

**LEADERSHIP SERIES; NPP PRESS CONFERENCE ON THE COCOA SECTOR.
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Ladies and gentlemen, we continue our leadership series today with a look at the cocoa sector, a true anchor industry that has impacted our national economic security than no other industry for well over 120 years and thus demands quality leadership to sustain.

It is one area that John Dramani Mahama showed clearly that his goal was not to build on what he inherited but to plunder. It is one area that the incompetence, corruption, carelessness and recklessness of John Mahama as President was obvious to all, especially, the ordinary cocoa farmer.

It is also one area, which the President has treated with care, competence and vision, in line with his overarching manifesto promise to transform Ghana by adding value to what we produce. A clear example of this, ladies and gentlemen, is cocoa processing. In 2016, the year that John Mahama and his NDC lost power, 27% of cocoa produced in Ghana was processed in Ghana. Today, that figure has shot up to 40%, with plans to set up more indigenous processing factories.

Cocoa is grown in commercial quantities in 10 of Ghana's 16 regions. So the New Patriotic Party, which since the days of J B Danquah, Baafuor Akoto and Akwasi Abrefa Busia, has always been on the side of the Ghanaian cocoa farmer, is fully aware of what the industry means to creating jobs, and providing incomes to families and communities. That is why we invest in the industry than the NDC.

Again and again, compared to the Mahama led NDC, both in Government and now in opposition, President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo has demonstrated better understanding of the needs of the country and the direction in which we should go to meet those needs. The cocoa sector is another area where the President has demonstrated strong leadership and initiative, leading to the creation and sustenance of the first ever African inspired international community price support system, the Living Income Differential (LID). This means that, through the sustained and uncompromising joint efforts of President Akufo-Addo and the Ivorian leader, our farmers are now to earn an additional income through a US\$400 per tonne premium on the world price for cocoa. It takes strong and decisive leadership to win \$400 more for our farmers. That is why we say: 4 More To Do More 4 You!

Tetteh Quarshie introduced cocoa into Ghana from Equatorial Guinea in the 19th century. Since then, a huge industry, with multiple tentacles has spread throughout our economy. Indeed, between 1911 and 1976, Ghana was the world's leading producer of cocoa, contributing between 30-40% of global output. It is this feat of old that the NPP is determined to reclaim and the programmes

that we are deliberately rolling out will certainly see to that if protected and the only way to ensure that is to keep the NPP in office.

Significant as cocoa is to the Ghanaian economy and national security, key challenges include lack of control over international shocks and local efficiencies. Ladies and gentlemen, this media interaction seeks to bring to the fore what the President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo led NPP Government has done in the cocoa sector to restore and enhance progress. Naturally, in doing so, we must assess what we inherited. A credible Ghanaian Government must have a credible vision for cocoa.

The cocoa industry continues to provide foreign exchange, jobs, incomes and a decent standard of living to thousands directly and indirectly. The current and biggest challenge, is to localise value addition in order to deepen its contribution to skills, jobs and incomes, as well as international value and brand. As the President says, it is manifestly unfair that we earn barely 6% of the value of an industry that between two countries, we provide nearly 60% of the raw material.

Chemicals Corruption under NDC

Prior to assumption of office by the NPP Government, the cocoa industry was plummeting and in dire need of retooling, restructuring and repositioning due to the high level of mismanagement, corruption and incompetence that characterised the Mahama-led administration. In fact, even the chemicals that were needed to help the trees grow and bear fruits were badly compromised by the NDC policy of unbridled corruption. The evidence is there for all to see.

Production, having risen to a high of one million metric tonnes per annum as a through put from the Kufuor administration, declined drastically year on year under Candidate Mahama as President. He could not even sustain the gains protected by his predecessor President John Atta Mills.

