, 1963, Prins, 1965, Owusu-Ansah et al., 2010). The
16 excessive use of insecticides without any advisory service can impact negatively on the
17 economic viability of cocoa farming as the cost of pesticides may outweigh crop sales
18 as well as destroy beneficial and other non-target organisms (Rejesus et al., 2009).
19 It is not clear whether membership of farmer associations/ cooperatives improves access
20 to information. Most farmers in Ghana do not use research recommendations from
21 CRIG for the control of cocoa mirids because of the difficulty in accessing the
22 information (Gerken et al., 2001). There is evidence to show that farmers get the bulk of
23 their information on how to access and use farming innovations and techniques from
24 other farmers (Pomp and Burger, 1995). There is also a strong peer effect on farmer
25 adoption of innovation in Ghana, with ethnicity and religious affiliation playing a role
26 (Munshi, 2002). In Ghana, a cocoa disease and pest control programme, CODAPEC,

1 was introduced in 2001 to help manage diseases and pests on cocoa to enhance yield
2 (Asante et al., 2002). This involves the application of recommended insecticides and
3 fungicides on farms at no direct cost to the farmer. Farmers are to ensure that their
4 farms are not weedy and cocoa trees well pruned for good aeration. Water must also be
5 made available for CODAPEC sprayers to make up insecticide and fungicide solutions
6 for application. Even though the programme has helped to increase yields, it is
7 challenged with a late start in some areas and some farmers are not carrying out the
8 needed cultural practices before application is done (Adjinah and Opoku, 2010, Kumi
9 and Daymond, 2015). The perception that some farmers are not always able to afford
10 recommended pesticides to complement CODAPEC's efforts could be another
11 drawback to the pest control programme.

12 In the quest to develop forecasting systems to provide information for effective mirid
13 control, there is a need to investigate farmers' willingness to use such information. The
14 most acceptable mode of conveying this information must also be investigated since the
15 farmer may not access an innovation if the medium of information transfer is not
16 appropriate. A forecasting system for this study is defined as a method of collecting
17 data, processing it and sending the resultant information to the end user (cocoa farmer)
18 for decision making and farm management. For mirid control on cocoa in Ghana, such
19 information might be provided on the basis of the phenology of the crop, climate and/or
20 monitoring of mirid populations.

21 A survey on farmers' access to such information for mirid control, its implications on
22 yield and the acceptability of a forecasting system to inform pest management decisions
23 then becomes necessary.

24 The specific objectives of this study were:

- 25 1. To assess farmers' knowledge on insecticide use for mirid control.

- 1 2. To examine whether farmers who are members of farmer association/co-
2 cooperatives have better access to information on mirid control.
- 3 3. To test farmers acceptability of a forecasting system to inform pest management
4 decisions for the control of cocoa mirids.
- 5 4. To identify the most appropriate medium to send information to cocoa farmers
6 to aid mirid control.

7

8 **Methodology**

9 **Study area**

10 A total of 280 farmers were interviewed from the Ashanti and Eastern Regions of
11 Ghana. District cocoa officers in the regions were contacted to provide names of the
12 major cocoa growing communities. Farmers were then interviewed in these
13 communities.

14

15 **Design of questionnaire and interview**

16 A structured questionnaire with open and closed ended questions was designed for the
17 study. At the end of each working day, completed questionnaires were cross-checked to
18 ensure they were fully completed. All incomplete or doubtful entries were sent back to
19 the respondent for clarification. This ensured that the views of each respondent were
20 correctly represented, enhancing the reliability of the data collected and information to
21 be deduced from it (Baah, 2006). In most cases, questions were translated to the local
22 language of the area (Twi), taking care not to lose any information. Selection of farmers
23 for interview was not biased towards any gender, religious or political affiliation.
24 Village chiefs, chief farmers and other appropriate opinion leaders in each selected
25 community were briefed on the purpose of the study before any farmer was interviewed.
26 This ensured that farmers received the interviewers through the proper chain of
27 command in each community to enhance the accuracy of information given. The

1 following variables were used to assess the socioeconomic background of farmers:
2 gender, age, education, marital status, farm ownership status, age and size of farm as
3 well as membership to a farmer group or association. Farmers were also assessed on
4 their knowledge on mirid control, access to information for mirid control, effect of
5 timely insecticide application on mirid numbers and yield, and percentage crop loss to
6 mirid damage. An assessment of insecticides used by farmers was made as well as the
7 timing of applications. Finally, the questionnaire also covered the issue of willingness to
8 use forecasting system for mirid control and the most preferred medium to receive this
9 information. Willingness to use forecasting system was determined with a yes or no
10 question.

