

**A PRESS CONFERENCE ADDRESSED BY THE MINORITY CAUCUS IN
PARLIAMENT
“EXPOSING THE DECEPTIONS OF PRESIDENT AKUFO-ADDO ABOUT THE
COCOA SECTOR OF GHANA”.**

25th July, 2019.

Introduction

Good afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen of the press. It is my singular honour to welcome you on behalf of the Minority Caucus in Parliament, and the National Democratic Congress, to this press conference.

Today’s press conference has been necessitated by a recent challenge by President Akufo-Addo to the erstwhile NDC/Mahama Administration to name one policy of ours that increased cocoa production during our tenure in office. In his perpetual campaign mood, the President went ahead and answered his own challenge by claiming that; “I can tell you the answer in advance – zero! Zero! Zero!”

Ladies and gentlemen of the press, it would appear to us that in his struggles to do anything meaningful about the continuous mismanagement of our country under his watch, President Akufo-Addo has put himself on an auto-pilot reactionary mechanism, such that anytime the opposition makes a move that exposes his failures, he quickly embarks on panic-stricken tours only to churn out falsehood and display more insensitivity to the plight of Ghanaians.

Instead of admitting that he has failed cocoa farmers in Ghana, and that he and his government have completely mismanaged Ghana’s cocoa sector, President Akufo-Addo continues to display insincerity and complete lack of sympathy for the plight of the poor cocoa farmer.

However, at the end of this press conference, we will demonstrate to you that President Akufo-Addo was either misinformed about his so-called record in the cocoa sector vis-à-vis that of President Mahama and the NDC, or that he was simply being mischievous and disingenuous with the facts about Ghana’s cocoa sector.

Policies of the Mahama/NDC Administration Which Boosted Cocoa Production

Friends from the media, President Akufo-Addo challenged the erstwhile NDC administration to mention only one policy that we introduced to boost cocoa production in Ghana. However, in fairness to our superior record in government, we will give the President more than one of the far-reaching interventions that were introduced by the Mahama Administration.

Free Fertilization of cocoa farms

First of all, the NDC under President Mahama introduced the free fertilization of cocoa farms policy in 2013/2014, and repeated same in 2015 and 2016 to boost cocoa production. This game-changing program was what culminated in Ghana achieving its second highest annual cocoa production of 969,000 metric tonnes for the 2016/2017 cocoa season under President Mahama as captured at paragraph 403 of the NPP's own 2018 Budget statement.

Compare this sterling record to the current situation under the insensitive and grossly underperforming Akufo-Addo regime, where annual cocoa production dropped to 904,000 in the 2017/2018 cocoa season as captured at paragraph 524 of the 2019 Budget statement. Also, annual cocoa production has further dwindled to an estimated volume of 770,000 metric tonnes for the 2018/2019 cocoa season representing a 21% decline in annual cocoa production since 2016/2017 cocoa season.

Ladies and gentlemen, the main reason for this huge decline in cocoa production is because the Akufo-Addo government upon assuming office in 2017 canceled the distribution of free fertilizer to cocoa farmers program initiated by the erstwhile Mahama administration and instead, fraudulently started selling Free ("Not for sale fertilizers") to farmers at 80 Ghana Cedis per bag. Quite expectedly, many farmers could not buy these fertilizers at such exorbitant prices.

Yet, the wicked Akufo-Addo government has allowed these fertilizers to expire and rot away. This is one of the major factors that has accounted for the sharp decline in annual cocoa production figures since the Akufo-Addo government assumed office. Indeed, cocoa farmers in Ghana are surely feeling the pinch of the inhumane and counter-productive measures of President Akufo-Addo in the cocoa sector.

Free distribution of Cocoa Hybrid Seedlings to Cocoa Farmers.

Distinguished friends from the media, another far-reaching intervention that was introduced by His Excellency President John Dramani Mahama to boost cocoa production in the medium term was the Free distribution of Cocoa Hybrid Seedlings to Cocoa Farmers.

Under this initiative, COCOBOD expanded the Seedlings Nursery Sites from 28 Sites to 330 Nursery Sites from 2014 to 2016. In all, about 4000 labourers were engaged during the various Cocoa Seasons at the Nursery Sites. It has to be emphasized that during the 2014/2015 Cocoa Season, 50 Million Hybrid Cocoa Seedlings were raised and distributed free of charge to farmers. During the 2015/2016 Cocoa Season, 60 million Hybrid Cocoa Seedlings were raised and distributed free of charge to farmers. In the 2016/2017 Cocoa Season, another 60 million Hybrid Cocoa Seedlings were raised for free distribution to farmers.

