

# Female Cocoa Farmer defy odds for a COVID-19 free Sierra Leone

By Theriyeh Koroma & Alpha Daramy

Three months ago, when 37-year-old Mattu Musa was caught in the web of obeying the COVID-19 travel ban and fighting to save her business, she chose the former.

“I had planned to travel the next day to sell my fruits in the periodic market. I could not because of the travel ban. So my fruit perished,” say Mattu, the mother of three daughters.



Photo 1: Mattu on her cocoa farm at Ngelahun Village, Kenema District @NaCOVERC/ Alpha Daramy Sesay 2020.

Mattu is a cocoa farmer who owns a 7 acre of cocoa plantation. She is also an assorted fruit vendor in Ngelahun Village in the outskirts of Kenema district in the eastern province of Sierra Leone.

Before the inter district movement ban was declared, Mattu had a store of fruits items ready to be transported for sales to the capital city of Freetown. But by the time she had the opportunity to transport them, some of the commodities had perished due to the delay with the then stringent inter district movement procedures. By reason of this, she unfortunately lost the currency value of about Le 1,000,000.

The corona virus has adversely impacted the flow of businesses in Sierra Leone. Small business like Mattu have seen the worst.

Mattu is also concerned that because the sales of cocoa is limited, she struggles to pool resources together to pay labour to prune her farm land as the cost to do so has tripled what she used to pay pre COVID-19. Pruning helps the cocoa farm to thrive well by weeding off unwanted plants.

In all of this however, Mattu is convinced that situation is not normal because of the COVID-19 and that the only way things will go back to normal is when the virus is contained and defeated.

“Obviously, it is tough for



*Photo 2: Mattu showing her cocoa yield @NaCOVERC/Alpha Daramy Sesay 2020*

me just as it is for many other farmers like me. Moreover, because we did not expect the corona virus to plague us and leave this huge economic impact, it is a complete surprise to wake up to this sudden change” she admitted.

Kenema District is in the Eastern part of Sierra Leone, it is a reputable hub for tons of cocoa production that feed into a large export from Sierra Leone to other countries. As it is, the production chain has been disrupted because of the drastic decrease in demand and supply flow.

Umaru Vandy Kondovor is the Kenema District Coordinator for the COVID-19 response. “The COVID-19 pandemic has left an indelible effect on this district and suffice to say that we all do feel the impacts. However, it is so pleasing to see a farmer like Mattu defying the odds by playing her own part to ensure that we

collectively get rid of the virus. Her sense of community ownership of the fight is amazing and worth emulating”

So far, the Kenema District has been highlighted as one of the districts that have seen huge public compliance of behavioral hygiene protocols such as regular hand washing, social distancing and the use of face masks. This is largely because community ownership of the fight is constantly encouraged by the response team.

“As my desire is to see the end of the corona virus and my business return to normal, I endeavor to practically comply with health precautions to prevent myself, my family and loved ones from catching the virus” said Mattu optimistically.