11 12 **Reliability of questionnaire**

13 A pre-testing exercise was carried out in four communities in the Eastern Region (Nobi,
14 Asafo, Obubanase and Tontro) in order to assess whether there were any ambiguities in
15 the questions. A total of 30 cocoa farmers in these villages were interviewed from the
16 15th November to 6th December, 2011. Any questions that were not easily answered by
17 most farmers due to lack of clarity were modified. The actual surveys with the final
18 questionnaire started on the 26th December, 2011 and were completed on the 6th April,
19 2012.

20 **Data analysis**

21 The data was analysed with SPSS statistical package version 16. Variation in responses
22 was analysed to show frequencies and their percentages. Relationship analysis was
23 conducted using a chi-squared test to find out if personal and farm characteristics were
24 associated with farmers' access to information on mirid control, willingness to use a
25 forecasting system for mirid control and the most preferred medium for information
26 transfer. Relationships were also explained between personal/farm characteristics and
27 membership of a co-operative/farmer association.

1

2 **Results**

3 **Farmers' personal and farm characteristics**

4 Of the farmers interviewed 76% were males and 24% females; their ages ranged from
5 20 to 80 years. The age group 40-60 years was the most represented accounting for 51%
6 of respondents. In contrast, 18% of respondents fell within the age group 20 to 40
7 years. A greater percentage of respondents were farm owners (87%). Respondents with
8 a Middle School Certificate /Junior High School (MSLC/JHS) educational qualification
9 were the most represented (61%) with 15% having no formal education. A summary of
10 the personal characteristics of farmers is presented in Table 1.

11 **Farmer associations and farm practices**

12 Most farmers interviewed (71%) were not part of any farmer association, certification
13 scheme or cooperative society. Approximately 81 farmers are part of a farmer group.
14 Among farmers that were part of a farmer group, 90% belonged to local farmer
15 associations or cooperative societies. The remainder had some association with Organic
16 Cocoa Certification (4%) and the Cadbury Livelihoods Programme (now Cocoa Life)
17 (6%). The majority of farmers that were part of farmer associations were motivated to
18 do so because of the training they received on Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) (72%)
19 with 16% motivated by access to credit. The sources of motivation for joining a farmer
20 association are presented in Figure 1. Access to training was by far the most cited
21 reason for joining an association. Neither gender ($\chi^2 = 0.043$, $p=0.84$), age of farmer (χ^2
22 $=1.96$, $p=0.91$), marital status ($\chi^2 =4.46$, $p=0.35$), educational status ($\chi^2 = 7.79$, $p=0.17$)
23 or farm ownership ($\chi^2 =1.36$, $p=0.71$) had any significant relationship with membership
24 of farmer group, farmer association or cooperative society.

25 The largest proportion of farmers had hybrid cocoa (progeny of bi-parental crossed
26 produced in seed gardens) on their farms (38%) whilst 14% had Amelonado (a

1 traditional variety), 29% “Amazon” (early generation hybrids) and 19% mixed
2 materials. The most frequently cited source of planting materials for respondents is pods
3 from neighbouring farms (48%) followed by the cocoa seed gardens (39%) (Figure 2).
4 Cocoa in most farms was not planted in regular lines (78%), however, the proportion
5 planted in lines was greater amongst those farmers who were members of farming
6 groups ($\chi^2 = 6.55$, $p=0.01$). Furthermore, members of farmer groups/associations were
7 more likely to grow hybrids ($\chi^2 = 8.43$, $p=0.04$) and source planting materials from a
8 recommended outlet (i.e. Seed production Unit and CRIG) ($\chi^2 = 19.69$, $p<0.001$). A
9 relationship was also observed between farmer age and variety grown in that the highest
10 proportion of the farmers that had hybrid cocoa trees on their farms (49% of farmers)
11 were between age 20 and 40 years ($\chi^2 = 12.32$, $p=0.05$). A significant association
12 between the age of farm and planting material was observed ($\chi^2 = 30.36$, $p<0.001$) such
13 that a large proportion (85%) of more recently established farms (>20 years) were
14 planted with hybrid trees sourced from recommended outlets (e.g. seed production units
15 and CRIG). Furthermore, a greater proportion of trees were planted in lines (as opposed
16 to uneven planting) on more recently established farms ($\chi^2 = 22.82$, $p<0.001$) (79% on
17 farms up to 20 years old compared to 26 on farms older than 20 years).

18 (Table 1 here)

19 (Figure 1 here)

20
21 (Figure 2 here)

22 **Insect pests on cocoa and insecticide application**

23 The majority of farmers (86.8%) considered mirids to be the most economically
24 important insect pest on cocoa. A pest gaining importance is *Bathycoelia thalassina*
25 (stink bug) (‘Atee’ in the local Twi language), which ranked second with 12% of
26 farmers considering it as critical to yield losses. A pictorial presentation of respondents’

1 perception of the most economically important insect pests on cocoa is shown in Figure
2 3.

