

The Cocoa & Forests Initiative:

Collective Action to End Cocoa-Related Deforestation

The governments of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana and 35 leading cocoa and chocolate companies, representing 85% of global cocoa usage, joined together in the Cocoa & Forests Initiative to help end deforestation and restore forest areas. Their combined actions play a crucial role in protecting and restoring biodiversity, sequestering carbon stocks in West African forests, and addressing climate change in line with the Paris Climate Agreement. The Cocoa & Forests Initiative contributes to Sustainable Development Goal 13 (Climate Action) and 15 (Life on Land).

The Cocoa & Forests Initiative is a public private partnership based on frameworks for action (Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana) and action plans for the private sector (Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana) and public sector (Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana) that spell out commitments to:

- protect and restore forests,
- promote sustainable cocoa production and farmers' livelihoods,
- engage communities and boost social inclusion.

To learn more, follow #CocoaAndForests on social media, or visit Cocoa & Forests Initiative.

The World Cocoa Foundation (WCF); IDH, the Sustainable Trade Initiative; and the Governments of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana drive the Cocoa & Forests Initiative. The Prince of Wales (now King Charles III) launched the Initiative in March 2017.

Deforestation of tropical rainforests is a major issue in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, which together produce nearly two-thirds of the world's supply of cocoa, the main ingredient in chocolate. According to Global Forest Watch, between 2002 and 2023, Côte d'Ivoire lost 28% and Ghana 13% of their humid primary forest, with a large portion of this loss attributable to cocoa farming expansion.

A comprehensive analysis is required to determine the exact contribution of cocoa production to deforestation. WCF, CFI members, and partners are working together on science-based methods to determine the share of cocoa production to overall deforestation rates with a high level of accuracy in cocoa producing countries. Data reliability and a good knowledge of the cause and location of deforestation is essential to develop effective and adequate mitigation measures and ensure that WCF members and partners are compliant with regulations such as the EUDR.

Cocoa provides crucial income to communities in rural West Africa, but farmers are too often faced with poverty. Poverty is one of the causes of deforestation. Accelerating a transition to sustainable livelihoods is essential for farmers' economic security and a healthy planet.

The first priority is the protection and restoration of forests that have been degraded. To this end, the governments and companies have pledged no further conversion of forest land for cocoa production and have committed to the phased elimination of illegal cocoa production and sourcing in protected areas.

Both countries are introducing a differentiated approach for improved management of forest reserves, based on the level of degradation of forests. In 2019, the government of Côte d'Ivoire adopted and published a new forest code which, among other things, put forth policies for the promotion of cocoa agroforestry to restore degraded land, improve forest cover, and promote sustainable livelihoods and agriculture in the classified forests and rural zones. Both governments have shared maps on forest cover and land-use, and continue to update the maps, including socio-economic data on cocoa farmers, to inform private sector investments. Companies have made significant investments in the promotion of cocoa agroforestry and the restoration of degraded forests.

To ensure effective implementation and monitoring of these commitments, companies have pledged to develop traceability from farm to the first purchase point for their own purchases of cocoa. They also work with governments to ensure an effective national framework for traceability encompassing all traders in the supply chain and to anticipate forthcoming due diligence legislation. The companies will similarly share information with the national satellite monitoring platforms to effectively monitor progress on CFI, as well as proactively address threats of new deforestation.

The next critical priority is sustainable agricultural production and increased farmer incomes. These are essential pre-requisites for reducing pressure for agricultural encroachment into forests and strengthening the resilience of cocoa farmers to climate change.

The governments and companies are accelerating investment in long-term productivity of cocoa in order to grow "more cocoa on less land." Key actions include provision of planting materials for the promotion of cocoa agroforestry, training in good agricultural practices, soil fertility, land tenure reform, and capacity building of farmers' organizations. Sustainable livelihoods and income diversification for cocoa farmers are being accelerated through food crop diversification, agricultural inter-cropping, and development of mixed agroforestry systems and shade-grown cocoa.

The final area of focus is strong community engagement and social inclusion, with a particular focus on women and youth. The governments and companies have committed to full and effective consultation and participation of cocoa farmers in the design and implementation of key actions, and promotion of community-based management models for forest protection and restoration. The governments have adopted social and environmental safeguards and are assessing and mitigating the social impacts and risks of any proposed land-use changes on affected communities.

Fighting for sustainable cocoa

Key elements of our corporate social responsibility lie at the beginning of our value chain. We must safeguard and promote sustainable use of the resources of our planet, and act with care for human rights throughout our supply chain, ensuring responsible procurement practices. Therefore, the first pillar in our sustainability strategy continues to be Responsible Sourcing. We will keep fighting against deforestation and child labour – aiming to cover 100% in our cocoa supply chain by 2025, and 100% of our entire supply chain by 2030. These are significant tasks. With decades of experience fighting for sustainable cocoa, we recognise that the complex social and environmental challenges in the cocoa supply chain will not be solved easily or quickly. The same applies to the issues related to some of our other raw materials. However, this is not an excuse to not do what we can.