The NDC government, under John Mahama, chose to distribute what was meant to be “free” fertilizers in a way that became just another lucrative channel for corruption. Rather than rehabilitation of the industry, a thriving fertiliser smuggling enterprise was created, some perpetrators being friends, family and cronies of the then Mahama government. The country suffered colossal losses due to the hundreds of thousands of bags of fertilisers which found their way onto the markets of neighbouring countries. These smuggling incidents are very well documented within the respective state agencies.

Upon assumption of office, the NPP government decided to subsidize fertilisers by absorbing a larger share of its cost, and then retooled the fertilizer distribution process to improve equity and

availability to farmers in all cocoa growing areas. Farmers do not have to pay upfront to get their fertilizers. The retooling has also eliminated opportunities for smuggling by middlemen.

Moreover, cocoa farmer cooperatives were re-introduced. This helped ownership of incentives by the farmers themselves, ensuring effective, efficient and timely supply of adequate amounts of fertilisers, agrochemicals and implements directly to cocoa farmers.

The recklessness in the handling of the cocoa industry further caused a downturn in the financial position of COCOBOD. The Mahama-led administration borrowed \$1.8 Billion through a syndicated loan during the 2016/17 crop season despite the fact that the crop prediction for that particular season was far less.

Like other innovations within the cocoa industry, cocoa road projects began under an NPP administration, specifically, during the Kufuor-led administration. The original core purpose was to ease the evacuation of cocoa beans from the growing communities to 'Take Over Centres' as it is called.

COCOA ROADS

Far from what the NDC will want Ghanaians to believe, at no point within the current Government was a decision taken to neglect cocoa roads projects began under the previous administration.

However, in order to deepen accountability and protect the public purse, as well as ensure value for money, due diligence had to be exercised. Cocoa roads projects were suspended for an audit to be conducted, especially, after some anomalies which resulted in inflated costs of some of the contracts awarded by the previous government, were detected.

The suspension of the project allowed for a re-scoping and proper alignment of funds as well as open competitive bidding processes towards the award of new cocoa roads contracts.

It is important to state that the contractors who were awarded contracts by the previous administration and had genuine claims were promptly paid. During the 2017/2018 cocoa season, an amount of GHC497 million was paid to some of those cocoa roads contractors and another GHC414 million was subsequently paid in 2018/2019 cocoa season. Also, road projects awarded by the previous government that were near completion in 2017 were, as well, allowed to be completed by the contractors.

The records show that the Mahama-led government deviated from the original purpose and intent for the construction of cocoa roads. There was a heavy concentration on the construction of highways and in some cases roads in non-cocoa growing areas. A whopping 63% of the funds for

cocoa roads was devoted to highways, 5% went to urban roads and the rest went to feeder roads. This situation has changed significantly. That is why today, the increase in tarred feeder roads across the cocoa-growing regions in Ghana can be as high nearly 40% in just under four years (37% in the Eastern Region, for example, from 34 km in 2016 to 466km today).

Candidate John Mahama is indeed a curious man. He has shown some remarkable bravery in daring to speak on the contracts he and his spouse awarded for cocoa roads. He is asking for the Government to publish what is already public, the audit report of the said cocoa roads contracts. First of all, for John Mahama, his habit was to award contracts even if he had no clue how to pay for them.

Cocoa roads contracts awarded by the previous government, constituting 229 projects, amounted to some GHC5.1 billion. This was at a time when funds available to pay for road construction in total was only GHC1.7 billion. Specifically, for cocoa roads, the approved annual mounts averaged GHC500 million for the Cocobod Infrastructural Development Trust Fund for the entire five-year period for the programme.

Indeed, John Mahama committed GHC3.2 billion (64%) that he did not have to just 74 projects awarded by the Ghana Highway Authority – not the Department of Feeder Roads. The 131 projects under Feeder Roads was valued at just GHC1.5 billion. Again. The average cost per KM of trunk roads in the contract award was GHC2.5 million; more than double the KM cost of the feeder roads at GHC1.16m.

The 140 contractors who were awarded the 229 contracts, none of the contracts went through a competitive tendering process. Not a single one. The cost per KM was much higher than the average cost of other government-sponsored road projects. For example, for the Preastea Samreboi Road, awarded to Asabea Engineering Ltd, the audit report found that it was inflated by 121.85%. This is a classic case of incompetent economic management, worsened by corruption.