3 **(Figure 3 here)**

4
5 The vast majority of farmers (92.9%) applied insecticides for mirid control on their
6 farms. Only 7.1% did not apply any insecticide mainly due to logistical problems on the
7 farmer's part or on the part of the cocoa pest and disease control (CODAPEC)
8 programme. Confidor (Imidacloprid 200 SL) was the most widely applied insecticide
9 (50.8% of respondents) with Actara (Thiamethoxam) used by 25.8% and Akatemaster
10 (Bifenthrin) by 18.8% of respondents. A small proportion (1.1 %) of respondents used
11 unapproved insecticides for mirid control and 3.5% of respondents (under Organic
12 certification) applied crude aqueous neem extract. The vast majority (93.9%) of
13 respondents graded the performance of insecticides applied as very effective against
14 mirids whilst 3.8% and 2.3% judged them as providing no change or as not being
15 effective against the pests respectively. Among respondents who recalled the timing of
16 insecticide application, August was the month in which most respondents (30.3%)
17 applied insecticides for the first time in the season with 19.2% spraying in September,
18 11.9% in June and 7.3% in May (Figure 4).

19 **(Figure 4 here)**

20 The issues that inform farmers' choice of the month to start insecticide application for
21 mirid control are summarised in Table 2. The start of the CODAPEC spraying
22 programme was the most cited reason (49.2% of respondents), whilst 19.4% farmers
23 also relied on the visual presence of mirids to start insecticide application. The majority
24 of farmers (90.8%) interviewed stated that they had benefited from the CODAPEC
25 programme.

26 **(Table 2 here)**

1 **Source of information on insecticide usage**

2 Less than half of the farmers interviewed (43.6%) received information on which
3 insecticide to use for mirid control. Amongst these, 85.2% of them did so through
4 extension officers, 4.1% from CRIG, 4.9% from certification officers and the rest
5 (5.8%) received their information from other farmers and input suppliers. In terms of
6 timing of insecticide application 43.6% of farmers received information on the
7 appropriate time of the year to apply insecticide. Amongst this group of farmers, 86.1%
8 cited extension officers as the source of that information whilst fewer farmers cited
9 certification officers (5.7%), CRIG (3.3%) and contributions by other farmer and
10 suppliers (4.9%). With regards to the frequency of insecticide application, 43.9% of
11 farmers were able to access information and, amongst these most farmers (86.1%)
12 received such information from extension officers. Amongst those farmers who had
13 access to information on which insecticide to use as well as timing and frequency of
14 application the vast majority (95.9%) found the information useful for mirid control.
15 Detail of farmers' sources of information on insecticide use is presented in Table 3. A
16 significant relationship was observed between a farmer's age and access to information
17 on insecticide use. Farmers between 20 to 40 years were more exposed to information
18 on insecticide use (57% of farmers: $\chi^2 = 5.65$, $p=0.05$) than any other age group.
19 Furthermore, ability to access information on which insecticide to use was significantly
20 greater for those farmers in a group or association ($\chi^2 = 75.58$, $p<0.001$). This was also
21 the case regarding information on time of application ($\chi^2 = 75.56$, $p<0.001$), frequency
22 of application ($\chi^2 = 78.76$, $p<0.001$) as well as factors influencing the choice of the when
23 to start insecticide application for mirid control ($\chi^2 = 41.77$, $p<0.001$). Farmers who are
24 members of farmer associations rely mostly on CRIG recommendations and the level of
25 mirid damage in farms to decide on the month to start insecticide application while non-
26 members rely to a greater extent on the start of the CODAPEC spraying programme.

1 Meetings held by farmer groups become the platform for extension service personnel to
2 be invited to provide such information or give training. Cocoa farmers acknowledged
3 the importance of timely application of insecticide as 97.1% of them suggested
4 increased mirid damage and a reduction in yield when insecticide is applied later than
5 required. The largest proportion of farmers (47%) attributed 30-40% of cocoa losses to
6 mirid damage annually.

7 **(Table 3 here)**

8 **Forecasted system**

9 Almost all farmers interviewed (99.6%) thought that it would be useful to have
10 forecasting systems to inform them of expected mirid peak periods in each year, which
11 insecticides to use, time to start insecticide application and the required frequency of
12 applications. The reason cited by farmers for the need for an information system are as
13 follows (with corresponding percentages): to enhance production (52.3%), reduction in
14 mirid damage to cocoa (25%), broadening farmers' knowledge base on mirid control
15 (15.9%) and for effective control of mirids (6.8%). Most farmers (70%) preferred to
16 receive information on mirid control on a quarterly basis. Some 14.6% preferred to be
17 informed twice a year with 10% as and when necessary. The majority of farmers
18 (89.6%) would be willing to support (financially) a forecasting service if COCOBOD is
19 unable to meet the full cost.

