

SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES



**COCOA
NECT.**

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)



The ambitious targets of the chocolate industry have triggered numerous programmes in Ivory Coast, and in the field, you'll see many 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 attracting members and surviving in this increasingly competitive market.

When visiting a farmer cooperative and taking a closer look on the member list, it is not uncommon to find a small number of female members. Cocoa is commonly perceived as 'a male crop' and when it comes to cash revenues, decision-making positions, or programme enrolment, women are rarely involved. This is the case even though women take part in most stages of cocoa farming. Post-harvest practices such as pod breaking, fermentation, and drying of beans are often done by women, which they do in combination with other household duties and childcare.

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 more common to find women who do possess a few acres of cocoa farm donated by their husbands and form groups to market their products, particularly in Baoulé and Yacouba communities. Targeting and empowering these women groups is likely to trigger similar developments in neighbouring communities.

However, in order to involve women groups in sustainability and certification programmes, the cocoa industry will also have to change its current selection procedures. Today, sustainability programmes are a very volume-driven business, where supply chain actors mainly select the low hanging fruits; the largest ►



and best organised suppliers. This means that women cooperatives are generally not taken into consideration as their scale of operations in cocoa is often too small (<25 Mt). The lack of working capital is a serious root cause; cash crops like cocoa require deep pockets, and if women cooperatives don't get access to pre-finance or sustainability programmes, they will be restricted to low-scale staple crops. This is a vicious circle: with an increasing number of cooperatives becoming certified, women groups are bypassed 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. Incomes and programme 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, Cocoonect signed a partnership with the Ivorian Federation of Female Coffee and Cocoa Producers to enrol women cooperatives in our sustainability programs and up-scale their cocoa business. To achieve 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 programme started with two 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 three. A total of 170 hectares of improved planting materials were distributed to generate additional revenues for the women by selling seedlings.



A further five women cooperatives will be added to the initiative in 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 programmes is increased for women groups and cooperatives. In 2018, at least 5 women cooperatives will be enrolled in the programme.



CHILDREN

More than their male counterparts, women prioritise 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 upscaled.

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Connecting the world of Cocoa