Also, several contractors were requesting payment for variation on contract amounts which were multiple times in excess of the initial contingency or variation amounts allocated.

Whilst the Mahama-led Government could not honour the payments of contracts they signed right from 2014/2015 cocoa season, they continued to sign additional contracts till 2017 when they left office, piling up dubious debt.

Swollen Shoots under Mahama

Moreover, swollen shoot disease became widespread, threatening to bring our heritage cocoa industry to its knees. John Mahama's response was to ignore cocoa farmers, which led to

collapsing the economy in vital areas such as the Western North Region. It took Nana Akufo-Addo and the NPP to bring back life to the economy there.

Prior to 2014, COCOBOD was actively involved in the Cocoa Swollen Shoot Virus Disease (CSSVD) Control Programme with the following responsibilities; removal of diseased and contact trees, compensation to farmers for trees removed (both initial treatment and replanting grants), the supply of free hybrid cocoa and economic tree seedlings for replanting and treating farms and technical backup through extension education.

This social intervention policy on the CSSVD control and containment was changed in 2014. Farmers were asked to cut the diseased trees and replant themselves without any compensation. Farmers were only given free seedlings. Moreover, once the cocoa trees were removed, the landowners took back their lands.

Accordingly, most of the cocoa seedlings given to farmers between 2014 and 2016 were planted under asymptomatic and dying diseased trees, poorly treated farms, and in some cases abandoned under the cocoa trees without planting. Consequently, seedlings were infected by the disease and had to be removed.

The change in policy also led to the rapid spread of the disease, especially, in the Western North and Eastern Regions. The infection in the Western North Region was so severe that over 40 per cent (214,508.26 ha) of its total cocoa area of 509,295.53 hectares had been devastated according to a 2017 survey. At the national level, a whopping 315,886 hectares out of a total of 1.9 million hectares of cocoa farm had been lost to the CSSVD, thus seriously affecting production. Western North, which used to produce over 330,000mt in 2010/2011 was now accounting for 154,000mt.

The NDC government was characterised by poor cocoa bonus management and the short-changing of farmers with respect to cocoa prices. Though the long-held principle is to pay at least 70% of the FOB price to cocoa farmers, at the time they left office, farmers were receiving only 65.2% of the FOB price.

In the area of value addition to our cocoa beans, not a single processing plant was either conceived or built to boost our country's long-held value addition agenda and to create jobs and opportunities. Rather, the West Africa Mills Company (WAMCO) Limited, an existing cocoa processing factory, was neglected and shut down in 2013, with 254 workers laid off.

Since 2017, the President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo led NPP Government has demonstrated resolve to fix the mess left behind by the NDC government by retooling, restructuring and repositioning of COCOBOD into a robust entity in order to increase our cocoa production while making the life of the cocoa farmer much better than before.

COCOA REHABILITATION PROGRAMME

Under the latest Cocoa Rehabilitation Programme, the NPP Government through COCOBOD is bearing the cost of removing (cutting) all diseased trees from farms. COCOBOD has been tasked with directly overseeing the entire process from cutting to replanting of the farms. It also provides compensation of GH¢1000.00 each to affected farmers and their landowners.

The farms are replanted with disease-tolerant, early-bearing, high-yielding cocoa varieties, at no cost to the farmers. During the two-year-long rehabilitation period, COCOBOD provides labour to work on the farms, also at no cost to the farmers. This has proven to be a far superior approach to rehabilitating affected farms and stopping further spread of CSSVD.

Between 2017 and 2019, a total of 144,421,477 seedlings were produced and distributed to farmers. Most of these seedlings were utilized in the Western North and Eastern Regions for the Pilot Rehabilitation Programme (that is, replanting of CSSVD affected cocoa farms) financed by COCOBOD.