20 **Channel for dissemination of information**

21 The majority of farmers interviewed (89.3%) preferred extension services as the
22 medium to relay information on insecticide usage for mirid control to them. Farmers'
23 preferences for access to information are presented in Table 4.

24 **(Table 4 here)**

25

1 The main reason for the choice of extension service as the most preferred medium for
2 information transfer was the opportunity to see demonstrations (72.1% of farmers),
3 followed by reliability and ease of access (26.1%), affordability (1.1%) and avoidance
4 of language gap problems (0.7%).

5 **Discussion**

6 Access to information is a key component that enables cocoa farmers to optimise their
7 management and hence increase yields. In many developed countries, both public and
8 private institutions provide farmers with farm management information through a range
9 of systems (Just and Zilberman, 2002). However, in Ghana and other cocoa growing
10 countries in West Africa, the lack of such systems to provide accurate, easily accessible
11 and timely information on pest management presents a number of challenges to cocoa
12 farmers. Farmers sometimes rely on ‘word-of-mouth’ for decision making which may
13 not be accurate or timely.

14 Forecasting systems consist mainly of data that have been processed to be meaningful to
15 the end user (Acebedo et al., 2008). A forecasting system is therefore a system to collect
16 data, process it to be meaningful and transmit it to the end user (cocoa farmer) for
17 effective decision making and farm management. The study therefore examined the
18 willingness of cocoa farmers in Ghana to use such forecasting systems for mirid control
19 and whether particular groups of farmers are more willing to take up such information.

20 The survey showed that cocoa farming is a male dominated profession. This is the case
21 for most cocoa growing countries in West Africa (Olujide and Adeogun, 2006). Most
22 cocoa farmers interviewed were also over the age of 40 highlighting the need to
23 encourage young people to take up cocoa farming as a profession. The aging farmer
24 population has sometimes led to cocoa farms being abandoned after the death of their
25 owners (Asante et al., 2002). The current economic status of cocoa farmers in Ghana

1 makes it difficult for them to encourage their children to take up the enterprise after
2 school since they are often more interested in non-agricultural employment in the cities.
3 This study also showed that farmers' age is very important when it comes to adopting
4 innovative practices; most of the farmers between 20 and 40 years had more access to
5 information on insecticide use and have adopted the use of hybrid materials and
6 planting them in lines on their farms. The results suggest that more effort needs to be
7 made to encourage older farmers to adopt new innovations.

8 West Africa is responsible for approximately 71% of world cocoa (ICCO, 2012/13),
9 produced mostly by smallholder farmers as exemplified in the present study (70% of
10 farms surveyed were less than 1.5 hectares). Many of these smallholder farms are aging
11 and require some rehabilitation or replanting. The study showed that at least 14% of
12 farmers still grow traditional Amelonado cocoa, and less than half grow the
13 recommended hybrid varieties. Replacing old, low yielding trees with recommended
14 hybrid materials is an important step to enhanced cocoa production. However, when
15 replanting, nearly half the respondents obtained seed from neighbouring farms. A
16 survey of cocoa seed gardens in Cameroon, Ghana and Nigeria suggests that the
17 majority of farmers used seeds from neighbours' farms due to lack of nearby seed
18 gardens (Asare et al., 2010). The amount of hybrid seed available from seed gardens to
19 cocoa farmers in Ghana is considered inadequate. Asare et al. (2010) estimate that less
20 than 60% of the demand for seed for new planting material in Ghana is met by seed
21 gardens. As a result, cocoa farmers are using inappropriate, segregating F3 and F4 seed
22 populations as planting materials. Farmers' lack of understanding of the development of
23 hybrid materials is also a reason for the use of segregated seeds. It is therefore important
24 that new planting materials are made available for replanting through increased
25 availability of hybrid seed/ seedlings from seed gardens in Ghana.

1 Replacing old materials with high yielding varieties will only produce higher yields if
2 pest and disease challenges of the crop are well managed. Cocoa mirids have been cited
3 as the most important insect pest on cocoa in Ghana (Awudzi et al., 2009, Padi, 1997,
4 Owusu-Manu, 1995). The majority of farmers (87%) interviewed agreed with this
5 assessment with 47% of farmers attributing a 30-40% loss in yield to mirids. This
6 perception is similar to published estimates of losses to mirids in the region of 30%
7 (Owusu-Manu, 1995). Over 90% of farmers applied insecticides in the 2011/2012 cocoa
8 season. The month during which most respondents (30.3%) first applied insecticides for
9 mirid control was August. This could be due to factors such as the start of the
10 CODAPEC spraying programme (which is scheduled to start in August) or the
11 perceived increase in mirid numbers and damage in farms. The results of the survey
12 showed that, most farmers rely on the start of the CODAPEC programme (49.2%),
13 presence of mirids (19.4%) and the weather (10.1%) to decide on the month to first
14 apply insecticides each season. It was noted that not all farmers follow
15 recommendations or labelled instructions on recommended insecticides. There is the
16 perception by some farmers that the higher the concentration of insecticide solutions,
17 the greater the efficacy (Matthews et al., 2003). The inconsistencies in the dosages of
18 insecticides applied in cocoa farms could increase the risk of mirid resistance to
19 approved insecticides. Effective farmer education on pest identification and accessibility
20 to information on insecticide usage is therefore important.

