

Building sustainability at the source

2024 ECOM Cocoa Sustainability Report

Welcome

to ECOM's annual Cocoa Sustainability Report

ECOM is one of the world's largest suppliers of cocoa beans and products to leading chocolate manufacturers and consumer food brands. In 2024, we sourced cocoa from 30 countries across the globe, and our products provide options for a wide range of finished goods, including chocolate, ice cream, fillings, desserts, baked goods, creams and drinks. Our origin-sourced supply chain refers to the 11 cocoa-producing countries where we have local teams operating that procure beans, manage traceability and run farmer engagement programmes. Our extensive reach across supply chains and experience within producing countries gives us in-depth knowledge that we work to share with our clients and the wider industry.

ECOM's Smarter Cocoa Charter sets out our commitment to lead responsible trade for a sustainable future. In our fourth annual Cocoa Sustainability Report, we share new targets and the progress we have made towards our key performance indicators (KPIs) detailed in the Charter.

This Report covers our global cocoa operation's footprint, including origin sourcing countries, secondary sourcing regions, and our factories and offices, for the calendar year 1 January to 31 December 2024. All the activities reported are those of ECOM's Cocoa division, unless otherwise stated, and 'ECOM Cocoa' and 'ECOM' are used interchangeably throughout. When using 'ECOM Group', we are referring to our global operations and policies covering our Cocoa division, as well as our other commodities and operations.

The programmes, initiatives and actions referred to in this Report were undertaken in collaboration with a range of partners, including donors, clients, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and issue-specific experts. Where possible, we have credited these partners in our disclosures.

We continue to follow the topic standards of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and the Sector Standard for Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fishing. The GRI content index, as well as further details about ECOM Group's sustainability performance, can be found in our [2024 ECOM Group Sustainability Report](#). External assurance has not been sought for this Report. Adjustments are due to the evolution in our thinking around sustainability as we achieve the indicators we set out for ourselves. These changes reflect new conditions and priorities within our sourcing origins and those of our stakeholders.

All financial figures are reported in US dollars (US\$) unless otherwise stated.

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1 Introduction

*growing a smarter
future for cocoa*



1.1

A note from our Cocoa CEOs

Over the past year, the cocoa market faced unprecedented supply deficits and increasing regulatory pressures. Cocoa prices tripled within three months, reaching their highest levels in decades and triggering significant market volatility. Managing risk is a core responsibility for us as a Group and has become increasingly complex in this turbulent environment.

Volatility in the cocoa market affects the entire value chain – from producers and cooperatives to exporters and consumer-facing brands. As climate change, geopolitical tensions and policy uncertainty persist, companies like ours have a responsibility to support producers and their communities through these challenges. Our work in the field gives us the insights needed to design targeted, effective and meaningful interventions.

The price surge has strained liquidity for many in the market. However, our long-standing relationships with banking partners allowed us to secure additional credit lines, enabling continued and effective operations. ECOM's firm commitment to sustainability, which extends beyond regulatory compliance, reinforces our long-term investment in the sector and strengthens our appeal to financial institutions.

Additionally, following the 12-month delay, the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) is now set to take effect at the end of 2025. Throughout 2024, we have been actively preparing for its implementation, focusing on supporting our suppliers and preventing the unfair exclusion of producers. While the regulation presents challenges for both ECOM and our partners, we recognise its potential to drive progress in sustainability, enhance traceability and foster a more level playing field.

As the industry continues to evolve and the demand for sustainable practices grows, we see a clear opportunity to foster value-driven growth while advancing fairness and equity for all actors across the supply chain. The Smarter Cocoa Charter remains our guiding framework to drive change, reinforcing our long-term commitment to a more equitable and sustainable cocoa industry. This Report outlines our progress and the work ahead, and we remain confident that, through determination and collaboration, we can achieve lasting impact.

Guus de Gruiter & Nicolas de Wasseige
ECOM Cocoa CEOs



1.2

About ECOM's Cocoa division

Where we operate

ECOM is one of the world's largest cocoa traders and processors, sourcing high-quality beans and products from more than 30 countries around the world. We sell the beans directly to our clients or process them into cocoa mass, butter, cake and powder in our six factories across three continents. As part of the ECOM Group, our Cocoa division draws on vast experience in agricultural goods.

1,900+
Cocoa employees

840+
staff work directly in cocoa
sustainability at origin

750+
agronomists and field staff

31
sourcing countries



¹ All origins we source from in our partner-sourced supply chain.

² All origins we source from in our origin-sourced supply chain. This refers to all volume purchased through a locally ECOM-managed operation (covering 11 countries).

³ A portion (385) of our field staff is contracted through a third party to effectively manage the operation, so therefore not counted in overall direct employee numbers but instrumental to the implementation of our programme in Ghana.

⁴ Not sourcing staff. The in-country sourcing is conducted via third-party exporters and does not fall under the scope of origin-sourced operations.

1.3

The ECOM Cocoa value chain

Globally, as much as 95% of beans are traded on international commodity markets, with over one-third processed in Europe.⁵ The global value chain is long and complex, with products seen on the shelves today often transferring between many entities before reaching the end consumer. ECOM is active across the cocoa value chain, working with many stakeholders around the world, buying, processing and trading high-quality cocoa beans and products.

In producer countries, cocoa is grown mainly by smallholder producers, then generally sold to local aggregators who sell on to exporters. Local aggregators (e.g. cooperatives) and exporters play a crucial role in ensuring producers have market access, as cocoa has a small internal market. These exporters then sell to global traders who often carry out primary processing before selling to manufacturers, and the manufactures (often consumer-facing brands) sell to retailers, who ultimately reach the end consumer.

Depending on the context of the trade, ECOM operates as a local aggregator, exporter, primary processor and global trader within the cocoa supply chain.

In our origin-sourced supply chains, we act as local aggregators and exporters, serving as the critical link between smallholder producers and global markets. On the ground, our teams work closely with producers to develop and implement agricultural practices aimed at improving farm management, increasing yields and building resilience against the growing impacts of climate change. Beyond agriculture, we engage with producers' families and communities to address key social issues, including gender equality and child labour.

In addition to our origin activities, we also process cocoa into butter, liquor and powder in six sites around the world. We are continually working to improve the efficiency and reduce the environmental footprint of our processing facilities, which supply high-quality cocoa beans and products to leading chocolate manufacturers and food companies in over 75 countries.

ECOM also operates as a global trader, buying and selling cocoa beans and products from and to third parties that do not pass through our origin operations and may or may not enter our processing operations. As a global trader, we actively encourage our suppliers to strengthen their supply chain due diligence through regular reporting and greater transparency.

You can read more about ECOM's value chain in our [2024 Group Sustainability Report](#) (page 8).

Where we engage

We engage in partnerships across our value chain, including suppliers, clients, civil society, and certification and accreditation bodies. We aim to create a positive impact through a range of programmes designed to tackle challenges facing our industry, business and stakeholders. We regularly fund and co-fund these projects, as well as receive funding provided by clients and partners.

In 2024, our partners included:

- African Cocoa Funds
- Basic Needs
- Beyond Chocolate
- Center for International Forestry Research and World Agroforestry (CIFOR-ICRAF)
- Child Learning and Education Facility (CLEF)
- Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria (CRIN)
- Corus International Lutheran World Relief (LWR)
- Enveritas
- eProd
- Equal Origins
- European Cocoa Association (ECA)
- Farmerline
- Farm Radio International
- Federation of Cocoa Commerce (FCC)
- German Development Agency (GIZ)
- German Investment Corporation (DEG)
- Harvest Field
- International Cocoa Initiative (ICI)
- KIT Royal Tropical Institute
- Living Income Community of Practice (LICOPI)
- Nature-based Insights (Nbi)
- Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO)
- Proforest
- PUR Projet
- 60 Decibels
- Solidaridad
- The Sustainable Food Lab (SFL)
- The Sustainable Trade Initiative (IDH)
- Swisscontact
- Swiss Platform for Sustainable Cocoa (SWISSCO)
- Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO)
- Technoserve
- Tetra Tech
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- United States Agency for International Development (USAID)
- United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)
- Verité
- Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)
- World Cocoa Foundation (WCF)
- World Resources Institute (WRI)

Certifications and verified programmes

We run globally recognised certifications and verified programmes to adopt and apply best practices.

We currently hold the following certifications:

- Fair for Life
- Fairtrade International
- Fairtrade USA
- Organic for EU, National Organic Program and Bio Suisse (CH)
- Rainforest Alliance
- Third-party assessments (e.g. EcoVadis and Sedex)

We also implement the following programmes:

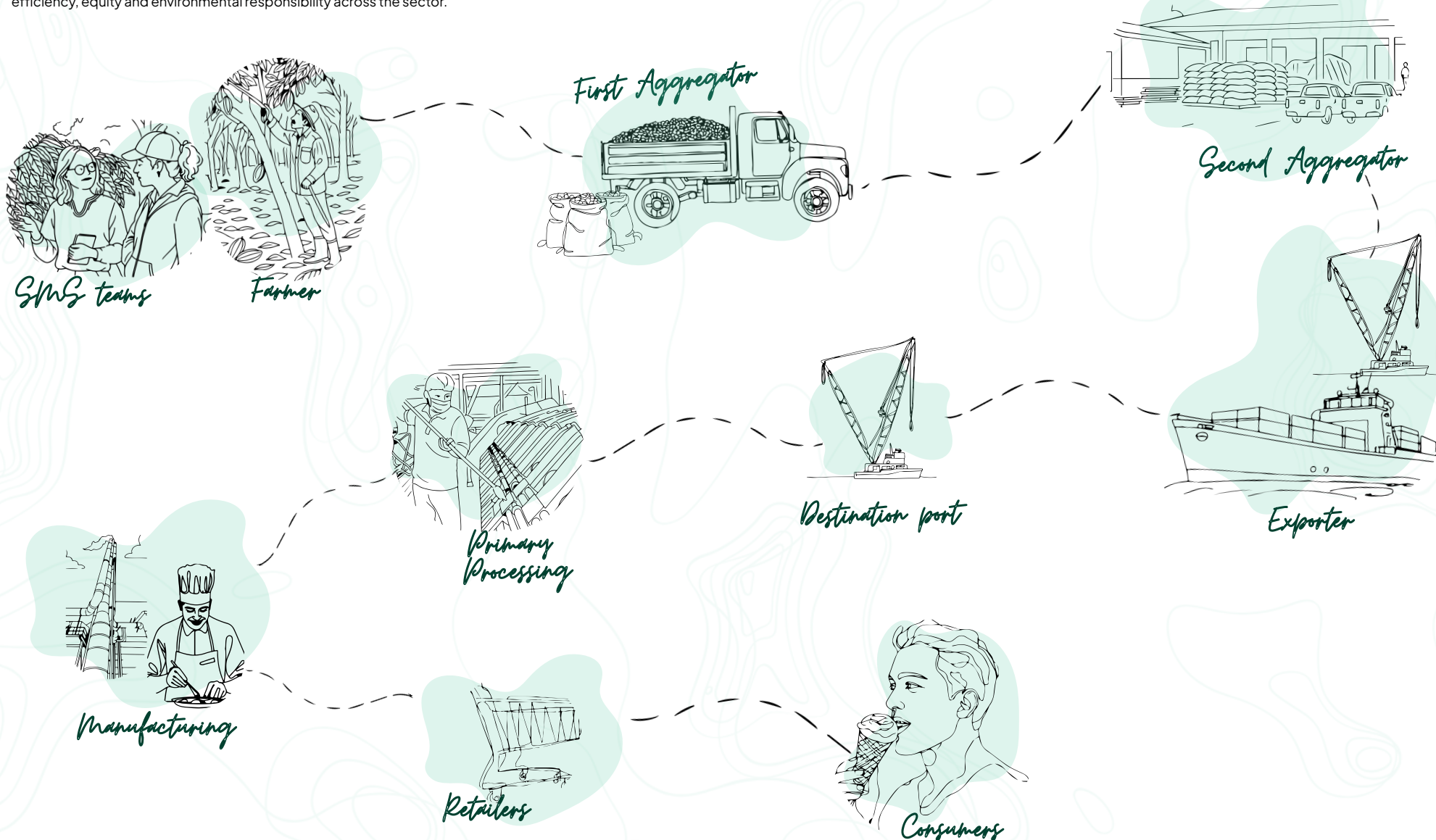
- Cocoa for Good (Hershey's)
- Cocoa Life (Mondelēz)
- Cacao Trace (Puratos)
- Fazer Cocoa Vision
- Ferrero Farming Values Cocoa Programme
- Lindt Cocoa Farming Programme
- Mars Cocoa for Generations
- Nestlé Cocoa Plan
- Nestlé Income Accelerator
- Smarter Cocoa LATAM



⁵ International Cocoa Organization, 2022.

1.4 The ECOM Cocoa value chain

The cocoa value chain represents the series of activities and stakeholders involved in transforming raw cocoa beans into finished chocolate and cocoa-based products. This value chain spans from smallholder farmers who cultivate cocoa and our SMS teams who provide support, through the exporter, primary processing, chocolate making, to the final consumers. Each stage adds value, and understanding the cocoa value chain helps us to identify opportunities for efficiency, equity and environmental responsibility across the sector.



