
Cote d'Ivoire: IMF, cocoa, coffee, logging and mining

For over a decade, the Ivory Coast has been under the influence of IMF structural adjustment programs, of which intensification of exports has been a significant factor. The 1990s saw the heightened pursuit of fiscal and structural reform in the Ivory Coast. The Ivory Coast devalued their currency in 1994 and eliminated export taxes in compliance with the IMF's adjustment program and in 1995 the country liberalised its domestic markets.

As a result, cocoa production exploded by 44 percent from 1994 to 1996. The Ivory Coast became the world's leading producer of cocoa, with 40 percent of the global market. The country also ranks third in coffee production, behind only Brazil and Colombia. The flourishing of the agricultural sector, under its flagship crop of cocoa has, however, brought about substantial changes in land use. This land conversion has been a major factor in the decrease in the Ivory Coast's forest cover by 67 percent since its 1960 independence from France. Forests now total about six million acres, where they once covered 70 million acres, or most of the southern half of the country.

The lucrative cocoa market has spurred farmers to illegally expand their plots into the Ivory Coast's protected forests, threatening about one-third of these areas. Forested areas intended for protection through their official government designation of "sacred" and "classified" are being slashed, burned, and cultivated for export crops. In these forests, almost half a million farmers and their families have grown up to 100,000 tons of cocoa, about ten percent of the 1996/1997 harvest.

In 1994, Europe-destined wood products accounted for 11 percent of exports. The logging activities continue to expose the more remote areas of the Ivory Coast to poachers. Where local residents have hunted wild animals for sustenance for thousands of years, today's "bushmeat" trade has evolved into a commercial industry where traditional tools have been supplanted by automatic rifles. The hunting of chimpanzees, birds, turtles and other species has grown into an estimated \$121 million industry in the Ivory Coast.

The forests of the Ivory Coast remain some of the most significant forested areas throughout Africa. Their loss poses serious risks for regional climatic patterns, which are closely tied to the presence of forest cover. Ironically, the cocoa production is dependent upon these weather conditions and overproduction of cocoa could ultimately threaten the success of the crop.

The IMF has also recently pressured the Ivory Coast to expand its mining and petroleum sectors.