21 The survey also showed that less than 30% of farmers' interviewed were members of a
22 farmer or cooperative groups. Farmers associations like cocoa Abrobopa, Kuapa
23 Kookoo and the Cadbury Livelihood Programme (now Cocoa Life) are training farmers
24 on best cultural practices. These practices are geared towards improving farm sanitation
25 to minimize pest and disease damage to enhance yield. Some farmer associations also
26 support farmers with inputs such as fertilizers, insecticides and fungicides on credit

1 (Baah, 2008). Recent certification of cocoa has led to the development of certification
2 schemes such as Rainfall Alliance, Naturland (organic certification) and UTZ
3 certification who train farmers to meet particular standards. According to Baah (2008),
4 farmer associations have helped the expansion and growth of the cocoa industry in
5 Ghana through farmer training. In this study, most farmers who were members of
6 farmer associations also had easy access to information on insecticide use, time of
7 application and frequency of applying insecticides for mirid control. This study also
8 demonstrated the effectiveness of membership of a farmer group in the adoption of
9 innovations such as the use of hybrid materials, planting in lines and sourcing planting
10 materials from recommended bodies, thereby demonstrating the potential of such
11 associations to play a part in increasing cocoa production. Another reason why
12 encouraging the formation of farmer groups across the entire cocoa landscape could
13 boost production is that most farmers are able to learn and adapt new farm practices
14 easily from fellow farmers who can recognize their needs (Baah, 2008). Membership of
15 a farmer association was closely related to the farmer's choice of month to start
16 insecticide application, with a greater proportion relying on the presence of mirids
17 (21%) and the Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana (CRIG) recommendations (16%)
18 compared to those who were not part of a farmer group who relied mainly on the start of
19 the cocoa pest and disease control (CODAPEC) programme. Relying on the start of the
20 CODAPEC programme is not the best approach as the start of the programme may be
21 delayed due to logistical problems such as late arrival of pesticides at various districts
22 and the frequent breakdown of spraying machines (Baffoe-Asare et al., 2013).
23 Significant losses of cocoa can occur due to mirid damage when there is a delay in the
24 start of the programme.

25 An overwhelming response from farmers for the need for a forecasting system for mirid
26 control was demonstrated. Farmers were aware of the difficulty in managing cocoa

1 mirids and the need for accurate information for effective pest management.
2 Information could be sent to farmers on when to apply recommended insecticides and at
3 what frequency. This would ensure that insecticide application is carried out on a need-
4 based system and not the blanket application system currently in use. Such an approach
5 would help reduce insecticide residue problems in cocoa beans as well as addressing
6 health issues related to insecticide use. The fact that farmers were willing to pay
7 towards an information system is indicative of the importance that they attach to a more
8 targeted mirid control system. Farmers' willingness to help sustain a forecasting system
9 for mirid control stems from the need to get accurate information for mirid management
10 to produce more and to contribute to the enhancement of their living conditions and also
11 ensure that a programme of that nature does not eventually "breakdown" due to national
12 budgetary constraints.

13 Extension services appeared to be the most preferred means of information and
14 technology transfer to cocoa farmers in Ghana with 89.3% of respondents opting for
15 this route. For extension to be effective, extension services need to develop farmer
16 centred information technologies which are interactive. Furthermore, Adu-Acheampong
17 et al. (2014) point to the relatively low number of extension officers currently in the
18 cocoa sector in Ghana. Even though radio is reported to be the most important medium
19 for communicating with rural populations in developing countries (Odame and Kassam,
20 2002), it is limited in its "one-way" communication channel. In Ghana, this limitation
21 has been improved with farmers calling into radio programs for clarification when
22 necessary. Recently, the Ghana Cocoa Board in partnership with Cadbury, "Kuapa
23 Kookoo" (a co-operative) and West Africa Fair Fruits Limited has agreed to support
24 cocoa extension as well as implement interventions to enhance the livelihood of cocoa
25 growing communities in Ghana (Government of Ghana, 2011). Cocoa extension in
26 Ghana has also been revived under the Cocoa Health and Extension Division (CHED)

1 (a division of the Ghana Cocoa Board); extension could be used as a tool in any
2 information system to disseminate information on mirid management to cocoa farmers.
3 From the results of the survey, the success and adoption of any information system
4 depends critically on the inclusion of extension services and local farmer organizations.
5 The CODAPEC programme in Ghana could further be enhanced with the addition of an
6 information system to provide forecasted information on expected pest situations to
7 improve the effectiveness of the programme.