2 Sustainability at ECOM Cocoa

“Sustainability is at the core of our business, driving our commitment to positively impact producers, their communities and the environment, and secure our supply chains into the future. Guided by our Smarter Cocoa Charter, we ensure that our actions and goals are aligned with our dedication to making a meaningful, lasting difference.”

Pamela Schreier
Global Head of Cocoa Sustainability

2.1

What sustainability means to us

ECOM's long and successful history has been built upon collaboration – with producers and their communities, partners, clients and many others. Building lasting, mutually beneficial relationships has enabled us to establish a bond with our stakeholders who know they can trust us to manage our business responsibly.

Sustainability is crucial to this responsible approach to management, which is reflected through the fact that more than 79% of ECOM's cocoa teams are based at origin, working closely with producers. As an origin-empowered company, our global policies and strategies cover a wide footprint while respecting the nuances of each location where we source cocoa. This includes the 11 origins where we have direct operations and others where we have local partners. This close working relationship enables us to understand what support producers need to farm sustainably.

Cocoa farming practices vary significantly from one region to another due to differences in climate, soil conditions, farm sizes, cocoa varieties, and the availability of technology and inputs, as well as the respective enabling environments that impact access to market, among other factors. Understanding these regional differences is crucial for several reasons, including ensuring adoption of sustainable practices, improving quality and optimising efficiency throughout the supply chain. This understanding also aids us in developing interventions that address the specific needs of cocoa producers. For example, in West Africa, cocoa is often grown on small farms in the variable system of agroforestry, whereby forests are selectively thinned and cocoa, along with other fruit or timber trees, is planted beneath the remaining canopy. In contrast, on larger farms in Latin America, cocoa is often planted in near-full sun or with a few agroforestry trees – such as plantain and timber – lining the outside of plots to maximise the productivity of certain varieties.

The social context of each cocoa-growing region also significantly influences the supply chain. Factors such as labour practices, including the prevalence of child labour, and community access to education and healthcare differ across cocoa-producing countries. By understanding these dynamics, we can make informed sourcing decisions and design programmes that improve the livelihoods of producers and workers, fostering more equitable and ethical supply chains. For instance, it is well known and documented in numerous studies that child labour is a critical issue in smallholder supply chains in West Africa, prompting the need for social interventions aimed at managing individual cases through monitoring and remediation, as well as looking to prevent child labour by addressing its root causes.

The enabling environment also differs across regions, in terms of infrastructure development and direct government intervention in the cocoa market, among other influencing forces. Countries with better infrastructure, such as roads, transportation networks and financial systems, can more efficiently move cocoa beans to global markets. In contrast, regions with less infrastructure may face delays, higher costs and increased risks of supply chain disruptions. Producers may have more access to services where governments are more involved in the sector but are less connected to global trends in prices. Additionally, instability in some regions may lead to higher costs around security and increased complications in delivering services to farmers.

Our Sustainable Management Services (SMS) teams are therefore essential in adapting sustainable practices to the specific contexts in which we operate, ensuring that the sustainability goals of both our own strategy and those of our clients are met through customised approaches for each origin. Their on-the-ground presence allows them to monitor local conditions, assess farming practices and engage with communities to foster long-term relationships. This direct engagement also helps inform strategic decisions related to sourcing and supply chain investments. This year, to highlight the importance of this local knowledge, we have included a variety of interviews with our field staff throughout this Report. It is important for our origin teams to explain the successes and challenges they face in the fields, and the realities of working with producers on different sustainability topics, in order to foster a better understanding of the complex environments in which we operate.

Pamela Schreier
Global Head of Cocoa Sustainability



2.2

Materiality update

In anticipation of the upcoming Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), we began conducting a Double Materiality Assessment (DMA) which aligns with the European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS).

Our ECOM Group DMA is based on double materiality principles:

- Financial materiality – how environmental and social factors affect our ability to do business
- Impact materiality – the impact of our business on the environment, society and people, including the impact on human rights

The DMA has a strong emphasis on stakeholder engagement and ensuring that the entire value chain is considered. The value chain mapping was conducted for cocoa, coffee, cotton, soy, sesame and cashew to ensure we fully capture our impacts across the value chains.

Our DMA identified the below topics, in no particular order, as the most material for ECOM:

- Adequate wages
- Climate change adaptation
- Climate change mitigation
- Corporate culture
- Corruption and bribery (prevention and detection and incidents)
- Child labour
- Diversity
- Energy
- Forced labour
- Gender equality
- Land use management including deforestation
- Living income
- Management of relationships with suppliers
- Measures against violence and harassment
- Pollution of water
- Training and skills development
- Water discharges

For more information, see our [2024 Group Sustainability Report](#) (page 12). The topics identified largely overlap with the 2023 materiality assessment.



What this means for ECOM Cocoa

Our Smarter Cocoa Charter commitments and KPIs, including the eight new KPIs presented in this Report, have been informed by the topics identified by our stakeholders as being the most material to our cocoa business with a farmer and supply chain focus.

Specifically, this includes:

- Climate change adaptation
- Climate change mitigation
- Child labour
- Forced labour
- Gender equality
- Land use management including deforestation
- Living income
- Management of relationships with suppliers

We continue to assess the impact and relevance of these material topics, and intend to review these in line with the results of the CSRD-aligned DMA. The key efforts of our sustainability teams are captured through the Smarter Cocoa Charter and will be incorporated into ECOM's Sustainability Statement in order to comply with the CSRD.

However, we will continue to provide separate updates to the Smarter Cocoa Charter as a means of building out the context of our sustainability strategy, as well as outlining the challenges that we face.

2.3

Future-fit Cocoa KPIs: Updating our Smarter Cocoa Charter

The Smarter Cocoa Charter was developed to unify our sustainability strategy across our diverse operations. Launched in 2021, we set 17 time-bound targets covering themes within our Group sustainability pillars: Sustainable Livelihoods, Nature & Climate and Traceability & Responsibility.

As of the end 2023, we successfully closed nine KPIs (outlined in our 2023 Cocoa Sustainability Report). In 2024, after three years of active implementation, we have learned a lot about what it takes to reach our goals and the complexities that come with it. We recognise that meaningful impact requires flexibility, taking into consideration the complexities of diverse supply chains, as well as interventions specific to local contexts.

We are dedicated to continuously ensuring that our Smarter Cocoa Charter remains relevant and aligned with the latest research, learnings and priorities across our cocoa origins. As cocoa is grown along the equator in a variety of geographical areas, each with unique conditions, farming practices, community access, customs and climate conditions, it can demand unique solutions.

This year, we took the time to update and refresh the Charter and our commitments to keep ourselves aligned with evolving farmer and industry needs. In July 2024, ECOM's global and regional cocoa sustainability teams convened in London for a strategic meeting. This provided a valuable opportunity to discuss the future of the Smarter Cocoa Charter, explore challenges and identify opportunities to enhance our impact.

Ariana Carter, our Smarter Cocoa Lead, gives more detail below:

It was very exciting to see so many of ECOM's original KPIs being successfully completed, so what comes next?

The completion of our original KPIs is fantastic and demonstrates the success of an aligned commodity strategy across the business. It was only possible thanks to the support of our SMS teams but didn't come without its challenges. We have learned a lot along the way, as you'll discover from reading this as well as last year's report. What we have achieved so far has paved the way for further, more ambitious, sustainability goals for ECOM Cocoa as well as the wider Group. Ultimately, we aim to maintain this momentum and continuously have a positive impact on producers, their communities and the environment.



What was the thinking behind ECOM's sustainability strategy meetings?

The idea was to come together as a team, review learnings from the last three years and update the global cocoa sustainability strategy, Smarter Cocoa, including the specific KPIs it sets out. It was an opportunity to reflect on our progress, align on the way forward and strengthen the strategy for the future. In the process, we hoped to foster greater local ownership, so that the strategy is not perceived as a top-down initiative but as a shared, collaborative effort.

What sort of insights did the meeting offer?

Having input from global and regional cocoa sustainability managers enabled us to better align our on-the-ground capabilities, identify realistic and proven interventions, incorporate local priorities, and engage on wider industry learnings. For example, one discussion point was that relying solely on overarching global KPIs may not be the most effective approach, given the contextual differences and complexity of supply chains across cocoa origins. A one-size-fits-all strategy risks being counterproductive to our sustainability goals; however, it is also difficult to create a cohesive global narrative around origin-specific goals. We believe we found a balance that will allow us to respect differences at the origin level while also meeting our shared objectives around communicating our global impact.

To be more specific, for one of our new KPIs – Integrate child and youth wellbeing activities for 100,000 farmer households as a preventative approach to child labour by the end of 2028 – we have a 'menu' with a variety of interventions that can be adapted to community, cooperative and household levels, depending on priorities and capabilities. Instead of a child labour monitoring or remediation target which is less relevant in origins where prevalence is low, this KPI enables various teams to determine how to best engage with the common global goal of working to empower youth across cocoa supply chains.

What was the rationale for updating the Charter continuously?

Through our work in the field and our efforts to understand drivers of change, our Smarter Cocoa Charter like our approach to sustainability is ever evolving. We place utmost importance on carefully developing and aligning our goals to the needs of the producers we work with and the environment we operate in. This ensures that we set out clear and relevant actions to help us make a real difference.

We want to ensure that the Charter remains effective in addressing the evolving ESG challenges that we face in the cocoa industry and within the sustainability sector in general. As regulations, stakeholder expectations, industry best practices and scientific insights continue to evolve, we must adapt dynamically to these shifts, addressing emerging risks and capitalising on related opportunities. Navigating the intersection of legislation and sustainability can be challenging practically, especially when regulatory compliance establishes a higher baseline that we aim to exceed through our own sustainability ambitions. While we are proud of the progress we've made, we recognise that achieving a truly sustainable cocoa sector at scale is a long road ahead.



2.4

Smarter Cocoa updates

Our Smarter Cocoa Charter was introduced in our 2021 Cocoa Sustainability Report. It is a unified strategy for all our cocoa sustainability efforts, with clear timebound targets to direct and track our progress. The Charter contributes to the Group's commitments by driving forward our mission to grow a smarter future for cocoa, increasing both our impact and our accountability.

Key

New

In progress

Completed⁶

IMPROVE

farmer and worker
livelihoods

KPIs

- Assess the risks of child and forced labour in 100% of ECOM origin-sourced and partner-sourced supply chains by the end of 2023
- Train 100% of farming communities in ECOM origin-sourced supply chains in child protection and the prioritisation of education by the end of 2025
- Integrate child and youth wellbeing activities for 100,000 farmer households as a preventative approach to child labour by the end of 2028
- Establish the living income baseline and roadmap to address the identified gap for all origin-sourced supply chains by the end of 2023
- Begin implementing locally adapted roadmaps to address living income gaps in all direct origin-sourced supply chains by the end of 2027
- Train 80% of producers in our ECOM origin-sourced supply chains in improving agricultural practices annually, with an ambition of reaching 200k individual producers by the end of 2025
- Provide access to farmer-centred services to 100% of producers in our ECOM origin-sourced supply chains by the end of 2025
- Have 100% of ECOM origin-sourced supply chains covered by the Gender Equity Index GEI and improvement plans by the end of 2025
- Achieve a 15% increase in the Gender Equity Index score across origin-sourced operations by the end of 2027

PROTECT

and regenerate
nature

- Carry out deforestation and biodiversity risk assessments in 100% of ECOM origin-sourced supply chains by 2023 to prioritise activities that mitigate deforestation and work towards zero deforestation in the supply chain by the end of 2023
- Establish agroforestry models and monitoring systems in 100% of ECOM origin-sourced supply chains by the end of 2023
- Train 100% of producers in climate-smart agriculture in ECOM origin-sourced supply chains identified as being at high risk of negative impacts from climate change by the end of 2025
- Establish a carbon reduction roadmap for cocoa by the end of 2022
- Carry out country-level climate change risk assessments in all cocoa origins by the end of 2023
- Quantify GHG emissions for Scope 1 (direct operations), 2 (purchased energy) and 3 (indirect impacts) in our operations and supply chains by the end of 2022
- Achieve Net-Zero emissions in our entire value chain by 2050
- Establish a baseline of land management emissions and removals for all direct origin-sourced supply chains by the end of 2027
- Implement preventative strategies for 100,000 individuals to contribute to halting or the reversal of deforestation by the end of 2028
- Assess biodiversity risk for 100% of the origin-sourced supply chains by the end of 2027

MANAGE

change through
transparency and traceability

- Achieve 100% traceability to farmer organisation/community for all beans purchased through ECOM origin-sourced supply chains by the end of 2023
- Ensure 100% of beans purchased through ECOM origin-sourced supply chains are sustainable by the end of 2025
- Achieve 100% traceability to farmer for all beans by the end of 2026
- Roll out human rights and environmental due diligence process and assess risks for all tier one suppliers by the end of 2025.
- Identify and prevent deforestation, in respect of land that has been degraded or deforested since 2020, with the implementation of a strong monitoring, risk assessment, due diligence and remediation process in all our supply chains by 2025
- Complete a partnership and purchasing practices map across the cocoa supply chain, identifying risks and opportunities to improve transparency and responsible sourcing practices, to enable us to provide evidence-based insights to our policies by the end of 2028
- Benchmark ECOM's forced labour mitigation procedures with the Verité Farm Labour Due Diligence Toolkit and develop a roadmap to work towards leadership in each section by 2027

⁶ For more information on the completed KPIs, please refer to our 2023 Cocoa Sustainability Report.