In other to scale up the program, the Government led COCOBOD to AfDB to secure USD600 million, out of which USD140 million (23.3%) will be devoted to the treatment of the CSSVD.

MECHANISATION – DUAL PURPOSE PRUNER/SLASHER

Innovations introduced and known as Productivity Enhancement Programmes (PEPs) aim to increase, by significant proportions, the production capacity of existing cocoa trees and ultimately enable farmers earn more from their labour without having to increase their farm areas. One such PEP is Mass Pruning.

Mass Pruning is the careful cutting of dead, diseased, and excess branches off cocoa trees ahead of a flowering season. Parasitic plants (e.g. mistletoe) are removed as well. Pruned plants develop more flowers as the plants devote a lot more of their nutrients to the flowering process and then to fruit growth after pollination. These, in turn, result in significant increases in yield volumes from the same trees.

COCOBOD is conducting mass pruning of cocoa trees across the country. This is the first time such an exercise is happening in Ghana under COCOBOD. Directly related is the distribution of 100,000 pieces of dual-purpose motorized slashers and pruners to cocoa farmers across the cocoa growing regions. The dual-purpose motorised pruner/slasher is far more efficient than the traditional methods of weeding and pruning. Their use reduces the chances of injury to the cocoa

tree such as branch tear, damage to the buds on the tree etc. They also considerably reduce the fatigue associated with farming, as one needs not exert much energy when using the dual-purpose motorised pruners/slashers.

The introduction of the equipment is not only in recognition of introducing innovative ways of farming but also the urgent need to phase out the labour-intensive ways of farming. The drudgery of the use of machetes and hoes for weeding often drives farmers to apply weedicides on their farms despite their long-term adverse effect on the cocoa trees, soil fertility and the rest of the environment. COCOBOD has, as such, placed a total ban on the use of weedicides on cocoa farms.

The dual-purposed Sharp Power 4T Motorised pruners and slashers are distributed through recognised cocoa farmer cooperatives, which have collective ownership of the equipment, and therefore ease of access by member farmers to carry out pruning and weeding activities on their farms. This is to reduce the cost burden on farmers and at the same time, meet the overarching aim to adopt simple user-friendly technologies to ease the work of cocoa farmers.

HAND POLLINATION

Hand Pollination is another newly introduced PEP and arguably the single most important transformation factor in Ghana's cocoa production history. Hand Pollination is the human aided cross-fertilization of the male and female flowers of cocoa plants. Hand pollination ensures that a greater percentage of the flowers on cocoa trees get fertilized, leading to massive increases in production.

Averagely, a cocoa tree produces 1,000 flowers every season, yet only five per cent of the flowers grow into pods. Compared with other countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia, which produce two tonnes of cocoa per hectare, Ghana only produces 0.45 tonnes of cocoa per hectare. To address this, COCOBOD in 2017 launched the artificial hand pollination project in all 6 cocoa growing regions. Cocoa trees which naturally produce 20 pods are through Hand Pollination producing anywhere between 100 to 300 pods, and even beyond. Consequently, many farms are producing at record high levels.

The Hand Pollination creates jobs, especially for young women. COCOBOD initially engaged some 10,000 youth as pollinators and has increased the number year-on-year to over 30,000 at present. The skilful young pollinators are also being trained and assisted in establishing community-based service companies to offer pollination services to farmers.

THE INTRODUCTION OF EARLY MASS SPRAYING/CODAPEC SCHEDULE

The Cocoa Mass Spraying Programme is carried out to control pests and diseases of cocoa trees which cause economic loss to farmers. The government, informed by research from the Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana (CRIG)-which showed a change in the breeding and reproduction cycle of the pests and diseases of cocoa-came up with a new twist to the period(s) the spraying exercises should be done. Cocoa farmers have hailed the introduction of the ‘Early Spraying’ Schedule.

For best results and yields, the first round of spraying is carried out from April to May. This novelty has ensured the annihilation of the pests which hitherto could not be targeted due to lapses in the previous spraying schedule. As a boost to this scheme, COCOBOD is making effective use of Farmer cooperatives in the cocoa sector to facilitate the distribution and application of the chemicals.

