

Mondelez initiative to enhance capacity of cocoa farmers

As production of cocoa has failed to keep pace with world demand, prices have steadily been rising for several years. Fortunately, manufacturers such as Mondelez International are taking steps to help cocoa farmers boost production.



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Last month Mondelēz International's global sustainability initiative, Cocoa Life, was highly rated for impactful progress in an independent assessment by leading US-based humanitarian agency CARE International. This program, launched in 2012, is aimed at ensuring a sustainable cocoa supply chain by partnering with cocoa farming communities in countries which are key suppliers of this critical commodity for the chocolate industry.

The “Joy Ambassador” programme

As part of its commitment to strengthening the cocoa industry, Mondelēz International recently sent a multi-skilled group of employees from various countries around the world to one of its Cocoa Life beneficiary communities in Ghana, for them to impart business and financial skills to local cocoa farmers. The “Joy Ambassador” programme, as it is known, is part of the company's Call For Well-being, which focuses on fueling growth and making a positive impact for future generations. This year, the program's theme was centered on enhancing the capacity of cocoa farmers' societies, which are critical stakeholders in the supply chain.

“Visiting small-scale cocoa farmers in Ghana was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to learn more about the communities benefiting from Cocoa Life and to collaborate with them in finding solutions to their day-to-day challenges,” says Ashley Mbanga. The Johannesburg-based Finance Analyst was one of 15 employees selected to serve as an International Class of 2016 Joy Ambassador.

This programme focuses on skills sharing in various disciplines and, in line with his field of expertise, Mbanga took community organisation partners through the process of preparing a budget and monitoring performance against targets.

“We spent time conducting workshops for the community leaders, farmers, and cocoa life partners; improving their knowledge and implementation of various business skills, including budgetary planning, process, and execution, excel spreadsheet skills, mobilisation, and lobbying, presentation skills, problem-solving as well as leadership skills,” says Mbanga.

Commitment to a sustainable cocoa supply chain

“The Cocoa Life programme is part of Mondelēz International’s commitment to a sustainable cocoa supply chain,” explains Yaa Peprah Agyeman Amekudzi, country lead, Cocoa Life, Mondelēz International. “It aims to empower more than 200,000 farmers and more than one million people in six key cocoa-growing regions by 2022. In Africa, the programme runs in Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire. In Asia, it is established in Indonesia and India; in South America, it is active in Brazil and the Dominican Republic,” says Amekudzi.

“We are proud that CARE International highlighted the programme’s benefits across its focus areas of farming, community, livelihoods, youth, and the environment.”

Empowering women

Cutting across these themes is Cocoa Life’s commitment to empowering women. The program gives better access to agricultural training, enhances money-management skills through supporting financial literacy training from Village Savings and Loans Associations, encourages greater participation and leadership in community decision-making, and promotes gender equity, both in cocoa farming and in cocoa-producing communities and households.

“I spent a day with a female farmer on her cocoa farm and I can testify to how exhausting cocoa production is,” says Mbanga. “Pods have to be dislodged from the trees using long sticks. You have to then use a club to split them open to reach the beans, which is a pretty risky process. The beans are covered in plantain leaves to ferment for six days with a turning over every two days. Then the beans have to be dried and turned regularly in the full sun for at least a week. It was absolutely backbreaking work in really harsh conditions.”

All the programme’s labour support also came from older women, Mbanga noted. Young Ghanaians are not interested in attempting a precarious living from a commodity that is vulnerable to disease and weather – Ghana suffered a punishing drought in 2015.

“Young people and men tend to move to towns and cities to find better-paying work such as becoming taxi drivers,” says Mbanga. “At the primary schools, we visited, children said they wanted to be doctors, nurses or police officers – not cocoa farmers because they think that is too much hard work.

“Many existing cocoa farmers are in their late 50s, which could make cocoa farming a dying business. At the moment, the women remaining in villages are each left keeping a 2ha cocoa plantation going.”

“Mondelēz International surveys have shown that women are 25 percent less likely than men to have received training in the past year and up to 40 percent less likely than men to have access to crucial farm inputs such as fertiliser,” says Amekudzi. “Through Cocoa Life, we can help these women sustain their families and their communities by means of this nationally and internationally important crop.”

Addressing child labour

Child labour is another cross-cutting theme of the Cocoa Life program. “It was impressive to see community workers addressing the issue broadly, dialoguing with teachers and children at schools as well as parents,” says Mbanga.

“As in South Africa, school facilities often aren’t conducive to a good education. Despite such infrastructure challenges, we found farmers understood how crucial education is for a better life for their children and that they shouldn’t be taken out of school to help on the farms.

“The farmers often can’t afford to pay labour but they have a traditional system of pooling their efforts. At harvest time, for example, all the farmers in an area group together to help each other harvest their crops, then they move on to the next farm so the favour is eventually returned.

“Sometimes even the households in a village would cook together, with everyone contributing what they could. We’ve forgotten in South Africa how to make prosperity a common goal – which is ideally how ubuntu should be. It was really eye-opening for me to learn as much from the Joy Ambassador experience as I gave back.”

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