2024 highlights



Launched

Green Meter, our land management carbon emissions calculator

1.7 million+

shade trees distributed to cocoa producers in the origin-sourced supply chain

Established

and began implementing our Deforestation Verification Protocol

500,000+

hectares of land assessed for deforestation risk

Deployed

Integrity powered by BanQu, our supply chain transparency platform

49%

of producers in our origin-sourced supply chain were provided with technical assistance to reduce emissions while becoming more climate change resilient

80%

of households in our origin-sourced supply chain in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria and Cameroon covered by Child Labour Remediation and Monitoring Systems

45%

of origin-sourced supply chain now covered by the Gender Equity Index

Improve farmer and worker livelihoods
Manage change through transparency
Protect and regenerate nature

2.5

Case studies overview

[Read more](#)

Child Learning and Education Facility (CLEF)

Working to improve access to quality education in cocoa-producing regions in Côte d'Ivoire

[Read more](#)

Gender equity

Promoting gender equality and social inclusion in Ghana

[Read more](#)

Closing the living income gap

Creating a roadmap to tackle the living income gap in Ecuador

[Read more](#)

Carbon accounting through collaboration

Advancing carbon accounting through knowledge and collaboration

[Read more](#)

Biodiversity

Techniques to improve production and resilience on Mexican farms

[Read more](#)

Advancing EUDR compliance in Sierra Leone through partnerships

Evaluating risks to biodiversity in Ecuador

[Read more](#)

Improving traceability

Using technology to capture better data in our supply chain first mile

3 Improving farmer and worker livelihoods

“Rather than address the symptoms, we aim to take action to address the root causes of issues that affect people. By doing so, we hope to take a proactive approach on people and communities, empowering them to be more resilient and to prosper.”

Sylvie Myambaye
Regional Manager for Smarter Cocoa

3.1

Improving farmer and worker livelihoods: Overview

Our focus

At ECOM Cocoa, our long-term vision is to empower the producers we work with and source from, along with their families and communities, by making cocoa part of a profitable business. We aim to create opportunities with partners and clients that enable producers to reinvest in their farms and build their entrepreneurial skills.

Globally, an estimated 5 to 6 million producers produce cocoa, with approximately 90% classified as smallholders managing less than five hectares of land.⁷ Like many small-scale producers across agricultural sectors, cocoa smallholders often face persistent poverty, with the World Bank estimating that around 500 million smallholder producers worldwide live on less than \$2 per day.⁸ Poverty remains a fundamental barrier to the wellbeing and resilience of cocoa producers and their communities, even amid significant price increases. Limited economic opportunities, compounded by inadequate access to essential services such as education and healthcare, market volatility and rising inflation contribute to systemic human rights challenges, including child labour and gender inequality.⁹ Intensifying these issues are the growing impacts of climate change, with unpredictable weather along with persistent threats from pests and diseases, all of which undermine cocoa yields and reinforce a cycle of poverty that obstructs sustainable development and long-term prosperity.

We recognise that there is no single solution to these interconnected challenges, but that local and specific factors must be considered when designing effective interventions. A holistic approach means that our Smarter Cocoa Charter needs to reflect these factors, as well as ongoing developments in the cocoa industry. We aim to foster stronger, more equitable business practices and create lasting, positive change in the cocoa industry as a whole.

Read more about our work to improve farmer and worker livelihoods in our **2024 ECOM Group Sustainability Report** (page 14).

Our commitments

- Empowering producers, workers and their communities to optimise their profitability and ultimately reduce poverty
- Eliminating breaches of human rights through proper risk identification and remediation

⁷ Bermúdez, S., Voora, V., Larrea, C., & Luna, E. (2022, November 22). Global Market Report: Cocoa prices and sustainability. International Institute for Sustainable Development.

⁸ World Bank. (2016, February 25). A year in the lives of smallholder producers.

⁹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) & Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI). (2022). Measuring rural poverty with a multidimensional approach: The Rural Multidimensional Poverty Index. FAO Statistical Development Series, No. 19.

Our 2024 KPIs

KPIs	Material Topic	Status
Train 100% of farmer communities in ECOM origin-sourced supply chains in child protection and the prioritisation of education by the end of 2025	Child labour	In progress
NEW: Integrate child and youth wellbeing activities for 100,000 farmer households as a preventative approach to child labour by the end of 2028	Child labour	In progress
NEW: Begin implementing locally adapted roadmaps to address living income gaps in all direct origin-sourced supply chains by the end of 2027	Living income	In progress
Provide access to farmer-centred services to 100% of producers in our ECOM origin-sourced supply chains by the end of 2025	Management of relationships with suppliers	In progress
Have 100% of ECOM origin-sourced supply chains covered by the Gender Equity Index (GEI) and improvement plans by the end of 2025	Gender equality	In progress
NEW: Achieve a 15% increase in the Gender Equity Index score across origin-sourced operations by the end of 2027	Gender equality	In progress

See our full list of KPIs [here](#)

Progress against our KPIs

3.2

Child and forced labour

Farming community training

- **KPI:** Train 100% of farmer communities in ECOM origin-sourced supply chains in child protection and the prioritisation of education by the end of 2025
- **Status:** In progress

ECOM Group has zero tolerance for modern slavery, including child and forced labour, in the organisation and supply chains. Our Smarter Cocoa Charter sets goals and targets to address the challenges faced by the cocoa industry and improve conditions for children and adults who are at potential risk.

Addressing agricultural labour rights holistically has long-term practical advantages for the cocoa supply chain, providing an opportunity to drive positive impacts for suppliers and cocoa communities, while delivering responsible and high-quality cocoa for markets. It is essential to ensure supply chains are sustainable and ethical, protecting workers' rights and mitigating risks to human rights.

According to the International Cocoa Initiative (ICI), around 1.56 million children aged 5 to 17 are involved in cocoa-related child labour in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana.¹⁰ This amounts to 45% of children who are living in cocoa-growing households being involved in child labour. It is a complex issue with a variety of factors that can be attributed to it. In West Africa, the majority of cocoa is produced by smallholder producers who often contend with the challenges of rural poverty, including limited land, food insecurity, poor access to quality education, inadequate healthcare and insufficient access to clean drinking water. These conditions significantly heighten the risk of child labour within farming households.

Community awareness-raising is recognised as a core component of effective CLMRS,¹¹ as defined by ICI. Educational efforts at the community level aim to foster a shared understanding of what constitutes child labour, clearly distinguishing between acceptable forms of children's work and activities that are harmful or prohibited. These initiatives help sensitise communities to hazardous tasks, the risks they pose to children's safety, health and development, and their long-term consequences for families and communities.

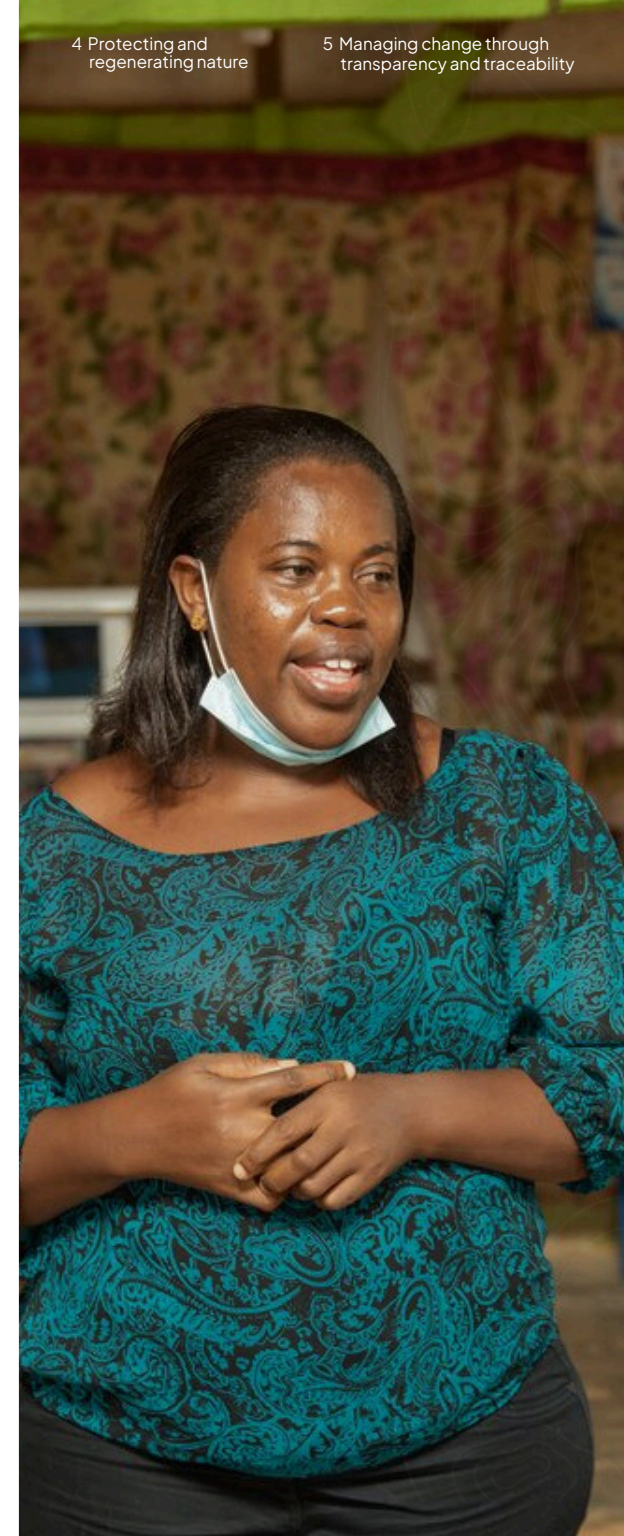
In 2024, our child protection awareness-raising efforts reached 71% of households across all our origin-sourced supply chains. This work is especially critical in regions with a high prevalence of child labour, such as West Africa, but remains equally important in lower-risk areas such as Latin America. By embedding child labour awareness into daily community life, we move beyond one-off interventions towards an ongoing culture of vigilance and collective responsibility.

In high-risk contexts, awareness efforts help challenge long-standing norms and economic pressures that can make child labour seem inevitable or acceptable. Engaging community elders, religious leaders and farmer groups is key, as they are trusted voices who can influence attitudes and promote shared responsibility.

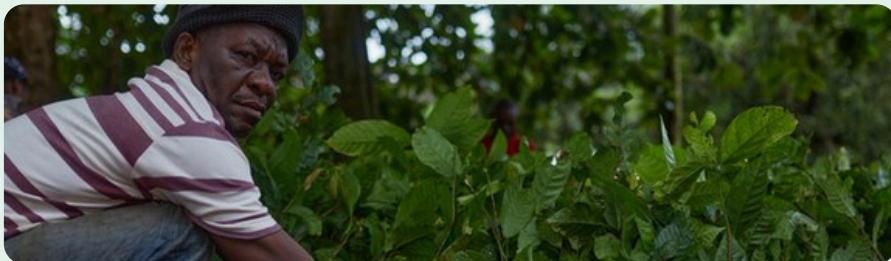
In Latin America, where child labour is less widespread, awareness campaigns serve to reinforce positive norms and prevent regression, while also identifying hidden or emerging risks. Creating spaces for dialogue, where communities can reflect on the impact of child labour and share practical solutions, fosters mutual learning and solidarity. By promoting peer learning between regions, we can also amplify successful local approaches and adapt them to different cultural contexts. For example, in Ecuador, 100% of communities were trained in 2024. The training methods for communities depend on the area and the level of risk and include one training session a year. Here, training sessions are held in person at various collection centres, often scheduled to coincide with days where producers receive inputs and tools as part of the supply chain programmes. These sessions are led by our field technicians, who have previously received training on these topics, including human rights, child labour and adult education methods.

¹⁰ International Cocoa Initiative. (n.d.). Child labour in cocoa. International Cocoa Initiative.

¹¹ Read more on CLMRS on [page 20](#).



Spotlight



3.3 Educational radio programme for local communities in Nigeria

In 2024, our team in Nigeria launched an educational radio initiative in Cross River State, broadcasting weekly on Cross River Broadcasting Corporation (CRBC) to reach over 13,000 cocoa producers in our supply chain across seven local government areas. The programme promotes Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and raises awareness of child labour in cocoa farming communities.