Ladies and gentlemen, if one does a simple arithmetic of these statistics, 1,200 seedlings is equivalent to One Hectare of Cocoa Farm. Therefore, 60 Million Hybrid Cocoa Seedlings per year, and is supposed to expand Cocoa farms in Ghana significantly.

Other Interventions

Other Interventions that the Mahama administration undertook to motivate cocoa farmers and improve upon their livelihoods include the construction of Solar-powered Boreholes, schools, and roads in cocoa growing areas. Also, the Mahama administration continued the cocoa mass spraying program initiated by the Kuffuor Administration. All these were tailored to help make life better for the Ghanaian cocoa farmer and boost cocoa production.

False Claims by President Akufo-Addo on Annual Cocoa Production in Ghana

Members of the media, President Akufo-Addo also made some misleading claims about annual cocoa production in Ghana. While addressing chiefs in Daboase in the Wassa East District, the President claimed that the government of President Kufour moved cocoa production from 350,000 metric tonnes in the year 2000 to 750,000 tonnes at the end of 2008, while projecting a yield of One million metric tonnes by 2010. He further claimed that President Mahama dropped annual production “from 1 million tonnes to barely 700,000”, and that his government has raised production to 900,000 tonnes.

These claims could either be the product of ignorance on the part of the President, or perhaps

he was once again been misled by his handlers.

We wish to inform President Akufo-Addo, or perhaps remind him, that the two highest annual cocoa production yields that has ever been recorded in this country happened under the watch of successive NDC administrations.

The first highest yield of 1 million tonnes of cocoa was realized under the Mills/Mahama NDC administration in 2010/2011 cocoa season. The second highest annual cocoa production of 969,000 metric tones took place under the watch of President Mahama in the 2016/2017 cocoa season. This fact can be verified at paragraph 403 of the NPP's own 2018 Budget Statement presented to Parliament.

So where did President Akufo-Addo get his figures from? Who misled our President this time around? Your guess is as good as mine.

Allocations in Support of Cocoa Production – Comparing the records

Ladies and gentlemen of the press, one critical evidence of genuine commitment to the cocoa sector is the level of allocation that a particular regime devotes to that sector. In this regard, we wish to state without any equivocation, that the record of the Mahama/NDC administration far dwarfs that of the Akufo-Addo government. The erstwhile Mahama administration allocated more funds to critical services such as rehabilitation and replanting, pest and disease control among others as shown in the table below.

TABLE 1

ALLOCATION IN SUPPORT OF COCOA PRODUCTION	2016/17 NDC GH¢	2017/18 NPP GH¢	DIFFERENCE IN THE ALLOCATION S GH¢	PERCENTAG E (%) DIFFERENCE IN ALLOCATIO N
DISEASE AND PEST CONTROL (CODAPEC)	316,000,000	198,246,546.3 1	117,753,453.69	-21
REHABILITATIO N (Nurseries and Seedlings)	160,468,750	58,527,542.37	101,941,209.00	-64
FERTILIZER APPLICATION (Hi-tech)	355,500,000.0 0	153,577,500.0 0	201,922,500.00	-57
COCOA ROADS	592,500,000	-	-592,500,000	-100

However, under the current regime, one thing that has received the highest allocation is administrative expenses. Whereas critical services are under decline, administrative expenses continue to rise as shown in the table below.

TABLE 2

ALLOCATION FOR ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES IN THE COCOA SECTOR	2016/17 NDC GH¢	2017/18 NPP GH¢	2018/19 NPP GH¢
COCOBOD HEADQUARTERS	363,528,000	537,123,500	568,719,000
COCOA MARKETING COMPANY	74,800,000	103,504,500	109,593,000
QUALITY CONTROL DEPARTMENT	102,850,000	155,082,500	164,205,000

This ironical situation sums up President Akufo-Addo's vision for the cocoa sector, which is more money for office expenses, and very little for the cocoa farmer.

Worsening Conditions of Cocoa Farmers under President Akufo-Addo

Men and women of the inky fraternity, contrary to the obtuse and fallacious claims of President Akuffo-Addo, the lot of the Ghanaian cocoa Farmer continues to grow worse under his watch.

As we speak, the producer price of cocoa has remained static at GHS475 for three consecutive years. This is despite the fact that there has even been astronomical escalation in prices of fuel, building materials, food commodities and other goods and services, coupled with the fact that farmers now have to purchase fertilizers which were hitherto given for free.

Aside the producer price of cocoa, the Akufo-Addo has continued to shortchange cocoa farmers in many ways. This government has refused to pay premium to cocoa farmers or account for same for over two (2) years now. As if that is not enough, this government has also cancelled the additional bonus of GHS5 per bag that erstwhile Mahama Administration was paying to cocoa farmers.