FREE SEEDLING DISTRIBUTION

The adequate supply of Free Hybrid Seedlings to re-establish farms undergoing rehabilitation is a key component of the effort to restore farms affected by CSSVD. Cocoa seedlings are raised at selected nursery sites located within the cocoa farming communities for the replanting of CSSVD treated farms, the rehabilitation of over-aged and moribund farms, the replanting of burnt farms, the establishment of new farms and filling of vacancies in already established new farms.

Also, COCOBOD has increased the number of nursery sites and staff of its Seed Production Division (SPD) and consequently, the number of seedlings raised each year and distributed to cocoa farmers at no cost. Steps have also been taken to modernize the production of healthy cocoa seedlings for the field with the adoption of the use of galvanized poles and treated lumber for the nursery structures instead of bamboo; the use of lasting UV-protected receptacles instead of disposable polybags (the receptacles are environmentally friendly and are reusable); the use of soilless media (cocopeat) instead of topsoil which has become increasingly difficult to access; and the sinking of boreholes and use of irrigation facilities in places where access to a perennial water source is a challenge, which previously was not the case.

These are all being done to ensure the adequate supply of the very latest disease tolerant, early bearing, high yielding cocoa varieties approved by CRIG. These varieties bear fruit in a fraction of the time it normally takes the old types of cocoa trees and their disease tolerance provides a lot of security.

COCOA FARM IRRIGATION PROJECTS

COCOBOD has begun the piloting of cocoa farm irrigation systems which aim to provide alternative and supplementary water for cocoa farms to lessen the effects of climate change and harsh weather conditions on cocoa production.

The ultra-modern solar-powered irrigation systems, were first tested on COCOBOD's Seed Gardens and then on selected cocoa farms across the country. The irrigation systems improve the moisture content of the soils, enhance the retention of flowers of cocoa trees, help to increase the size of cocoa beans and increase productivity per hectare. Farmers with irrigation systems are able to produce cocoa all year because the cocoa trees do not suffer from the extremely dry weather of the harmattan season.

The project is entering its next phase where many more will be installed on cocoa farms across the country. Increases in yield volumes following the installation of the systems are immediate. The present goal is to install the systems in about 30% of cocoa farms in the country, at no upfront cost to farmers.

IMPROVED EXTENSION AGENT TO FARMER RATIO

Over the past three years, COCOBOD has consistently increased its number of frontline extension staff on the ground by recruiting and training over 1300 youth within cocoa-growing communities to provide extension services to cocoa farmers. These youth have markedly improved the frequency and delivery of quality extension services to cocoa farmers. It has reduced the previous extension agent to farmer ratio, which was one extension officer to 3000 farmers, to the present ratio of one extension officer to 600 farmers.

Farmers are educated on Good Agronomic Practices through rallies, group meetings, farm visits, home visits and radio programmes. They are also educated to appreciate that cocoa farming is a business. Farmers are also taken through additional livelihood skills training for livelihood diversification. These programmes include training in grasscutter and other livestock rearing; snail farming; poultry farming; soaps, detergents and pomade making; food and other cash crop farming and mushroom production, among others. These programmes are carried out through collaboration between COCOBOD and private stakeholders within the cocoa sector.

WOMEN AND YOUTH IN COCOA FARMING

Since 2019 COCOBOD has implemented the Environmental and Social Sustainability Project (ESSP). The project aims to improve environmental sustainability, eliminate child labour,

empower women in cocoa production and enhance their roles in their communities. Already the project has trained and empowered over 6,000 women in cocoa farming.

Also, the current management of COCOBOD has made it a deliberate policy in all of its activities to encourage women who are into cocoa farming to fully participate and take advantage of its many cocoa-related programmes. Under the new policy to bring fertilisers, inputs and other agrochemicals directly to farmers, women farmer groups and cooperatives have testified to the timely delivery of their agrochemicals from COCOBOD. Many female cocoa farmers have been awarded and will continue to be awarded, from the local to the national level, for their invaluable contribution to the cocoa sector.