Combining awareness-building with practical support, the initiative includes personalised farmer coaching, community sensitisation, household visits and radio-based training on sustainable farming. To boost engagement, a quiz segment was introduced, rewarding producers with farming inputs and providing school supplies to children.

The programme is gaining momentum, with growing listenership and plans to introduce a live Q&A segment for real-time farmer support. The quiz has also helped identify potential CLMRS Ambassadors – local advocates for child labour prevention and sustainable practices in their communities and schools.

However, producers face challenges that include limited awareness of GAP and CLMRS. Our field team tries to approach this through on-farm demo-plots, illustrating that adopting GAP correctly works to their benefit. Across Nigeria, we remain committed to continuing our community engagement and farmer education and collaborating with local partners to support long-term success.



3.4 Child Learning and Education Facility (CLEF)

In Côte d'Ivoire, the world's largest cocoa producer, learning poverty remains a critical concern. According to the most recent international evaluation, only 40.4% of students reached a sufficient level or higher in reading by the end of primary school, while 59.6% of students were not able to read a simple paragraph. In math, only 17.2% of students reached a sufficient level or higher. A staggering 82.8% were not able to perform simple operations. Child labour remains widespread in cocoa-growing regions, where many children perform hazardous tasks that keep them out of school, such as land clearing and handling harmful chemicals. Weak school infrastructure and poor teaching quality further discourage education, contributing to low attendance, heightening the risk of child labour. Addressing these challenges is a key priority for the Ivorian government.

To support this effort, CLEF, a coalition of government, industry including ECOM and philanthropic partners, is working to improve access to quality education in cocoa-producing regions of Côte d'Ivoire. It aims to develop school infrastructure, train teachers in effective pedagogical practices and engage parents in their children's learning.

By uniting a wide range of partners, in its first full year of operation in 2024, CLEF managed to train 7,054 teachers in effective teaching practices, along with 120 national trainers and 300 pedagogical advisers and inspectors. An accelerated learning programme reintegrated 4,277 out-of-school children, 44% of them girls, into formal education, many of whom had never previously attended school. CLEF also provided 143 motorcycles to pedagogical advisers to help them support teachers in remote areas.

Looking ahead, CLEF plans to build and equip 35 new schools across its six target regions in 2025. By 2027, it aims to improve learning for 4 million children, support 1.6 million parents in engaging with their children's education and integrate 19,800 out-of-school children into the formal school system.

ECOM is proud to be a founding member of CLEF, which has secured nearly 78.6 million Swiss francs in funding from partners.

Progress against our KPIs continued

3.5

Child and youth wellbeing

NEW KPI: Integrate child and youth wellbeing activities for 100,000 farmer households as a preventative approach to child labour by the end of 2028

Status: In progress

Addressing labour rights risks in agriculture for both children and adults is crucial for ensuring sustainable and ethical supply chains. We collaborate with independent experts to understand the root causes of child labour in rural communities, and we recognise that it can arise from various factors, including a lack of career opportunities for young people, cultural differences, poverty and seasonal labour patterns. The knowledge gained from these collaborations is shared with clients to encourage investment in prevention strategies in the regions where we operate.

To tackle child labour, the industry has adopted CLMRS, first developed by the International Labour Organization in the 1990s. These child-centred systems are designed to identify children involved in or at risk of child labour, and to provide tailored support that improves their wellbeing and tracks their progress over time. The core aim of CLMRS is to prevent and reduce child labour, mitigate its harmful effects and break the cycle from being passed to future generations. Interventions focus not only on the child but also on strengthening the surrounding environment and addressing the underlying causes that drive child labour. Read more on CLMRS in cocoa from ICI [here](#).

In 2024, ECOM's CLMRS enabled the monitoring of 195,360 children across various regions, with 32,054 cases of child labour identified. This included 18,608 cases in Côte d'Ivoire, 11,301 cases in Ghana, 1,811 cases in Nigeria and 334 cases in Cameroon, of which on average 45% of cases were girls.

Additionally, in 2024, we partnered with NGO Verité to ensure our CLMRS complied with best practices and relevant standards. Verité conducted a thorough review over five months, including field research, interviews, materials and documents analysis, and visits to cocoa-growing communities in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. The review confirmed the significant investments we have made in awareness raising and capacity building, as well as the comprehensive nature of our data systems and household risk profiling, case tracking and reporting. It also made some important recommendations:

- Greater standardisation across client sustainability programmes and country-level CLMRS strategies to guide objectives and priorities
- Increased resourcing for monitoring and remediation activities, and improved coordination of interventions with relevant stakeholders
- Working towards tracking the impact of CLMRS performance on child labour levels and how remediation addresses the root causes of child labour risk.

Acting on these recommendations and our own experience, in addition to implementing CLMRS, we are expanding our efforts to strategically prevent the risk of child and forced labour within ECOM's cocoa supply chains.

Unlike CLMRS, which focus on identifying and addressing individual cases, preventative strategies aim to tackle the root causes of child labour before it occurs. Both approaches are essential, but they differ in emphasis – remediation responds to existing cases, while prevention works to stop them from arising in the first place.

Preventative efforts must also include activities that support child and youth wellbeing. These should be tailored to the needs of individuals and communities and are vital in addressing the underlying causes of child labour. By creating safe, supportive environments, such initiatives help children lead healthy, productive lives and, while sometimes indirect, play a crucial role in enabling them to thrive and reach their full potential.

Depending on the scope of the intervention, a range of strategies may be used. We equip our teams with a menu of options, allowing them to choose the most suitable approaches based on local needs. These initiatives may include investing directly in our supply chain or collaborating at the sector level. For example, we support farmer cooperatives by improving access to sustainable, innovative technologies such as labour-saving tools, create employment opportunities for youth and contribute to sector-wide efforts, such as those led by ICI, to strengthen referral systems and promote an environment that upholds local child labour laws.

A deeper look at one example (mentioned in Charlotte Merheb's interview [here](#)), reveals that a lack of available labour is a key driver of child labour. One strategy to address this is the creation of labour groups, accessible to producers through their cooperatives. To develop these groups, we begin by consulting with producers, youth and community leaders to identify farming needs and select appropriate communities for implementation. During these consultations, vulnerable producers are also informed about the return on investment of labour services and the availability of subsidies. This initiative aims not only to improve agricultural skills but also to build life skills, helping to expand career opportunities for youth.

Additionally, we offer technical support, access to labour saving tools and labour subsidies for cocoa farming households in child labour-risk areas, focusing on tasks such as pruning, weeding and organic fertilisation. This approach aims to reduce child labour risks while fostering community development and sustainable farming practices.

An alternative, household-focused approach involves expanding opportunities for education and essential services such as girls' health programmes and access to sanitary products. We have previously assisted with the provision of birth registration services to ensure children have official documentation to verify their age and protect them from premature entry into the workforce.

As with all our KPIs, collaboration with clients and partners is essential to delivering these strategies effectively. While monitoring a diverse set of interventions presents some complexity, our priority is to ensure that each initiative addresses the specific needs of the communities we work with.

Spotlight



3.6

Putting preventative strategies into action

One example of ECOM's active preventative strategies is a programme with the Netherlands enterprise agency (RVO) in Côte d'Ivoire. The collaboration with RVO's Fund Against Child Labour, commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and carried out by RVO, was first reported on in our [2023 ECOM Cocoa Sustainability Report](#) (page 20).

In 2024, the project entered Phase B, which will involve:

- Increased access to more sustainable and innovative technologies, such as labour-saving tools
- Creating job opportunities for young people while enhancing their career and life skills
- Establishing and/or supporting school management committees to develop school management systems
- Developing women's entrepreneurship skills and access to microfinance
- Implementing or improving companies' due diligence process
- Developing a plan of action to address child labour after the funding subsidy ends

Spotlight

Preventative strategies against child labour

Tell us about yourself, your role and how long you've been at ECOM.

I'm an agricultural economist with 12 years of experience, including 10 years in child protection in cocoa farming. I joined the ECOM team about three years ago as a Community Development Manager. I'm particularly interested in this topic because I'm passionate about working with communities and the tangible ways I can see improvements in the lives of others.

Did you come from a cocoa background? Why did you choose to work in human rights in the cocoa sector?

My mother was involved in the cocoa community, and our struggles fuelled a desire for change. This experience helps me understand the community's needs and context, ensuring we implement activities that are relevant both to us and to the people we aim to serve.

What are contributing factors to human rights violations in the cocoa sector, and what can be done about them?

Child and human rights violations in the cocoa sector are a combination of several independent but interrelated factors: poverty, limited access to education, lack of labour and cultural factors that blur the line between teaching your children to work and learn, and abuse. Tackling these issues is important, as the future of cocoa farming depends on it, and I am glad that ECOM is making such strong contributions through sustainability programmes and collective actions, especially with CLEF and landscape projects.

Producers are aware that having their children work on their farms is not the best option for them, but they often lack access to education and other opportunities, leaving cocoa cultivation as the only available choice.

You mentioned that poverty is a risk factor for child labour. Could you please elaborate?

Poverty creates a cycle where producers can't afford labour and rely on family, as managing a cocoa farm is too much work for one person. This often means involving children. Child labour should be distinguished from socialising activities, which are light tasks under adult supervision that don't affect schooling. The International Cocoa Initiative's 2023 report shows that 26% of children in its monitoring system were involved in child labour, highlighting the extent of the issue.

One of our Smarter Cocoa KPIs focuses on preventative strategies for child and forced labour. How effective do you think preventative strategies are in tackling human rights violations?

Prevention remains the best way to reduce child labour and forced labour. Our experiences with CLMRS show that if we act only after identifying a risk, we risk operating in a constant state of emergency. By developing a prevention strategy, we can learn from both internal and external experiences to create an effective strategy, such as the Smarter Cocoa objectives.

Our intervention strategy focuses on four main areas that address the root causes of human rights violations and contribute to sustainable prevention at the community level. These include:

- *Raising awareness in households and communities to promote understanding and behavioural changes*
- *Facilitating access to skilled agricultural labour by promoting qualified community service groups, which improves services for producers and youth employability*
- *Improving household incomes through Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), self-managed groups that members subscribe to and that offer loans to members for income-generating activities*
- *Implementing educational activities to keep children in school*

How do you ensure that field officers complete all required tasks and responsibilities?

Field officers (FOs) are part of the team that goes to cocoa farms and communities, carry out our agricultural and social training, and have direct contact with producers in our supply chain. We ensure our FOs conduct important activities through initial and refresher training sessions. During the training, we equip them with tools for awareness-raising so they can go into the communities and conduct sensitisation activities, as well as supervising the first few sessions they lead and offer support when necessary. We also focus on coaching the FOs who might need additional help.

Do the FOs have the same passion as you?

Yes, I'd say so. During the recruitment process, we specifically look for candidates with experience or at least familiarity with the topic. Then, when activities are being carried out, the supervision helps us identify those who show the most ease and passion, and who stand out in their work. One of our strengths here in Côte d'Ivoire is that we have officers dedicated to the agricultural aspects and others focused on the social aspects at the field level. This allows us to give special attention to the communities and the children.

A challenge we have is that often when the agricultural calendar arrives and farming activities increase, the FOs have to decide whether to continue discussing the main theme they are focused on or shift to giving advice on agricultural matters, especially when it's not their area of specialisation.

3.7

Charlotte Merheb

Community Development
Manager in Côte d'Ivoire

Preventative strategies against child labour continued

We recently shared an internal menu of interventions for preventative strategies on different intervention levels (community, households, etc). Which, in your experience, are the most adaptable?

In my opinion, all Smarter Cocoa's proposed interventions are relevant and effective because they tackle the root causes of child labour, while keeping us informed about the progress made by NGOs and other specialists working on similar issues. This helps us adapt as needed to ensure our effectiveness and maintain the quality of our implementation.

Normally in the framework for action, there are indicators related to the implementation and creation of labour groups. The activities within the cocoa sector are seasonal, which means demand for labour is seasonal. Often, even if producers have the means, they don't have qualified labour because the demand is too high and there aren't enough labourers in the community. This is something we are trying to change.

If I had to choose just one intervention, I would pick VSLAs. They help us improve household incomes and empower women in rural areas. In the African context, women traditionally bear the responsibility of ensuring their children's education and meeting their basic needs. By improving their income, we can significantly enhance their children's wellbeing.

Is there pushback from communities when it comes to such an intervention or are they typically well received?

VSLAs are generally very well received. In some communities where we're planning to implement one, we've noticed that women take the initiative and start their own groups. They even expand them within the community because it's an activity where the results are clear, such as enabling them to pay for their children's schooling.

In 2024 in Côte d'Ivoire, we and our partners supported 26,486 VSLA members, of whom 77% are women.

What are the main priorities and needs of the producers you work with?

Nowadays, with the combined efforts of all cocoa farming stakeholders, we've seen an improvement in producers' understanding of child labour over the years. Human rights have been discussed for a long time, but many producer households still face unstable incomes, which perpetuates the cycle of poverty. Challenges such as Swollen Shoot, a virus that attacks cocoa plants, or low land fertility continue to negatively impact their situation and contribute to child labour. Additionally, the lack of employment opportunities for young people and insufficient educational infrastructure are still areas that need significant attention. These structural issues cannot be solved by the private sector alone.