Help instead of leaving behind

Our approach is not to stop buying from suppliers where risks are identified. Following the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the right thing to do is to support, pursue and push for sustainable development. Therefore, our approach is not to ignore the problems we find, but to ensure proper assessments and to monitor and remediate practices with an inherent risk of children becoming involved in child labour – or of forests being damaged or destroyed.

Increasing our efforts

During the past two decades, we have invested in local initiatives to improve the livelihoods of cocoa farmers and their children, and to protect forests. We have sourced our cocoa beans through programmes supporting sustainable cocoa production, and have been involved with leading international organisations, collaborating to achieve lasting changes in the cocoa industry on a large scale.

We will continue all of this in 2025, and we remain committed to increasing our efforts and to push for more changes at a faster pace. Where possible, our cocoa suppliers will be required to meet the same standards: the cocoa must be covered by standards where the farms are proven to have no deforestation and with systems in place that effectively prevent, monitor and remediate child labour. This will not solve all the issues at once. But we believe it is a necessary and strong foundation for sustainable development of cocoa farming. We aim to ensure and sustain an impact through our own supply chain. Additionally, we continue our cross-industry engagement with the leading organisations collaborating for a sustainable development of the full cocoa industry.



What we have been able to do in Ghana

But before we can reach the targets set for 2025, it is important to report what our initiatives, efforts and collaboration in 2024 amounted to.

Preventing deforestation is a key element of our strategy, and in 2024, 3.045 hectares in our direct supply chain had undergone and completed a deforestation risk assessment, and 2.056 farms that have been mapped in our direct supply chain.

23.633 improved cocoa seedlings have been distributed to farmers because of our efforts in 2024, aiding them in their effort to increase efficiency and causing less strain on the soil in the area. The total amount of improved cocoa seedlings distributed is more than 300.000 over the past 6 years.

Multi-purpose trees have also been distributed on a large scale, and 11.117 of them were granted for on-farm planting.

418 individuals were participating in women's empowerment projects or enrolling in financial services, such as drought or flood insurance in 2024.

As an effort to increase the overall livelihood of the cocoa farmers, in 2024 15 groups of 15-30 people, split roughly equal between male and female participants, have banded together in Village Savings and Loans Associations, incentivising collaboration and pooling their savings. This provides the group members with access to basic financial services. As an added effect of these groupings, entrepreneurial and leadership skills can be discovered among the members, and many have reported a rise in self-esteem and -confidence in their new roles in the group.

The basis of many of these efforts could not have been achieved without coaching and training the farmers, and in 2024, we helped ensure 802 farmers were reached by training programs involving sustainable agricultural methods.

Reporting numbers and efforts

| Description | # Through direct investment (current reporting year (2024)) |
|--|---|
| FOREST PROTECTION AND RESTORATION | |
| # of farms mapped in direct supply chain: Total Active | 1,625 |
| # of hectares in the direct supply chain with deforestation risk assessments completed | 3,045 |
| # metric tons of directly sourced cocoa traceable from the farm to the first purchase point (target is 100%) | 1,053 |
| # farmers informed, trained, and / or consulted on the new Forest Code, forest policy, law enforcement, forest protection, and restoration | 21 |
| # Individuals receiving incentives to protect and restore forests and / or adopt agroforestry (e.g., PES): New | 57 |
| # Individuals receiving incentives to protect and restore forests and / or adopt agroforestry (e.g., PES): Total Active | 63 |
| # farmers applying agroforestry: New | 44 |
| # farmers applying agroforestry: Total Active | 63 |
| # farmers provided with technical assistance to adopt and expand agroforestry | 63 |
| # multi-purpose trees distributed for on-farm planting | 11,117 |
| # hectares cocoa agroforestry: New | 154 |
| # hectares cocoa agroforestry: Total Active | 226 |
| # farmers provided with technical assistance to be more resilient to climate change and reduce and remove carbon emissions on farm (e.g., CSC) | 63 |
| SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION AND FARMERS' LIVELIHOODS | |
| # improved cocoa seedlings distributed to farmers | 23,633 |
| # farmers provided with technical assistance (based on plans) to professionalize & optimize cocoa farming practices | 802 |
| # individuals participating in additional Income Generating Activities (IGA's) | 37 |
| # individuals provided with technical assistance (based on plans) to increase income from non-cocoa sources/IGA's | 37 |
| # individuals provided with technical assistance to save money and access finance | 758 |
| # of members of VSLA groups in the current year | 418 |
| # of VSLA groups in the current year | 15 |
| SOCIAL INCLUSION AND COMMUNITY | |
| # of individuals participating in women's empowerment projects and activities | 418 |