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Projects

FACT-FINDING MISSION TO THE
COFFEE SECTOR IN GABON

OCTOBER 1999

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Introduction

1. Petroleum is Gabon's leading export product and is the main component in the country's gross domestic product, accounting for 42.7 percent in 1996 and 40.9 percent in 1997 (Economic Tables 1996 and 1997, Ministry of Finance and the Economy). Gabon's other main export products are: manganese, uranium and wood, which account for less than 5 percent of the GDP. In terms of value, these products accounted for CFAF 1,306 billion in 1996 and CFAF 1,365 billion in 1997.

2. The main concerns of the country's economic operators continue to be the negative effects of this situation which has led to a fall in exports other than mining products, a rise in unemployment, increased external dependence and a significant trade deficit. In fact, although Gabon recorded an economic growth of 3.2 percent in 1996 and 4.1 percent in 1997, in real terms there has been a slackening in overall mining production as a result of the depletion of uranium and petroleum deposits and the volatility of world prices.

3. At the same time, Gabon, whose population is concentrated in the major cities, principally Libreville, has an average unemployment rate of 18 percent, rising to over 22 percent in urban areas.

4. As a coffee producing country, Gabon is a Member of the International Coffee Organization (ICO), which has its headquarters in London. Gabon is also a member of the Interafrican Coffee Organisation (IACO) and the African and Malagasy Coffee Organisation (OAMCAF), with headquarters in Abidjan and Paris respectively.

5. The General Directorate of Gabon's Stabilisation and Equalisation Funds (DGCSP) is the official representative of the Gabonese Government to the ICO and this mission report was prepared within the framework of cooperation between the two institutions.

6. With a view to encouraging coffee production, whose steady decline is threatening the future both of the sector and of a number of the structures involved in it, the DGCSP requested the Executive Director of the International Coffee Organization to provide inter-institutional support for the purpose of preparing a project for the recovery of coffee growing to counter the decline in production: purchases of coffee in dry cherry form, which accounted for over 1,800 tonnes in 1981, have fallen steadily. At present they account for less than 300 tonnes.

7. Following this request, a mission composed of an economist representing the ICO and an agricultural economist specializing in coffee from the Centre for International Cooperation on Agricultural Research and Development (CIRAD) visited Gabon from 3 to 17 October 1999.

Objectives

8. The objectives of this first mission were as follows:

Firstly, to prepare a summary description of the coffee sector. This was made possible through visits to two or three regions where a recovery plan would be envisaged. The mission visited the provinces of Ngounié and Upper Ogooué but a visit to the Ogooué Ivindo region had to be postponed because of an unforeseen air transport problem. Meetings with the various agents at present involved in the coffee sector provided an indispensable complement to this initial approach. In this way, the mission met not only coffee farmers but local authorities and the various government institutions represented by the structures established in the main stages of the sector's development. Meetings with other private and non-governmental organisations and institutions involved in international cooperation completed these preliminary contacts. (A detailed programme for the mission is available from the ICO on request).

Secondly, to begin to gather information and to assemble documents, reports and studies carried out on the subject in the past. It should be noted that since studies and discussions on rural planning have already been undertaken, special attention was given to ensuring respect for the coherence of government plans on this matter.

Finally, to begin to identify needs in relation to the material and human resources required to encourage recovery and to prepare a list of additional information to be gathered by the DGCSP at a later stage.

9. This information will include:

- data needed to identify suitable conditions for or impediments to the development of the sector (soil and climate data, sociological data); and
- economic data needed to carry out a feasibility study, including economic and financial flows.

10. Following this first mission, a detailed document on the coffee sector will be prepared by CIRAD for release in January 2000.

11. A second mission is envisaged for the purpose of quantifying needs for the recovery project and carrying out a preliminary feasibility project.