Progress against our KPIs continued

3.8

Living income

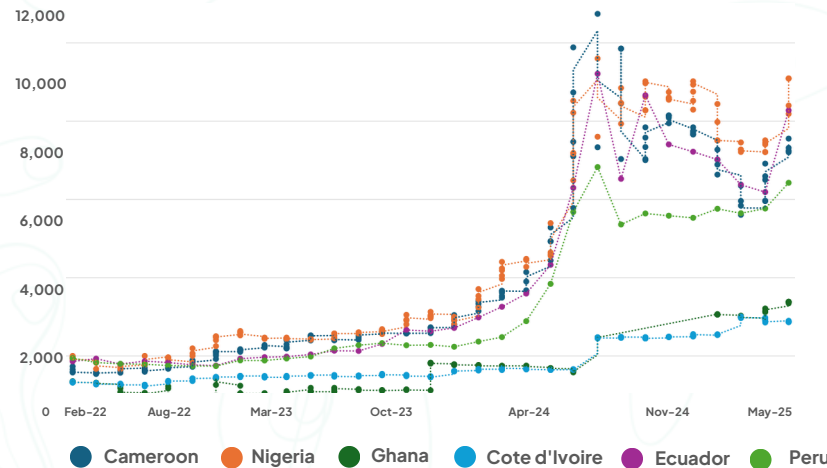
- **NEW KPI:** Begin implementing locally adapted roadmaps to address living income gaps in all direct origin-sourced supply chains by the end of 2027
- **Status:** In progress

A living income is a fundamental human right, and we have a collective responsibility to ensure that our staff, and the producers and workers we work with in the supply chain, achieve a living income. Achieving a living income is a complex, multidimensional process influenced by a wide range of factors, many of which are beyond a single company's direct control, such as land size, market prices, weather variability and national infrastructure. A robust living income strategy should prioritise assessing changes and continuous improvement in key drivers, such as farm productivity, income diversification, resilience and cost of living, while recognising that not every farmer may reach a full living income within a set timeline.

Poverty in rural communities is systemic, limiting not only access to basic services but also producers' ability to invest in their land and livelihoods. This lack of investment contributes to low productivity, soil degradation and continued reliance on exploitative practices. These challenges are further intensified by gender inequalities. Women, despite playing crucial roles in cocoa production, often face restricted access to land, credit, training and participation in decision making. As a result, gender disparities are both a cause and consequence of rural poverty, perpetuating cycles of marginalisation and undermining the sustainability of the supply chain.

Regulatory approaches to the cocoa market differ widely between countries, as do the socio-economic profiles of cocoa producers themselves. In theory, rising global prices should lead to higher incomes for producers, but this is not always the reality. In some countries, governments tightly control cocoa pricing and marketing. Due to deficits in previous years, many forward contracts were rolled over and hedged at lower market prices, limiting the extent to which current farmgate prices can rise. In contrast, in liberalised markets without centralised regulation, farmgate prices more closely reflect global market trends, but producers in these systems often lack access to government-supported services such as extension support, infrastructure or price stabilisation mechanisms. The graph below highlights the trends we have seen in farmgate prices across four different countries between 2022 and 2024.

Farmgate Price (USD/MT) over Time



We previously set a target to determine the living income gap across all origin-sourced supply chains to better understand and address living income. In addition to quantitative data, we collected qualitative insights inspired by the Thriving Index, asking producers about their perceptions of livelihood security, financial resilience and food security. This provided a more holistic understanding of household needs. Read more in the [2023 ECOM Cocoa Sustainability Report](#) (pages 23 to 27).

On average across the origins surveyed in 2022, 73% of farming households were below the living income benchmark. Despite the sharp increase in farmgate prices in some origins since the completion of the baseline study, these findings still highlight the challenges faced by cocoa producers, particularly in West Africa, in achieving a living income. These results serve as a call to action for stakeholders in the cocoa supply chain. There is a clear need to prioritise interventions and initiatives that can increase farmer incomes, promote financial resilience and ensure food security. Tackling these vital issues is essential for the long-term viability and sustainability of the cocoa sector.

While our ambition is to enable producers to earn a living income, we have decided not to set a rigid outcome-based target on the number of producers achieving it. Instead, we are choosing to measure and demonstrate *continuous improvement* across the farming population. From our point of view, focusing on an absolute numeric target risks oversimplifying this complex issue and may inadvertently lead to perverse incentives such as prioritising producers with better starting conditions over the most vulnerable households, thereby deepening inequality rather than fostering inclusive progress. We want to continue working towards achieving living incomes for producers and workers in all the origins we source from and to take urgent action when and where it is most needed. Our main focus is on making measurable progress: improving income for all producers. Ultimately, success should be defined by meaningful, transparent progress in closing income gaps, while acknowledging and addressing the structural barriers producers face. While this approach may not suit every company, we believe it is the most responsible way to support producers and advance collective change across the sector.

In reality, different farming families require different pathways to move closer to a living income, depending on their assets, capacities, and broader environmental and economic contexts. Systemic change therefore requires the collective effort of governments, supply chain actors and communities as opposed to single companies.

Tailoring our interventions

We are committing to creating localised roadmaps with our origin teams to collaborate with partners and clients, developing tools and strategies aimed at closing the gap collectively.

These roadmaps will include:

- A living income methodology, including measurement and implementation cycles
- A summary of activities to date and alignment with other ECOM programmes
- A clear business case for investing in living income initiatives
- A farmer segmentation strategy to identify specific interventions
- A curated menu of actionable solutions
- A framework for tracking direct and indirect impacts

We aim to design personalised interventions that reflect the real needs of different groups of producers. Segmentation helps us do this by dividing the farmer base into distinct groups based on shared characteristics, challenges or needs. We then can work with our origin teams to develop tailored solutions that address the specific barriers holding each segment of producers back from reaching a living income. This targeted approach is far more effective than applying one-size-fits-all solutions, as it allows us to respond to the unique circumstances each group faces.

For instance, producers with access to additional land and labour might benefit from income diversification strategies, while those already nearing or above the living income line may gain more from financial literacy training or access to VSLAs to help build long-term resilience.

Spotlight



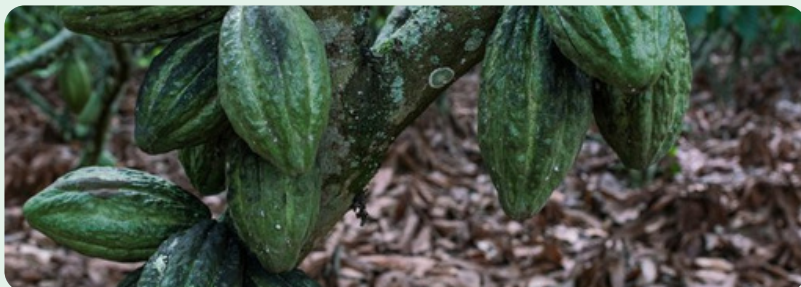
3.9

Creating a roadmap to tackle the living income gap in Ecuador

Latin America is the fastest-growing cocoa-producing region globally, and as the largest producer in the region, Ecuador is a key origin for ECOM and our clients. In December 2022, our SMS team in the country was one of the first to complete the Cocoa Economic Analysis survey. The survey showed that 56% of households were below the living income benchmark, and the median farming household had a 24% gap to the living income. However, a 25% increase in yield would close the gap for those households.

Our SMS team came together with German development agency GIZ and specialists at Sustainable Food Lab to identify the opportunities and local priorities that can be leveraged to increase household income and to create a roadmap for closing the living income gap. To this end, a public-private partnership was established between ECOM and GIZ under the GIZ global programme Sustainability and Value Added in Agricultural Supply Chains (AgriChains) to jointly implement the project in Ecuador. Our approach was to use data to segment the producer population according to living income per family member and productivity levels on their farms. Additionally, it was important to consider the significant increase in farmgate prices and how this would affect the composition of each segment, as well as the potential long-term implications if prices do not stabilise.

In the end, we were able to define six groups of producers and their characteristics and identify appropriate interventions:



Group 1 Small cocoa farms, with no additional space for expansion. The focus is on implementing high-value projects within the existing crop without risking productivity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce high-value crops (vanilla, avocados) to complement cocoa farming • Diversify income through technology learning and professionalisation • Provide community-based services
Group 2 Small cocoa farms with limited space for expansion and minimal knowledge or opportunities to learn new crop management techniques.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement basic technological packages for cocoa productivity • Monitor adoption of recommended practices • Provide access to low environmental impact inputs and ensure timely application • Facilitate credit access for input application • Provide community-based services
Group 3 Farms that have improved their productivity and need to consolidate this knowledge to reach maximum production capacity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on effective methods for transferring advanced crop management knowledge using high-value technological packages • Monitor the implementation of recommended practices • Provide access to environmentally friendly inputs tailored to their needs and ensure their timely application • Encourage investment in additional crops within the same farm, where feasible, or in producing goods for internal consumption to reduce living expenses
Group 4 Farms with high production potential but lacking technical knowledge to achieve maximum productivity. With proper support, these farms can transition to Group 5.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide intermediate-level technical packages and training to increase cocoa productivity • Facilitate access to credit and environmentally friendly inputs • Assist in maximising production to transition to higher income levels
Group 5 Farms that have reached high potential.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on resource management within the farm • Provide advisory services to maintain the plantation • Emphasise cost efficiency and effective administration (financial literacy) • Offer access to low-cost inputs through bulk buying
Group 6 Farms with sufficient land to generate substantial income but are underperforming due to poor technical management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on resource management within the farm • Provide advisory services to maintain the plantation (climate-smart agriculture) • Emphasise cost efficiency and effective administration • Offer access to low-cost inputs through bulk buying

Having defined these groups and activities, the next steps in our roadmap, to begin in 2025, are:

Savings project development:

- Conduct impact surveys to understand current investment levels, financial system usage and household resource management

Knowledge transfer:

- Develop methods aimed at older adults and improve good practice dissemination

Technological packages:

- Define low-, medium- and high-impact packages based on farmer affordability
- Develop efficient knowledge-sharing mechanisms (e.g. messages, emails, links)

Generational transition:

- Support intergenerational knowledge transfer for long-term sustainability

Progress against our KPIs continued

3.10

Providing support services for producers

- **KPI:** Provide access to farmer-centred services to 100% of producers in our ECOM origin-sourced supply chains by the end of 2025
- **Status:** In progress

ECOM continues to provide farmer-centred services to the producers in our origin-sourced supply chains. We offer a range of services to support producers, including one-on-one coaching, access to inputs, delivery of seedlings, equipment rentals and information on global crop prices. We also provide other forms of assistance to improve farm operations, all through our network of partner projects and SMS teams.

In 2024, 95% of producers in our origin-sourced supply chains had access to these farmer-focused services, demonstrating our commitment to supporting producers in improving their livelihoods and succeeding in the agricultural industry.

Spotlight



3.11

Serving communities in Mexico

Cocoa in Mexico is more than a crop; it is part of the country's history, culture and tradition. Through strategic alliances with different clients and organisations, our SMS team in Mexico has managed to promote the adoption of sustainable practices, improve the resilience of crops and foster the development of producing communities in Chiapas and Tabasco over several years.

One effort was focused on youth in which we carried out a series of educational activities in the southern state of Chiapas. We are working to promote the prosperity of cocoa-producing communities in the Mexican state of Chiapas, and aim to empower youth, care for children and preserve forest ecosystems. As an annual activity, we visited five schools in the region in 2024, sharing with children in 5th and 6th grades the history of cocoa and its importance for Mexico. Through interactive dynamics, games and prizes, we connected children to the magic of cocoa, understand its value, and perhaps become the future guardians of this ancient crop.

Another initiative is taking place in 37 communities in Soconusco. It began with the delivery of 20,800 cocoa plants and 6,000 trees to 48 producers in the region. This was followed by 25 training sessions involving 92 farmers, who learned about good agricultural practices, graft management, pruning and quality control. Alongside this, we ran education activities in schools around cocoa cultivation, chocolate workshops and tree planting. The success of the initiative has been demonstrable, with a sample of farmers in Chiapas reporting increases in yields from 50kg in 2016 to more than 1,000kg in 2024 based on having a higher density of improved variety cocoa trees and improved farm management practices. Overall, we have delivered more than 500,000 plants and supported over 1,500 farmers in 13 years. The project has been helping researchers from the Autonomous University of Chiapas, who have used it to study the production of cocoa seedlings in nurseries.

Each initiative has addressed specific challenges, from improving disease resistance with the distribution of new cocoa varieties and the establishment of agroforestry systems, to training in good agricultural practices, certifications and access to key inputs. Thousands of non-cocoa forest trees have been distributed, and demonstration plots have been created to promote agroforestry and other regenerative agriculture as a farm maintenance strategy. These practices will help to improve productivity, restore cocoa as a viable option in southern Mexico as well as support our Net-Zero goals through reductions and removals at farm level.