The True Legacy of President John Dramani Mahama In the Cocoa Sector

Ladies and gentlemen of the press, President Akufo-Addo and his appointees have never missed an opportunity to lament over so-called debt inherited from the erstwhile NDC administration as an excuse for their non-performance in almost every sector of our economy.

The cocoa sector is no exception, as President Akufo-Addo also told cocoa farmers that he was “clearing arrears inherited from the Mahama administration”. What the President failed to tell Ghanaian cocoa farmers is the true and enviable legacy bequeathed to him by President Mahama.

Ladies and gentlemen of the press, the Mahama Administration projected and collateralized 638,710 metric tonnes of cocoa for the \$1.8 billion syndicated loan it contracted for the 2016/2017 cocoa season but achieved a production volume of 969,000 metric tonnes of cocoa. The remaining 330,290 mt was inherited by the Akufo-Addo government, out of which they used only 30,000 metric tonnes to pay for the Bui Dam project. The remaining quantity amounting to 300,290 metric tonnes of cocoa was sold at \$1,900 per tonne, accruing a total of \$570,551,000. This means that an exchange of 4.3 Cedis to the dollar, the Mahama/NDC administration left behind 300,290 metric tonnes of cocoa, equivalent to GHS2.4 billion for the Akufo-Addo government.

Also, the Mahama administration bequeathed to the Akufo-Addo government a Cocoa Stabilization Fund which was intentioned to cushion farmers in times of need. Again, we left behind part of the \$1.8 billion cocoa syndicated loan we contracted for the 2016/2017 cocoa season and this is confirmed at paragraph 359 of the 2017 Budget statement.

This is the true inheritance President Mahama bequeathed to Akufo-Addo and his government. Now the question is; why has this government failed to disclose this inheritance to cocoa farmers and the general public? What have they used all this money for? And why do they continue to lie that they inherited a messed up cocoa sector from the Mahama Administration when the contrary is the case?

Cocoa Roads

Friends from the media, another falsehood that was peddled by President Akufo-Addo, which has been his long-held campaign rhetoric is the fact that President Mahama and the NDC

embarked upon ghost and inflated cocoa roads projects across the country. This lie by President Akufo-Addo and the NPP is not only pathetic, but his continuous repetition of same in cocoa growing areas further reinforces the fact that he cares little about the truth and the welfare of Ghanaian cocoa farmers.

It is an indisputable fact that the Mahama/NDC administration commenced hundreds of cocoa road projects across the country, completed some and left some at various stages of completion at the time of exiting office. These road Projects were aimed at improving the road network in cocoa growing areas and providing access roads to aid in the carting of cocoa beans.

However, upon assuming office, the Akufo-Addo-led government halted 200 of these ongoing cocoa road projects under the guise of conducting a clinical audit. As we speak, after almost three years in government, not a single official of the erstwhile Mahama administration or a single contractor has been indicted for any inflated, fraudulent or ghost cocoa road project.

Instead, what the Akufo-Addo government has succeeded in doing is to waste millions of the tax payer's money on illegally procured audits not sanctioned by the Auditor General. We are aware that \$10 million has been paid to one of such illegally procured private audit firms owned by a member of Akufo-Addo's Council of State and at the right time, we shall make the chilling details available to the Ghanaian people.

Needless to say, that the Government of Ghana has already incurred so much financial loss upon itself through this reckless handling of cocoa roads projects. We therefore wish to sound this note of caution to the current CEO of COCOBOD that we shall hold him responsible for any financial loss in the area of cocoa roads in the future.

Ladies and gentlemen of the press, we wish to inform you that after blaming President Mahama for commencing several cocoa road projects and halting almost all ongoing cocoa road projects across the country for more than two (2) years, President Akufo-Addo shockingly found it expedient to complete one of such projects from Apedwa to Kyebi, which happens to be his hometown.

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen of the press, as we have amply demonstrated to you, as far as the cocoa

sector of Ghana is concerned, that President Akufo-Addo and his government have no credible record whatsoever to even merit any comparison with the legacy of President Mahama and the NDC.

Cocoa farmers today are far worse off than they were under President Mahama and the NDC. Cocoa output has declined steadily, whilst all major projects in the cocoa sector have taken a nosedive since President Akufo-Addo assumed office.

We therefore charge President Akufo-Addo to focus and clean the mess that he has created in the cocoa sector through his mismanagement and stop sounding needless political rhetorics.

We thank you very much for your attention.

Signed.

Hon. Eric Opoku

(Ranking Member of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Food & Agriculture)