

RESILIENT ECOSYSTEMS AND SUSTAINABLE TRANSFORMATION OF RURAL ECONOMIES

Participatory and inclusive landscape governance for thriving communities and ecosystems in the cocoa-forest landscapes of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana



Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana are the largest producers of cocoa in the world, with millions of families relying on the crop for their livelihoods. Yet cocoa farmers earn, on average, only [six percent](#) of the final product's value in stores, making poverty and food insecurity common. Additionally, women make up a significant part of the cocoa workforce but earn far less than their male counterparts and have less access to land, credit, and inputs. Few farmers in these landscapes engage in sustainable practices, and cocoa production contributes significantly to deforestation and land degradation.

The Rainforest Alliance is implementing the [Resilient Ecosystems and Sustainable Transformation of Rural Economies \(RESTORE\)](#) project (2022-2027), in partnership with USAID, Olam Food Ingredients (ofi), five multinational chocolate companies—Blommer Chocolate Company, Costco Wholesale, Mars Wrigley, Mondelēz International, and Nestlé—farmer cooperatives, and local stakeholders. Working in the Béki-Bossématié and South Taï landscapes in Côte d'Ivoire and the Sui River landscape in Ghana, RESTORE improves livelihoods for cocoa farmers, while increasing tree cover and reducing GHG emissions.

RESTORE is demonstrating a scalable and regionally replicable model for community-led governance, natural resource management, and economic development that boosts livelihoods and protects biodiversity. Building on the Rainforest Alliance's successful integrated landscape management approach, the project has established Landscape Management Boards (LMBs) to enable multistakeholder participatory governance processes, facilitate productive diversification in

cocoa farming communities, and build capacity and market incentives for farms to apply climate-smart agricultural practices. Convened with community leaders and key landscape stakeholders, such as local government representatives, the LMBs are critical in the development and implementation of Landscape Action Plans, which articulate environmental, social, and economic priorities for communities, including guiding restoration efforts. RESTORE implements four interconnected strategies:

- 1. Restoration:** Improve tree registration and/or land tenure processes and strengthen incentives for tree growing and conservation to restore tree cover and protect forests. Activities include educational programs for farmers on the benefits of conserving and planting trees to improve soil, retain water, and regulate climate; accessing incentives through tree registration; and developing participatory restoration plans, identifying suitable sites for conservation and restoration in cocoa landscapes, and establishing community-led nurseries of native tree seedlings.
- 2. Landscape governance:** Establish and strengthen the business and governance capacity of LMBs, improving locally led natural resource management across landscapes. Thus far, RESTORE has launched four new LMBs in Côte d'Ivoire and strengthened three existing ones in Ghana. LMBs have formal governance and operating procedures, endorsed by relevant legal authorities, and are being supported to develop or implement their plans, consistent with the landscape's conservation, restoration, and economic development objectives.
- 3. Improved production:** Increase use of climate-smart, regenerative, and sustainable cocoa production by improving farmers' capacities, knowledge, and resources. The Rainforest Alliance and ofi provide extensive technical assistance to help farmers apply nature-based solutions on farms, like reduced agrochemical use, rehabilitation of cocoa trees, planting other tree varieties for shade and crop diversity, and regenerating soil health.



- 4. Livelihoods:** Promote and strengthen forest-friendly livelihood diversification through women- and youth-inclusive approaches that improve skills and access to funding, productive inputs, and markets. Working in partnership with established LMBs, RESTORE has delivered nearly 60 livelihood start-up kits, benefitting 225 people to date. The activity incentivizes improved practices on-farm by providing alternative opportunities to earn income through activities such as fish, snail and poultry farming, beekeeping, and the production of foods like cassava, plantain, and rice.

IMPACTS TO DATE

- **US\$3.1 million co-invested** from partner chocolate companies. These investments have gone to farmers in the form of training and productive inputs, as well as increased premiums as they implement sustainable practices.
- **7,785 cocoa farmers have directly benefitted from training** in sustainable and regenerative agriculture practices, alternative livelihoods development, and landscape restoration activities.
- From October 2023 to September 2024, **US\$730,149 was mobilized by 208 Village Saving and Loan Associations** in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, comprised of 6,048 community members, including 4,478 women, in support of their sustainable landscape activities.
- During this same period, **20,347 people received livelihoods co-benefits** (monetary or non-monetary) through the project.
- In 2024, the project facilitated the distribution and planting of **37,806 shade trees with over 1,000 cocoa farmers** across the two countries.

IMPACT STORY

Together with the Ivorian Office of Parks and Reserves (OIPR) and the Ministry of National Education, RESTORE led an environmental education program with students from three primary schools in the Appoisso, Pokoukro, and Prakro communities in Côte d'Ivoire, which border the Bossématié Nature Reserve. The event included theater competitions, brainstorming sessions, and green talent contests with the students, raising awareness of conservation and restoration efforts with the communities and sparking genuine interest from the students as the future guardians of the Bossématié Reserve.

“The environment is the soul of our life; protecting it safeguards our existence. Let’s be ready to be close, not distant, for we are young, and we are responsible for its care.”

Excerpt from a poem by pupils at Apoisso Primary School, performed at the event.

PLEASE SUPPORT THIS CRITICAL WORK

In the wake of the U.S. Government’s pause on foreign aid and subsequent suspension of this program, the Rainforest Alliance is seeking immediate funding to maintain support and technical assistance for newly formed LMBs in Côte d'Ivoire. These multistakeholder groups have only recently formalized their status with authorities and are at risk of being disbanded since they do not yet have the systems, processes, and experience needed to stand up on their own. Their role in managing and restoring these critical cocoa-forest landscapes, while boosting livelihoods, is critical to cocoa farming communities. The Rainforest Alliance also seeks to immediately deliver 166 outstanding livelihoods start-up kits to communities in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, keeping our promise to these farmers and preventing a loss in yield due to disruptions in the production cycles, which were timed to maximize productivity.