These actions reflect our commitment not only to sustainable cocoa production, but also to the community, the environment and education. We continue to move forward with the conviction that change begins at the root, and with each step we get closer to a fairer and more prosperous future for all.

Spotlight

Certification and technical assistance

Can you tell us a bit about yourself, your role, where you are based and how long you have been with ECOM?

My name is José Andrés, I'm 32 years old, and I was born, raised and still live in Quevedo, Ecuador. I'm an agricultural engineer by profession and completed my Master's degree in agricultural engineering seven years ago. Agriculture has always been my passion, as both my parents come from rural villages, and I was always involved in farming. My dad shifted from short-cycle crops into cocoa around 15 years ago, and I always try to find time to help him because it's his livelihood.

I've been with ECOM for about six years. I started working in the procurement team within the commercial department and, in February 2022, I joined the SMS team. Initially, I worked with large farms and intermediaries, then became the coordinator for the north and central regions of the country, and last year I became the national head of certifications, overseeing all technicians and managing operations in the field across the entire country.

Did you study sustainability as part of your Master's degree, or is it something that came with the job?

My background in agricultural engineering has been key to shaping my career. I didn't study sustainability, but I learned a lot throughout my career. Before joining ECOM, I worked as a field technician, where I was involved in implementing sustainability practices and certification processes. It's easy to discuss numbers from behind a desk, but applying them in the field is a different challenge. I've learned how to manage time and tackle real-world challenges through my time in the field. With SMS, I have gained a comprehensive understanding of the processes involved and am now focused on regulatory aspects and executing strategies, but my field knowledge has given me a significant advantage in putting it all into practice.

You have experience both in sitting behind a computer and doing things in the field. What are the biggest differences between the two?

In the field, things aren't always documented on paper, and often it's about reacting to situations in real-time. I always tell my team, "We know what the problem is, but what's the solution?" The focus should be on solving the issue, and the key difference is having the ability to think on your feet and solve problems quickly.

On the other hand, working behind a desk or in an office is more about organising and ensuring tasks are executed by others. However, when we're not closely involved in the field, we might lack empathy or a full understanding of how things really play out. For instance, challenges such as weather conditions, time constraints or even crime can impact things in ways we don't always expect, affecting both time and resources.

Can you tell me about other challenges you have faced in the last year?

One of the biggest challenges both the producers and I face is growing insecurity and crime, which has made access to rural areas increasingly difficult. Producers are very cautious, often avoiding calls from unknown numbers, and technicians struggle to build trust. Many new producers are even more reluctant to share information due to fear of being robbed or taken advantage of.

This started about two years ago and, unfortunately, crime has become a major obstacle for our work because cocoa prices are so high. Right now, the farmgate price is four times more than this time two years ago. You might think producers always want the highest price, but when faced with the constant threat of theft or kidnapping, the price becomes a problem. It's a real dilemma – producers are worried, especially since some have already experienced being kidnapped or having their cars stolen.

We try to offer personalised training, but due to security challenges, it's become harder to bring producers together in one place. Instead, we've adapted by connecting with them during their cocoa delivery visits.

In addition to security, climate change has had a severe impact on cocoa production, with unpredictable weather harming the crops. Cold winters have led to the loss of potential pods, and dry summers have hindered cocoa fruit development. Price volatility further complicates the situation; 2023 saw high prices, but 2024 was chaotic. Even though producers managed to sell at high prices, which is good for them, it's still an unstable situation.

We are actively preparing to address these challenges once again, refining our processes to ensure we are equipped to manage any ongoing issues that are likely to persist into 2025.

Do you work with the same producers year-on-year or is there lots of turnover?

We continue working with the same producers, but as our sales volumes increase, we need to onboard new producers each year to keep up with growth. Producers who have been with us for about eight years in certification programmes are familiar with our technicians, which helps ease the suspicion that I mentioned earlier. With these long-standing producers, there are no major issues, because they know and trust us.

However, as we grow, it becomes more challenging. Five years ago, you could call 10 producers, and most would answer, let you visit their farms and attend meetings. Now, you call 10 and only two answer. Building relationships with others takes more time and requires extra effort, such as sharing your phone number so they can recognise it when you call.

3.12

Andrés Leon
National Head of
Certifications, Ecuador

Certification and technical assistance continued

Is all the cocoa you buy certified, or do you buy conventional as well?

We buy both certified and conventional cocoa based on demand, but I encourage producers to prepare for the growing shift towards certified and traceable cocoa. Since I joined ECOM six years ago, demand for certified cocoa has steadily increased, and I remind producers to familiarise themselves with the certification process for a smooth transition. I enjoy the challenge of this process, working with technicians to find solutions and setting goals to convert 5–10% of conventional producers to certified producers annually.

And how are you doing this?

My main focus is getting the whole team, especially the technicians, on the same page with clear objectives. I want to inspire a passion for the job and motivate the top performers with incentives, while also helping those who may be struggling. I try to lead the way I would have wanted to be led. I believe in giving our technicians the freedom to make decisions, take risks and learn from them. We keep things aligned with regular follow-ups, audits and technical visits. I also make sure everyone has access to learning opportunities to stay updated and grow.

Since I joined the SMS team in 2022, our sustainability team has quadrupled, showing just how important sustainability has become at ECOM and in Ecuador. I also work hard to build trust within the team, creating a space where everyone feels comfortable talking about challenges.

One of our KPIs for Smarter Cocoa is to train producers in climate-smart agriculture. Is this something you work with? Have you seen improvements in cocoa plantations if these practices are being applied?

In the certification process, we incorporate climate-smart agriculture (CSA) practices such as water conservation, agroforestry and pest management. Beyond certification, we focus on preserving forests, transforming farm structures and enhancing biodiversity through agroforestry programmes. Our goal is to implement and ensure sustainable agricultural practices.

We handle initiatives such as agroforestry, training and regulatory changes, focusing on soil protection, optimal shade coverage and other sustainability goals. However, our focus isn't just on meeting regulatory requirements – it's about driving real change and allowing producers to see the tangible benefits for themselves. Producers who have been with us for years already recognise these benefits and we use their success stories to inspire new producers. It's rewarding to hear about their improvements, such as receiving messages about their lemon trees bearing fruit.

What are preventative strategies for deforestation and what do they look like on the ground?

We collaborate closely with producers by understanding their farms, gathering geodata and mapping their properties to create farm polygons. These polygons help us track deforestation, as producers who have deforested land since 2014 cannot be part of our certified supply chain based on Rainforest Alliance norms. For those who deforested before that time, we focus on educating them about the importance of preserving trees, highlighting benefits such as biodiversity and ecosystem balance.

Raising awareness is a key part of our approach, especially regarding the EUDR (European Union Deforestation Regulation). In some areas, we've found that potentially deforested land was used for palm plantations where one crop was replaced with another, rather than conversion from forest to agricultural land. Our strategy includes incentivising change, engaging in open conversations and encouraging producers to plant more native trees. We conduct surveys and, once data is collected, send technicians to validate and verify the information on site through ECOM's Deforestation Verification Protocol (more on the DVP can be found on [page 53](#)).

Is certified cocoa what you consider sustainable cocoa?

Certified cocoa may be seen as sustainable, but true sustainability goes beyond ticking boxes. It involves fair labour practices, regenerative farming and financial sustainability to keep young people interested in cocoa farming. Fair pricing is essential for long-term profitability, and environmental and social balance. Farms can yield well today, but without proper soil management, that productivity won't last, making long-term thinking crucial.

Have you had any difficulties getting this definition across?

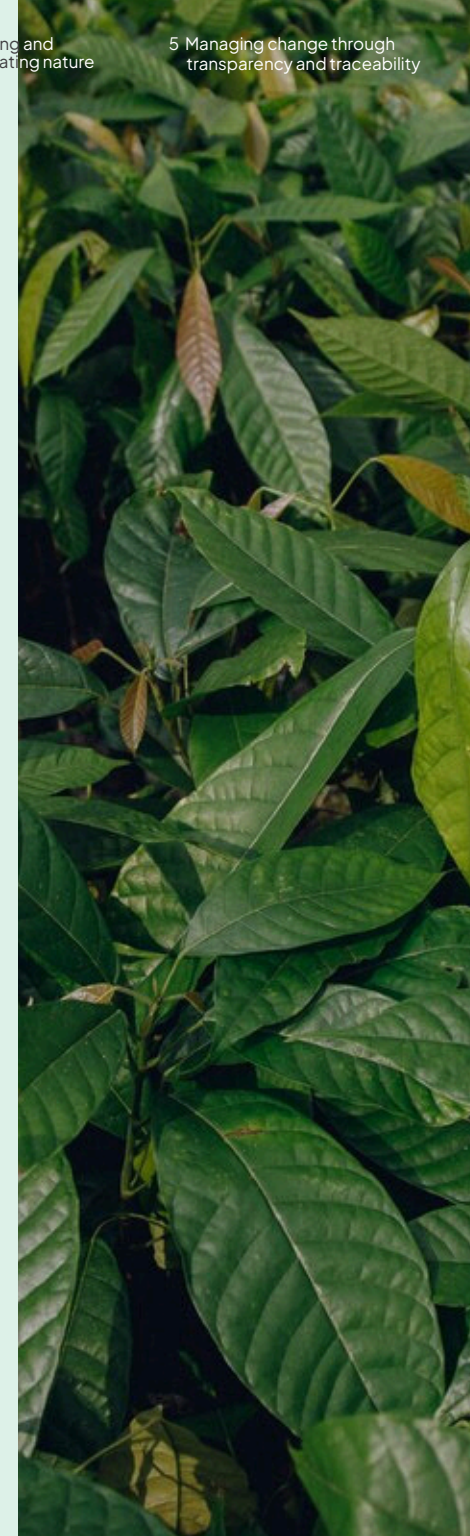
One challenge I've faced is that some producers may not take a young person like me seriously. When I was younger, around 23, I would hear things like, "You look like my son!" It's understandable, but I always say that the best way to overcome that prejudice is through results – showing success can influence others.

I don't claim to know more than the producers, as many of them have far more experience than I do. Each region in Ecuador is unique, and you can't apply the same practices everywhere. I'm learning something new every day, and that's what makes this work so rewarding.

Do you have any last thoughts you'd like to share?

What truly inspires me about the world of sustainability is the incredible opportunity it provides. At ECOM, we're fortunate to learn about new places and meet so many different people every day. Even if we only make a difference in one person's life, it's all worth it.

We're planting seeds now, and in time, they will grow and bring a harvest. I'm really grateful for the opportunity to have our voices heard and for the impact we're making, reaching more people each day.



Progress against our KPIs continued

3.13

Gender equality

KPI: Have 100% of ECOM origin-sourced supply chains covered by the Gender Equity Index (GEI) and improvement plans by the end of 2025

Status: In progress

Women play a crucial role in cocoa farming, yet their contributions are often overlooked. There are significant disparities between men and women in areas such as income, access to skills training and financial resources. Women frequently lack direct control over household income or access to land, limiting their opportunities for empowerment and growth.

The GEI is a tool that identifies opportunities for companies and their supply chain partners to enhance gender equitable service provision. Across our origin operations, the GEI has provided valuable insights and recommendations, laying the groundwork for tailored Gender Equity Development Plans and the development of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) strategies that are tailored to each origin's specific context.

GESI strategies are implemented by a dedicated team of staff who provide training and interventions to support women within ECOM and in cocoa-growing communities. Through different interventions that use a combination of practical support and education, we aim to make a positive impact on the lives of women, girls and their communities. By the end of 2024, 45% of our origin-sourced supply chains were covered by the GEI and 36% have implementation plans in place. Additionally, 18% of our direct supply chain are women.

Better Together workshops

The Better Together workshops are key to supporting each origin to assure our services and support of farmers is gender equitable. Through a growing understanding of how gender norms can lead to systemic bias, ECOM's origin staff gain the awareness, strategies and capacity to design and deliver farmer support that accommodates the barriers farming women face, with the intent to deliver services that includes responding to her farming concerns and priorities. Led by Equal Origins, the workshops utilise the GEI tool to both diagnose and track progress across our cocoa origins.

In Cameroon, over a 14-week period, 10 staff members were led through eight intensive sessions held every two weeks as part of the Better Together series, facilitated by Equal Origins. The training included 90-minute online group sessions, access to the GEI for self-assessment and analysis of initial diagnostic reports and four additional consultations to develop theories and change and action plans. The team engaged in discussions to conduct SWOT analyses and interpret the GEI results. Some key workshop activities included:

- Definition of key terms and introduction to the GEI
- Gender integration (analysis of results)
- Developing vision, goals and plans
- Aligning resources to achieve goals
- Tracking and communicating progress
- Gender responsive budgeting

Overall, the workshop led to significant progress, where participants gained a better understanding of gender equity concepts, enhancing their ability to deliver gender-equitable services. A Gender Equity Development Plan (GEDP) was created, outlining practical steps for integrating gender-responsive strategies. The strong progress in women's empowerment reflects their growing ability to tackle local barriers limiting gender equity, and the team has shown clear commitment to sustaining these improvements.