The Youth in Cocoa Farming Programme is a module currently being run by COCOBOD to help solve the peculiar challenges faced by the youth who intend to engage in cocoa farming and also to encourage others to get involved in cocoa farming. Under the programme, COCOBOD liaises with traditional authorities and landowners to release lands to young men and women who are interested in cocoa cultivation on flexible terms.

Furthermore, young cocoa farmers are encouraged to form youth groups. This allows easy access to extension education, cocoa input supply and credit facilities. Dozens of youth groups/cooperatives with membership in the tens of thousands have been inaugurated and for the first time, are receiving direct support from COCOBOD. Such youth groups are also engaged as service providers by COCOBOD for mass spraying, hand pollination and for farm rehabilitation. The national award of “Most Promising Young Cocoa Farmer” is also to encourage more of the youth to go into cocoa farming. Youth groups are then again linked by COCOBOD to access credits from reputable financial institutions.

EDUCATION AND WELFARE

As part of welfare and corporate social responsibility, COCOBOD has long supported education in second cycle institutions by providing scholarships. Scholarship provision is the oldest of all the support services COCOBOD has provided to farmers. However, thanks to President Akufo-Addo, secondary school education in Ghana is now free for all. This has eliminated the need for COCOBOD to provide scholarships to the wards of farmers.

Therefore, COCOBOD’s new policy is to channel its former scholarship funds into the construction of basic schools in cocoa farming communities. COCOBOD is identifying cocoa communities where pupils have to walk a very long distance to school and in partnership with the Ghana Education Service, is to build new schools to bridge gaps.

In collaboration with the University of Ghana and other partners, COCOBOD is implementing a programme on social inclusion and the elimination of child labour. For that purpose, funds have been dedicated to tackling child labour and fostering gender mainstreaming.

COCOA PRICE

Ladies and gentlemen, only a few days ago, the Government announced a new producer price of cocoa which is GHC 660.00 per bag. It is by far the highest amount ever paid to Ghana's cocoa farmers and a demonstration of the government's commitment towards the welfare of cocoa farmers. It is a substantial increase from the previous cocoa season. It is important to consider the fact that the government maintained the producer prices in the preceding years despite a 40% decline in the international prices of cocoa.

COCOA SEASON	PRICE
2012-2013	GHC 212 PER BAG
2014-2015	GHC 345 PER BAG
2015-2016	GHC 425 PER BAG
2016-2017	GHC 475 PER BAG
2017-2018	GHC 475 PER BAG
2019-2020	GHC 515 PER BAG
2020-2021	GHC 660 PER BAG

In adherence to the long-held principle that at least 70% of the FOB price of cocoa must be paid to cocoa farmers, the NPP has constantly exceeded 70% by paying 83.04%, 76.09% and 76.63% over the past three cocoa seasons.

In the face of the decline of the producer price of cocoa within the global market and the mounting pressure by international bodies to reduce the producer price of cocoa, the Government instead took a decision to safeguard the welfare of cocoa farmers in Ghana by maintaining the highest sub-regional producer price in the midst of a two-year-long fall in the price of cocoa on the international market. This was at a time when Cote d'Ivoire had dropped its producer price by a whopping 30%.

The world market price of cocoa is the single biggest determinant of the producer price of cocoa. The reality is that no Ghanaian government can claim to have control over the world market price

of cocoa at any moment in time. Therefore, to increase the revenue that the country earns from the sale of its cocoa, an ingenious new stream of income must be created. This is why the Living Income Differential (LID) was introduced.

Living Income Differential

The LID is a component of the new cocoa trading mechanism, championed by the Ghanaian government in partnership with the Ivorian government. It ensures that every tonne of cocoa beans sold from Ghana will attract an extra \$400.00 in addition to the existing premium. This historic achievement reforms the way global cocoa is priced. The objective is to reduce the high levels of poverty among farmers in Ghana and Ivory Coast, who together, produce more than 60% of the world's cocoa. The main aim of the LID is to safeguard cocoa farmers against price shocks.