8 **Conclusion**

9 Cocoa mirids continue to be the most important insect pest on cocoa in Ghana and other
10 cocoa-producing countries in West Africa. Control has mainly been achieved with
11 blanket application of conventional insecticides based on a specific calendar date. This
12 has led to the development of residue problems as well as changes in the status of some
13 pests which hitherto were regarded as minor. The root of this problem is inadequate
14 farmer knowledge on approved insecticides, timing and the frequency of application
15 within a growing season. It is clear from this study that even though information on
16 insecticide use and mirid management on cocoa is available, many farmers have little or
17 no access to such information. Farmers overwhelmingly accepted (over 99%) that there
18 is a need for a forecasting system through which they could be informed of mirid
19 activity on their farms as an early warning system and how to effectively manage the
20 pest in a more environmentally sensitive manner. The study has also showed that local
21 farmer groups and extension services will be vital for the success of a forecasting
22 system for mirid control in Ghana.

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1 **Table 1: Farmer and farm characteristics: Frequency distribution**

2	<i>Characteristics of farmers</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
	<i>Age (years)</i>		
	20-40	51	18
	41-60	143	51
	>60	86	31
	Total	280	100
	<i>Marital status</i>		
	Single	12	4
	Married	229	82
	Divorced	9	3
	Widow	20	7
	Widower	10	4
	Total	280	100
	<i>Farm ownership status</i>		
	Owner	244	87.1
	Share cropper (Abunu)	20	7.1
	Share cropper (Abusa)	15	5.4
	Share cropper (Abunan)	1	0.4
	Total	280	100
	<i>Numbers of cocoa farms operated</i>		
	1-2	198	70.7
	3-4	76	27.1
	5-6	2	0.8
	>6	4	1.4

Total	280	100
Farm age (years)		
1-10	94	33.6
11-20	115	41.1
21-30	49	17.5
>30	22	7.8
Total	280	100
Farm size		
(hectares)		
<1.5	196	70
1.5-3	64	22.9
3-5	14	5
>5	6	2.1
Total	280	100

1 *NB:* Definition of Share cropper (Abunu, Abusa and Abunan): Proceeds from the farm
2 are shared between caretaker and landlord with the caretaker getting 75% (Abusa), 50%
3 (Abunu) or 25% (Abunan).

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1 **Table 2:** Issues that informed farmer’s choice of the month to start insecticide
 2 application

<i>Issues</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Start of the CODAPEC programme	127	49.2
Presence of mirids	50	19.4
Weather	26	10.1
CRIC recommendation	17	6.6
Availability of inputs and machines	16	6.1
Level of damage	14	5.4
Availability of Neem	2	0.8
Production of pods	2	0.8
Another farmer/relative	1	0.4
Extension officer’s advice	1	0.4
Previous yield losses in bags	1	0.4
Appearance of flowers	1	0.4
Total	258	100.0

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1 **Table 3:** Farmers' source of information on insecticide usage: Frequency distribution

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<i>Insecticide usage</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Ability to access information on insecticide to use</i>		
Yes	122	43.6
No	158	56.4
Total	280	100
Source of information on insecticide to use		
Extension Officers	104	85.2
Certification Officers	6	4.9
CRIG	5	4.1
Chemical and input sellers	4	3.3
Other farmers	3	2.5
Total	122	100
<i>Ability to access to information on time of application</i>		
Yes	122	43.6
No	158	56.4
Total	280	100
<i>Source of information on time of application</i>		
Extension Officers	105	86.1
Certification Officers	7	5.7
CRIG	4	3.3
Chemical and input sellers	4	3.3
Other farmers	2	1.6
Total	122	100

Access to information on frequency of application

Yes	123	43.9
No	157	56.1
Total	280	100

Access to information on frequency of application

Extension Officers	105	86.1
Certification Officers	7	5.7
CRIG	4	3.3
Chemical and input sellers	4	3.3
Other farmers	2	1.6
Total	122	100

Frequency of receipt of information per year

Once	14	11.5
Twice	18	14.8
Three times	35	28.7
Four times	30	24.6
>Four times	25	20.4
Total	122	100

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1 **Table 4:** Farmers' preference for medium of information transfer

Medium	Frequency	Percentage
Radio	13	5
TV	4	1
Extension services	250	89
Cocoa farmers news paper	2	1
Mobile phone	6	2
Community information system (PAS)	5	2
Total	280	100