Spotlight

3.14

Addressing gender equality and social inclusion in Ghana

Ghana is the world's second-largest cocoa-producing country, and while women play a vital role in nearly every aspect of cocoa production in Ghana, it is still widely considered to be a man's crop, and women's contributions are frequently undervalued or ignored.

Our work to address gender equality and social inclusion in Ghana continued in 2024 with training sessions for managers and staff, followed by train-the-trainer sessions. As well as taking participants through the concepts of gender equality and our GESI strategy, a significant element of the training emphasised the role of trainers in challenging unconscious biases and promoting inclusive practices.

The programme was then rolled out, with a range of activities for different audiences. Discussion sessions around good social practices were held with, in total, 515 producers (296 men and 219 women). Sessions focused on issues such as gender and cocoa farming, and the participants' visions for a happier life and successful farming business.

We also celebrated the International Day of the Girl Child in the community of Tweapease, where 65 girls, 35 boys and 12 teachers from the local school took part in a parade to help raise awareness about the protection and empowerment of girls. As another part of the programme, ECOM Ghana marked World Menstrual Hygiene Day with educational workshops in schools organised in collaboration with health professionals. The sessions provided practical information and advice, and addressed the stigma attached to menstruation. The event also saw sanitary pads distributed to nearly 600 girls.

Gender-based violence remains a serious problem and our efforts included supporting 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, an international campaign to highlight the issue. ECOM supported this through a range of events, including workshops, advocacy and adorning our offices in orange, the campaign's colour.



Spotlight

Gender equality in Ghana

Can you tell us a bit about yourself, your role and what led you to do it?

My name is Debora, and I am a mother, wife and currently the gender specialist at ECOM Ghana. Before joining ECOM, I worked at the Ghanaian Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection. I have been working on gender and children's issues for the past 12 years, and my interest in this field began during university, when I participated in a programme that involved working with rural communities at the end of each trimester, which sparked my passion for gender and children's issues.

How do gender issues manifest within the cocoa industry in Ghana?

Women play a significant role in cocoa farming but are often excluded from the selling process, which is typically seen as a man's responsibility. Many women have shared that men usually handle the sale of cocoa while the women are preparing dinner, making it difficult for them to participate at such an inconvenient time. This effectively excludes them from the process. Additionally, women's caregiving responsibilities create challenges that reduce their productivity on the farm. One female farmer recently shared how her morning duties, such as caring for children or preparing meals, delay her ability to reach the farm early, which is crucial for avoiding the heat of the day.

Women are also burdened with unpaid household work, while men engage in paid work. Women are often referred to as the 'wives of producers' instead of being recognised as producers themselves, despite their significant contributions to the farming business.

Access to loans is another major challenge for women. They are often denied loans due to the belief that they cannot manage money and they are required to bring a man as a guarantor. In contrast, men in the cocoa industry generally have much easier access to loans. Land access is also an issue: when both male and female producers approach landowners, land is more likely to be given to men, due to societal beliefs that women are less capable in farming. This limits women's ability to farm effectively.

Could you please elaborate on how land rights work in Ghana?

In many communities, men are the primary landowners and women typically gain access only if they have a supportive husband who grants his wife access to a portion of land.

Is there any movement for change in that?

Yes, we have started advocacy efforts to help women gain access to land. We're engaging with key stakeholders such as the Land Commission, traditional leaders, women in agriculture, the Department of Gender and other relevant parties. This advocacy with key stakeholders began December 2024. It is a plan to hold such advocacy meetings occasionally to discuss how we can collaborate effectively to ensure women have better access to land in the country.

How is gender training perceived by communities?

Women recognise these challenges, but men often don't see them the same way. Many men are unwilling to acknowledge these issues, fearing it threatens their masculinity. They believe that giving women opportunities, such as access to loans, land, or supporting them in caregiving, undermines their role as the head of the family.

While both men and women recognise these issues, many men are reluctant to help. However, through training and engagement, some men are beginning to accept these changes. Some have even shared how supporting their wives has benefited their families, using their own experiences as examples of positive outcomes.

Do you go into the field often?

Yes, I often go into the field, but we also have some FOs who are trained in gender issues and carry out gender-related work on the ground. We started the training last year as part of our GESI (Gender Equity and Social Inclusion) strategy and, this year, we will continue training the remaining officers.

Do you see a generational divide on attitudes for change?

The older generation is generally less open to change, while the younger generation is more eager to embrace it. A key difference is that older men are often reluctant to empower their wives, though they may support their daughters' education and opportunities. In contrast, younger men, especially those married to women who were already empowered or educated, are more likely to support their wives' growth and independence.

How do you tackle resistance to changing traditional gender roles in cocoa farming households?

To address these issues, especially resistance, we use household dialogues. When all the men are together, they may resist, but meeting with them individually in their homes makes them more open to change. Some men act as change agents, sharing personal stories about how empowering women has positively impacted their families and households. We hold separate meetings for women to discuss their issues and sometimes organise household dialogues with different families.

What do household dialogues entail?

We meet with households in an informal setting to discuss women's empowerment and children's issues. It's a relaxed environment that allows for open discussions on important topics such as gender and children.

Have there been any other strategies that have proven effective in empowering women in the cocoa sector?

Yes, the establishment of the VSLAs (Village Savings and Loan Associations) has been incredibly empowering for women economically, teaching them how to save and manage finances. In one particular instance, an entire community came together to ask the VSLA for a loan. They were working on a community project to build a school but faced financial challenges. Thanks to the women-only VSLA, they were able to secure the loan needed to continue their project and support the development of their community.

How do you feel as a woman working in cocoa?

One of the main challenges is the caregiving responsibilities, especially when it comes to travelling to the field for work activities. Additionally, some of our female colleagues have experienced pregnancy-related challenges while travelling to remote communities, where poor road networks and limited access to healthcare create additional difficulties.

As a woman working in a sector that is predominantly male, particularly in the cocoa industry, it feels empowering to be able to break barriers and show that women can succeed in areas traditionally dominated by men.

Progress against our KPIs Continued

3.16

Gender Equity Index

- **NEW KPI:** Achieve a 15% increase in the Gender Equity Index score across origin-sourced operations by the end of 2027
- **Status:** In progress

As our original KPI to 'have 100% of ECOM origin-sourced supply chains covered by the GEI and improvement plans by the end of 2025' (see [page 28](#)) is set to expire at the end of 2025, we have introduced this new KPI to continue tracking and strengthening our gender-related maturity beyond that point.

This new KPI is designed to use the GEI score itself as a dynamic indicator of our ongoing progress. By regularly measuring and analysing changes in GEI scores, we aim to better understand how our supply chains are performing in relation to our broader gender strategy and where further improvements are needed.

To support this effort, we are currently working in partnership with Equal Origins to develop a structured process for using the GEI as a long-term monitoring and learning tool. Using tools such as the GEI is useful for monitoring gender equality progress by tracking changes, spotting gaps and adjusting interventions as needed. This will allow us to track progress over time, identify trends and respond with targeted actions to drive meaningful change.

Stay tuned – we look forward to sharing more on this evolving approach!



4 Protecting and regenerating nature



“At ECOM, we believe we have a responsibility to ensure that future generations inherit an environment capable of sustaining agriculture and securing access to food. This goes beyond supporting crop production – it means co-investing in solutions like agroforestry and on-farm monitoring that actively regenerate ecosystems, strengthen biodiversity and build long-term soil health. Sustainable agriculture isn’t a distant goal – it’s a future we’re actively building through concrete action today.”

Camila Olmedo Mendez
Regional Sustainability Manager LATAM

4.1

Protecting and regenerating nature: Overview

Our focus

Deforestation sits at the core of two planetary crises, biodiversity loss and climate change.¹² Climate change, exacerbated by deforestation, brings unpredictable and extreme weather events, rising temperatures and pests and disease to producers around the world.¹³ Biodiversity loss disrupts ecosystems, reduces resilience to environmental changes and diminishes the essential services nature provides, such as food, clean water, and climate regulation.

In the context of cocoa, extreme weather is significantly increasing financial risks for cocoa producers, particularly smallholders who are already operating on narrow profit margins, if any. These uncertainties contribute to income instability, limiting the ability of many to plan for the long term. As a result, there is often a need to prioritise immediate needs, such as household expenses or loan repayments, over investments in sustainable practices that would mitigate the potential impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss. This can make it more difficult to adopt approaches like agroforestry or soil restoration, which typically require time, resources, and technical support.

Protecting and regenerating nature within the cocoa sector is therefore not just an environmental imperative, it is a socio-economic necessity. As climate change continues to threaten both ecosystems and livelihoods, reducing carbon emissions across the cocoa value chain must go hand-in-hand with supporting producers to adopt climate-smart and resilient agricultural practices which not only enhance productivity but also strengthen biodiversity and carbon sequestration. To ensure meaningful impact, it is essential to monitor and evaluate these changes over time, using reliable data to guide adaptive strategies. Regenerating nature is thus central to securing a sustainable and equitable future for cocoa-producing communities and the planet. Read more about our work to protect and regenerate nature in our [2024 ECOM Group Sustainability Report](#).

Our commitments

- Optimising our natural resource management practices
- Improving producer resilience to the effects of climate change
- Becoming a Net-Zero company in our Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions by 2050

¹² Pörtner et al., (2023) Overcoming the coupled climate and biodiversity crises and their societal impacts. *Science* 380, eabl4881.

¹³ Pendrill et al., (2022) Disentangling the numbers behind agriculture-driven tropical deforestation. *Science* 377, eabm9267.

Our 2024 KPIs

KPIs	Material Topic	Status
Train 100% of farmers in climate-smart agriculture in ECOM origin-sourced supply chains identified as being at high risk of negative impacts from climate change by the end of 2025	Climate change mitigation/ Climate change adaption	In progress
Achieve Net-Zero emissions in our entire value chain by 2050	Climate change mitigation	In progress
NEW: Establish baseline of land management emissions and removals for all direct origin-sourced supply chains by the end of 2027	Land use management including deforestation	In progress
NEW: Implement preventative strategies for 100,000 individuals to contribute to halting or the reversal of deforestation by the end of 2028	Land use management including deforestation/ Climate change mitigation	In progress
NEW: Assess biodiversity risk for 100% of the origin-sourced supply chains by the end of 2027	Land use management including deforestation	In progress

See our full list of KPIs [here](#)

Progress against our KPIs continued

4.2

Climate change mitigation and adaption

- **KPI:** Train 100% of producers in climate-smart agriculture in ECOM origin-sourced supply chains identified as being at high risk of negative impacts from climate change by the end of 2025
- **Status:** In progress

In 2023, as per a previous Smarter Cocoa KPI, we completed climate change risk assessments across five regions to cover all our origin-sourced origins: West Africa, East Africa, South America, Central America and Southeast Asia. The assessment identified high levels of climate-related risk in all regions, underscoring the urgent need for adaptation and resilience measures throughout our supply chain. In 2024, we trained 49% of producers across all our origin-sourced supply chains in CSA (climate-smart agriculture) practices.

CSA is designed to strengthen the capacity of farming systems to sustainably increase productivity while also enhancing climate resilience and contributing to mitigation efforts. At the farm level, CSA involves a range of context-specific practices tailored to regional climate conditions and future predictions. These often intersect with GAPs, Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and Integrated Soil Fertility Management (ISFM), forming a comprehensive package of sustainable measures.

While we remain committed to scaling-up CSA training, we recognise that many of these practices also overlap with regenerative agriculture – a broader approach focused on restoring and enhancing natural ecosystems. We believe that building resilient, productive supply chains requires a holistic perspective that integrates both CSA and regenerative agriculture principles.

For example, agroforestry is a multifunctional land use system that improves agronomic, ecological and socio-economic outcomes. Practices such as integrating shade trees to boost cocoa tree performance, protecting water sources to reduce erosion and planting species that support biodiversity and natural pest control all contribute to long-term farm resilience.

Our CSA training has a strong focus on affordability, ease of implementation and adaptability across diverse farming systems. The core elements include site selection, soil and water management, pest and disease control, crop and shade tree management, income diversification and community engagement. These can be scaled according to a farmer's available resources and capacity, allowing for tailored, impactful adoption. Adoption of CSA training can also contribute to our achieving the on-farm goals for our decarbonisation strategy for Scope 3 emissions. Key climate-smart, on-farm interventions for decarbonisation that we have implemented include:

- **Agroforestry:** integrating shade trees (≥5 species, 20 trees per hectare)
- **GAP:** enhancing pruning, pest and disease control, weed and shade management, and harvest practices
- **Biochar:** using carbonised organic matter from agricultural and urban waste as a soil amendment to improve soil health and carbon sequestration
- **Forest conservation:** protecting and accounting for carbon removals from farmer-owned adjacent forests

Read more about ECOM's climate strategy in our [2024 Group Sustainability Report](#) (pages 35 to 39).