VALUE ADDITION/COCOA PROCESSING

The present government, through COCOBOD, has led the effort to retool and expand the total cocoa processing capacities of the entire Ghanaian-Owned cocoa processing sector while embarking on a massive campaign to boost both local consumption and international sale.

Under this NPP Government, WAMCO is now fit for purpose after it was restructured. It remains operational and a profit-making venture which employs hundreds of Ghanaians.

The reopening of WAMCO is not an outlier. It exemplifies the various interventions carried out by the Nana led NPP Government to increase local cocoa processing and value addition. Similar support has been extended to other local cocoa processing factories such as the Cocoa Processing Company (CPC), Niche Cocoa Industry Ltd., PLOT Enterprises Ghana Ltd amongst others, which has resulted in a significant improvement in their processing volumes.

Through this effort, the total volume of locally processed cocoa beans has moved from 27% to a record height of 40% during its peak time. This brings Ghana closer to achieving the 50% processing target that was earmarked by this Government to be attained in the next couple of years.

Regarding small scale cocoa processing and artisanal cocoa products manufacturing, the current rules for the supply of cocoa beans require companies to purchase not less than 50 tonnes of cocoa. In view of the fact that most SMEs in cocoa processing need smaller quantities of cocoa beans for their operations, a committee made up of representatives from COCOBOD, the FDA and Cocoa Value Addition Artisans Association of Ghana (COVAAAG) have been constituted to develop strategies for value addition and local market access for artisanal chocolate and small scale cocoa processors.

Moreover, Government has already announced plans to further expand the local cocoa processing sector by allocating a significant proportion of the US\$600 million loan facility from the African Development Bank (AfDB) to fund the scaling up of the processing of cocoa beans. In addition, it has signed an agreement for the establishment of a new cocoa processing factory at Sefwi Wiawso in the Western North Region to further increase local cocoa processing, value addition and to create jobs.

The government is already embarking on a major campaign to boost both local consumption and international sale of the processed cocoa. It is also exploring new market avenues in Asia, particularly, in China and India, where there are ready markets for the sale of Ghana's processed cocoa which is arguably among the best in the world.

PENSION SCHEME/NATIONAL COCOA FARMER DATABASE

The current Management of COCOBOD, in conjunction with Government and the National Pensions Regulatory Authority is working on starting a Cocoa Farmer Pension Scheme. Part of the requirements is the development of a Cocoa Management System (CMS), which amongst many functions, will hold a robust data base of cocoa farmers to enable tracking of their output to help determine benefits and payments.

CONCLUSION

Ladies and gentlemen, the NPP Government has performed far better than the Mahama-led administration. The previous NDC government cannot credit itself with one single policy or intervention within the cocoa industry that was introduced by them. This is because, most of the interventions in the cocoa industry were first initiated and implemented by either the Kufuor government or this present Government. At best, what they could do was to maintain some of our policies.

Farmer's are far better-off today than yesterday and tomorrow looks even more promising. We are, however, constantly reminded of the immeasurable sacrifices and role our cocoa farmers play in the development of our country.

Therefore, we shall continue to introduce and implement policies that will inure to the collective benefit of our farmers and to strengthen COCOBOD.

Our warning to cocoa farmers, their dependents and all meaning Ghanaians is this: keep John Mahama's hands away from your cocoa. He is the alternative and when it comes to the welfare and wellbeing of the Ghanaian farmer, John Mahama is dangerous. He does not know how to

manage the economy. He does not know how to help the cocoa industry. He has no clue what the needs of the farmers are. To him cocoa is just an avenue for corruption. Leaving the industry to suffer.

Stay with Nana Akufo-Addo and the NPP to protect the progress made so far and to transform the industry for the welfare and wellbeing of all Ghanaians.

Thank you