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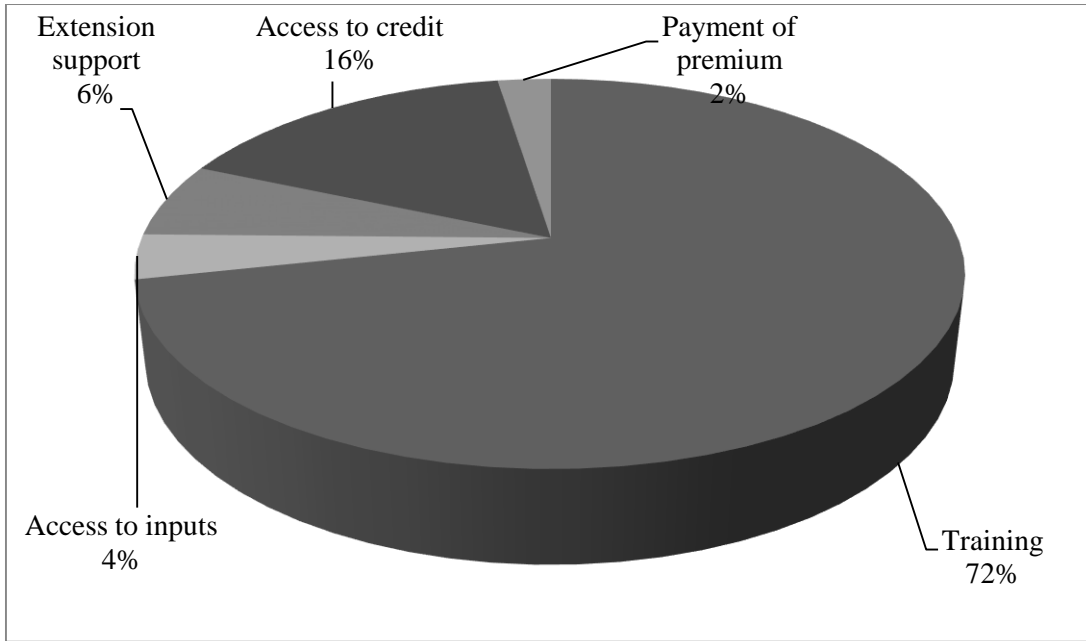


Figure 1: Farmers' motivation for joining farmer associations (n=81)

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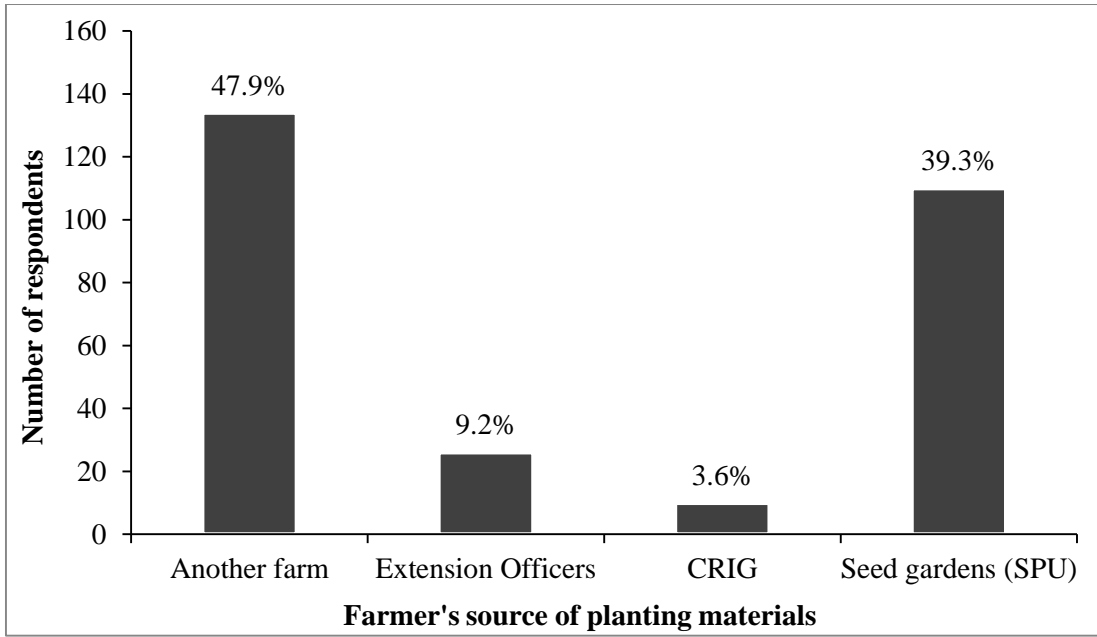
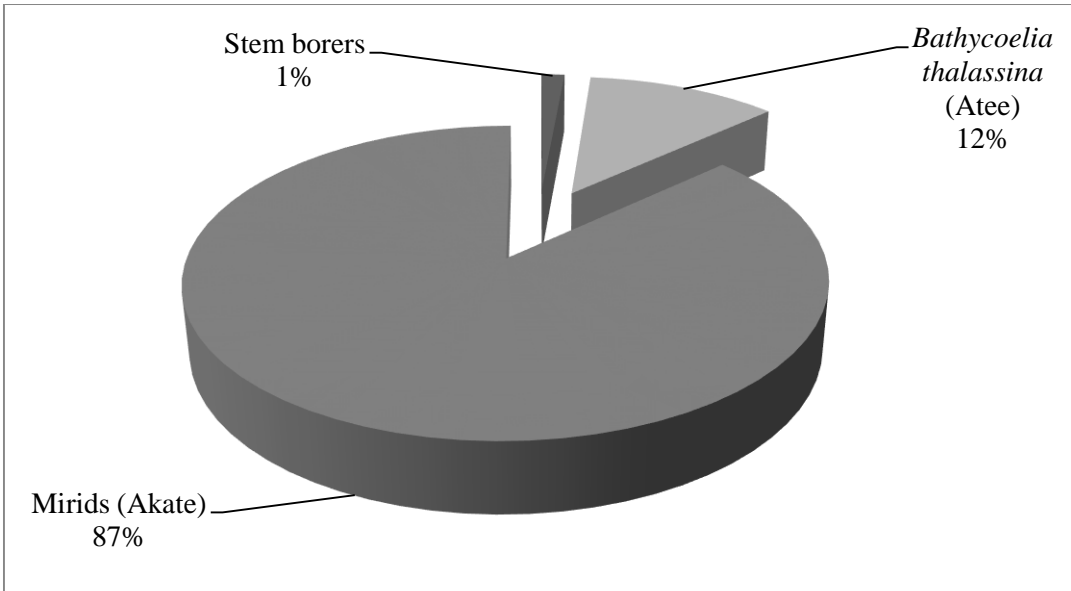


