

# The Women in Cocoa Business Initiative, Ivory Coast



**REGIONS:** DUEKOUÉ, MAN, VAVOUA, BOUAFLE  
**FARMERS:** 3.450  
**STARTED:** 2016  
**CERTIFICATES:** UTZ CERTIFIED, RAINFOREST ALLIANCE  
**PARTNERS:** LA FEDERATION NATIONALE DES PRODUCTRICES CAFÉ ET CACAO, THE DEUTSCHE GESELLSCHAFT FÜR INTERNATIONALE ZUSAMMENARBEIT (GIZ), THE SOCIÉTÉ DE COMMERCIALISATION DE CAFÉ ET CACAO (S3C)



**A**mbitious targets of the chocolate industry have triggered numerous programs in Ivory Coast, and in the field you'll see an abundance of warehouses decorated with UTZ, Rainforest Alliance and Fairtrade logos. We estimate that today about 30-35% of the Ivorian cocoa market is certified, and farmer cooperatives not actively participating are facing serious problems to attract members and survive in this increasingly competitive market.

When visiting a farmer cooperative and having a closer look on the member list, it is not uncommon to find only a few female members. Cocoa is commonly perceived as 'a male crop' and when it comes to cash revenues, decision-making positions, or program enrollment, women are rarely involved. This despite the fact that women take part in most stages of cocoa farming. In particular post-harvest practices such as pod breaking, fermentation, and drying of beans is often done by women, which they do next to other household duties and the care of children.

Many cultural traditions need to be addressed to tackle gender issues, such as inequality in land inheritance, land ownership, and financial decision-making. As is the case with many local habits and policies, it takes



time to change patterns. In certain regions, however, it is not uncommon to find women who do possess a few acres of cocoa farm donated by their husbands and forming groups to market their products. This in particular concerns Baoulé and Yacouba communities. Targeting and empowering these women groups are likely to trigger similar developments in neighbouring communities.

However, in order to involve women groups in sustainability and certification programs, the cocoa industry will also have to change their current selection procedures. Today, sustainability programs are a very volume-driven business, where supply chain actors mainly select the low hanging fruits; the largest and best organized suppliers. This means that women ▶



cooperatives are generally out of scope as their scale of operations in cocoa is often too small (<25 Mt) to be considered. The lack of working capital is a serious root cause; cash crops like cocoa require deep pockets, and as long as women cooperatives don't get access to pre-finance or sustainability programs, they will be restricted to staple crops at a very low scale. This is a vicious circle: with the increasing number of cooperatives getting certified, women groups get surpassed as they can't afford similar advantages for their members.

Gender empowerment is receiving increasing attention from the cocoa industry. Various sustainability programs have started to register more women in farmer cooperatives, or support staple crop cultivation by women groups to increase revenues and improve nutrition and food security. In practice, however, this often brings limited change to the financial capacity and decision-making of women, as incomes and program premiums often end up in the pockets of their husbands, and staple crops generally show a lower profitability compared to cash crops.

Very few initiatives exist where women groups are actively supported in up-scaling their cash crop business, like the trade of cocoa. In 2015, Cocoanect signed a partnership with the Ivorian Federation of Female Coffee and Cocoa Producers to enroll women cooperatives in our sustainability programs and up-scale their cocoa business. To realize this in a cost-efficient way, we connect women groups with

larger well-organized buying companies to train them on entrepreneurship and organization management. Through additional support for their logistics and access to micro-credits, we gradually increase the women's capacity until their cocoa volumes are sufficient to fully operate independently.

The program started with 2 women cooperatives who up-scaled their cocoa business from less than 100 Mt on a yearly basis to a joint volume of 1.158 Mt in year 3. A total of 170 ha of improved improved planting materials were distributed to generate additional revenues for the women by selling seedlings.



Another 5 women cooperatives will be added in the initiative in 2017 and 2018. We are also in the process of establishing Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA's) with different women groups. These associations give women the opportunity to take out micro-loans, to start, or further upscale their business, and are another tool to empower women in cocoa communities.



## Key-Impacts



### WOMEN

Access to sustainability programs is increased for women groups and -cooperatives. In 2017, at least 5 women cooperatives will be enrolled in the program.



### CHILDREN

More than their male counterparts, women prioritize the education and wellbeing of children. One of the women cooperatives is already supporting local school canteens with rice donations.



### COCOA INCOME

At least 1.500 female cocoa producers will benefit from improved cocoa yields, premium revenues, and the sales of improved cocoa seedlings. At least 20 women in high-decision making functions will be hired through the program.



### INCOME DIVERSIFICATION

Staple crop cultivation will be supported by providing improved planting materials. Also, alternative income-generating activities such as the lease of ceremony chairs by women groups will be up-scaled.