Figure 2: Farmers' source of planting materials (n=280)

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Figure 3: Farmers' perception of the group of pests that they consider to be most economically important (n=280)

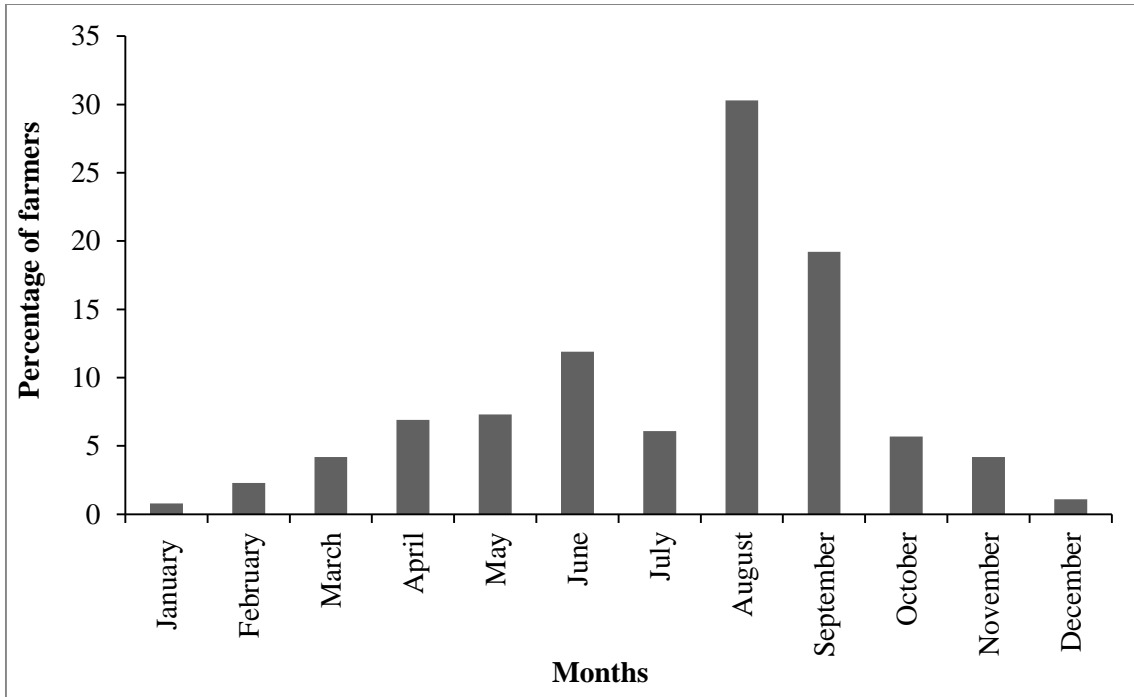


Figure 4: Frequency distribution of month in which respondents first applied insecticides (n = 261)

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