Spotlight



4.3

Cocoa Forests Initiative

The Cocoa Forest Initiative (CFI) aims to protect and restore forests that have been degraded. In support of this, governments and companies have pledged that there should be 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.

In the 2023/24 cocoa season, ECOM and its partners supported this goal through:

Activity	Côte d'Ivoire	Ghana
Distributing multipurpose shade trees for on-farm planting to promote agroforestry (number of trees)	855,461	403,096
Worked with producers to support them in applying agroforestry techniques (number of producers)	57,914	13,248
Provided financial assistance to producers to enable them to increase income from non-cocoa sources (number of producers)	29,707	6,833
Conducted deforestation risk assessments (hectares of land assessed)	253,178	103,748
Provided technical assistance to producers to enable them to become more resilient to climate change and remove carbon emissions on their farms (number of producers)	57,117	28,114
Engaged with individuals on women's empowerment projects (number of individuals)	23,025	15,759
Distributed high-tech enhanced cocoa seedlings (number of seedlings)	N/A	185,025
Supported communities with active forest restoration and protection programmes (number of communities)	N/A	30

Read more in our CFI Progress Report [here](#)

Spotlight

4.4

ECOM Research – Pod counting and predicting

ECOM has a dedicated team in sourcing countries whose job it is to count pods on cocoa trees. **Laurent Souron** from ECOM's Research team explains why:

Where is this carried out – and why?

We aim to forecast the size and the timing of the crop. To do this, we have set up pod counting operations in all major producing countries: Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Brazil, Ecuador and Nigeria. Cocoa is grown all year round, and we trek every month in each country, counting and categorising pods by size in a sample of farms. Applying survival and growth rates to the raw counts, we can forecast how much cocoa will be produced, and when exactly it will be harvested. Combined with analysis on demand, it enables us to work out if the market will be in a surplus or a deficit, which is crucial for our trading desk in London. This is also essential for our operations on the ground, allowing us to better plan purchases each season.

What is the process and why is it still done manually?

It is very difficult to automate. Cocoa has a very dense canopy and you need to move around the trees to find every pod, so we still rely on skilled pod counters – some have been with us for over 20 years – to gather the data. Access is also very limited. Roads are in poor condition, terrain is uneven, muddy or flooded during the rainy season, and bringing fragile equipment is not an option. Typically, our teams will hop on a four-wheel drive and visit 100 farms every month, counting the pods on five trees in each over the course of two weeks. The samples are designed so that the data gathered is representative of the tree population in each country.

And do you just look at the numbers and size of pods?

No, other parameters are also used. We will look at disease incidence, flushing (the creation of new leaves), flowering, moisture, temperature, tree condition and whether the canopy is close together – cocoa is self-shading and easily damaged if there are gaps in the canopy.

What happens with the data and is there any other data/are there any other factors you include in your assessment?'

It is passed on to our Research team in London for analysis. Other factors such as weather will also be considered. We use satellite data to monitor temperature, precipitation and soil moisture, all of which influence production. In West Africa, for instance, there is a dry wind called the Harmattan that blows from the Sahara between December and March. It can be very damaging to production, sucking up moisture from the soil and the leaves. We also interview producers to know the age of their trees, if they are still planting, whether they are using fertilisers and pesticides, and so on.

How is the data used?

The data helps ECOM anticipate supply and demand, and their impact on cocoa prices. We can match world production to world demand and work out whether the market will be in a surplus or a deficit each year, which will massively influence the market. If we can see this ahead of everyone else, then we have an edge in predicting price variations and we can trade accordingly. The information is useful for our clients too; they often have no operations of their own in producing countries and no visibility on the crop.

What challenges do you face?

Production completely collapsed over the past two years. Last season saw a huge drop due to bad weather, with flowers and small pods knocked off the trees by winds and storms. At the same time, fertiliser prices rose sharply. Half the world's fertilisers come from Ukraine, Belarus and Russia, and West African countries are highly dependent on them. Soil can manage without fertilisers for a couple of years, but two years after the war started, its impact started to be felt on cocoa, too. With a sharp drop in production and higher costs, there was a fivefold surge in cocoa prices, but chocolate makers have not passed this on to consumers for the most part. Market share is still more important to them.

How does this affect producers?

It mostly depends on the region. Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana have fixed prices set by the government, whereas in other countries farmer prices fluctuate daily. Where the price is fixed, farmers have not fully benefited yet from the higher prices. In Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, the crop is sold forward (i.e. the 2024/25 crop was sold in 2023/24) so there is typically a one-year delay between a rise in the market price and a rise in the official farmer price. Other factors (elections, price stabilisation) also come into play when setting the official farmer price and today Ivorian farmers are paid 2,220 CFA/kg while their counterparts in Guinea or Liberia, where the price is not fixed, receive 4,000 to 5,000 CFA/kg. That difference causes large volumes of beans to be smuggled across the border.

And all this starts with counting pods on trees?

Well, sometimes simple solutions are the best!



Progress against our KPIs continued

4.5

Our Net-Zero ambition

KPI: Achieve Net-Zero emissions in our entire value chain by 2050

Status: In progress

We continue to work towards Net-Zero by 2050, guided by clear climate targets and robust carbon accounting practices. Our focus is on reducing emissions, building climate resilience and aligning with evolving regulations, including the CSRD.

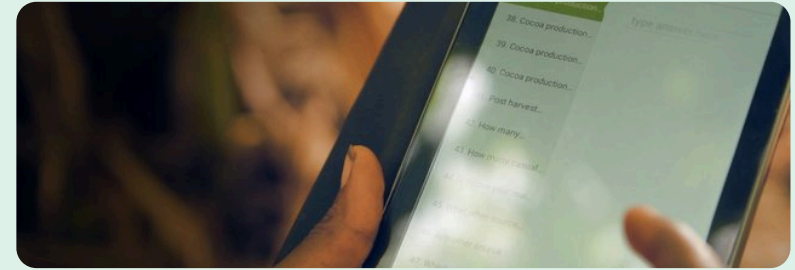
We follow the latest guidance from the GHG Protocol's draft Land Sector and Removals Guidance and the latest updates outlined by the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) to ensure alignment with the highest carbon accounting standards. We have also collaborated with the World Cocoa Foundation in the development of the GHG Accounting Manual for Cocoa, a step-by-step GHG accounting methodology for land use change, land management and carbon removals for the cocoa industry. This methodology will inform our own carbon accounting.

Given that land use change is the biggest source of emissions in cocoa, we prioritise deforestation monitoring. We are committed to addressing deforestation on land cleared or degraded since 2020, through systems for monitoring, risk assessment, due diligence and remediation across all supply chains by 2025. We are also developing a methodology to monitor forests near supplier farms to help prevent future deforestation and reward producers for conservation efforts.

As most of our emissions fall under Scope 3.1 (purchased goods and services), once deforestation risks are addressed, our focus shifts to improving on-farm carbon performance through better crop residue management, increasing productivity and enhancing carbon sequestration using practices such as agroforestry and biochar. These interventions are tailored to each supply chain, based on baseline data from our Green Meter tool and ongoing input from field teams and producers. Producers are at the heart of our decarbonisation efforts, which is why we are committed to increasing the value of cocoa by linking it to its carbon performance.

Read more in our [2024 Group Sustainability Report](#) on page 37.

Spotlight



4.6

Advancing carbon accounting through knowledge and collaboration

ECOM has collaborated with the World Resources Institute (WRI) on a project to operationalise aligned, transparent and science-based metrics that follow the GHG Protocol's draft Land Sector and Removals Guidance. The project aims to increase accuracy and promote standardisation for comparability in corporate inventory emissions reporting. Specifically, through publishing detailed methods to calculate land use change emissions and land occupation metrics for supply chains with different levels of traceability. Land use change relates to the shift from one type of land cover or usage to another over time, and land occupation metrics relate to the total surface of natural lands we are using through our products.

This project enables the sector to adopt best practices for supply chains through open-source emission and yield factors for 42 key commodities, including cocoa. These metrics will support the accuracy and transparency of our carbon footprint methods, which is pivotal in tracking progress towards ECOM's Net-Zero targets.

4.7

Land management emissions

NEW KPI: Establish a baseline of land management emissions and removals for all direct origin-sourced supply chains by the end of 2027

Status: In progress

A baseline of land management emissions refers to the reference point or initial conditions against which changes in agricultural practices and their associated carbon emissions or sequestration (removals) are measured over time. These are the greenhouse gases released or sequestered as a result of how land is used and managed, such as through fertiliser application, tillage, irrigation, agroforestry, cover cropping and soil conservation practices. These emissions are a critical component of agricultural carbon footprints, and they offer significant opportunities for mitigation when managed effectively.

As a company committed to achieving Net Zero, measuring land management emissions and biomass carbon stock at the farm level over time is essential. Agriculture, particularly land management and land use change, is a major source of global GHG, but it also holds powerful potential for climate solutions. By accurately capturing emissions tied to land management, we can identify high-impact interventions, support farmer resilience and make meaningful progress towards our Net-Zero targets in a credible and transparent way. We identified our priority origins by evaluating where we source the largest volumes and where the carbon impacts are most significant, including:

1. Côte d'Ivoire
2. Ghana
3. Nigeria
4. Cameroon
5. Peru
6. Ecuador

We will develop carbon baselines for each origin with our own tool, Green Meter, taking into account the level of homogeneity within regions and the need for stratification based on factors such as shade tree density, soil variability and other key environmental conditions. Establishing a baseline in these priority origins will allow us to develop decarbonisation strategies tailored to each origin. To truly reduce our carbon footprint from farm to port, we must connect these farm-level insights with broader emissions data and action across the supply chain.

Measuring carbon impact

In 2024, we officially launched our new internal carbon calculator, Green Meter, which enables us to accurately measure the land management emissions on-farm. It serves as a reference point for measuring the effectiveness of land management interventions, allowing for the baselining and then ongoing tracking of carbon reductions and removals. With this tool, we can offer more transparency and actionable insights into our supply chains, design more effective strategies to reduce our environmental impact, and empower our clients and partners to make informed interventions to reduce and remove carbon. Through the analysis of data with Green Meter, we can also design interventions that aim to increase farm productivity, improve climate resilience and reward producers for the ecosystem services their farms provide, and then measure their impact over time.

Green Meter has been independently reviewed by SustainCERT, and based on the procedures they have performed and the evidence that they obtained, nothing has come to their attention to suggest that the GHG calculations in the provided coffee and cocoa calculators and associated documentation deviate from the requirements of the WBCSD/WRI GHG Protocol or its associated draft Land Sector and Removals Guidance.

Read more on ECOM's Green Meter in the [2024 Group Sustainability Report](#) on page 38.

Spotlight



4.8

Agroforestry monitoring

A critical step in reaching our Net-Zero goal is monitoring the carbon removals of agroforestry trees. To support this, we developed an Agroforestry and Soil Carbon Monitoring Protocol in collaboration with South Pole. The guidance outlines a robust sampling method for monitoring carbon removals and ensures standardised tree measurement and data collection across diverse origins and projects.

The guidance is aligned with the GHG Protocol's draft Land Sector and Removals Guidance and is tailored to the realities of smallholder producers. This protocol enables us to establish carbon baselines, including the biomass carbon stock of agroforestry trees, providing a more complete picture of the carbon fluxes at the farm level.

Spotlight

Agroforestry in Cameroon

Can you tell us a bit about yourself, your role and where you are based?

I'm Billy Tchakam, agronomist by training, and I've been with AMS (our Cameroonian entity) for 11 years, and currently manage projects financed by our partners. I started with a small team when I first joined; we were just around 20 people. Now, we've grown to about 300. I've progressed from having no team to now managing a group of around 20 agronomists. Looking ahead, there are plenty of opportunities for growth. Sustainability offers a lot of potential for development, and there are many areas to explore within the company. I'm excited about the possibilities in sustainability – whether it's carbon management, forestry or forest protection. There's so much to be done, and I look forward to growing in this field.

Do you have a specific area of interest within sustainability?

I didn't start with a very specific interest at first, but over time, I've become more interested in it. Initially, working on agroforestry as part of broader initiatives wasn't something I saw as a unique area to develop, but more of a standard practice. I had experience in other areas, such as corn production, where we promoted agroforestry and even used the crops for biofuel. While that was interesting, I found it less engaging compared to cocoa. Over time, I've developed a real passion for the cocoa sector, and that's what truly drives me now.

I got involved with cocoa just a few years after I graduated, and I found it to be a truly unique domain. As a technician in cocoa, it's one of the rare fields where you can work with a large number of people, whether as workers on the farm or in farm management. Additionally, there's the aspect of training producers and promoting sustainability. The sector is constantly evolving, which makes it an exciting and dynamic area to be involved in, and that's why I've continued to pursue it.

What do you define as sustainability?

I'll start with a quote that I really love. It's in French, but I'll translate it: "We do not inherit the land from our parents; we borrow it from our children." This is something I came across long before getting into sustainability, but it perfectly summarises my perspective on it. To me, sustainability means enjoying a good life today, while ensuring that future generations, our children, can enjoy it in the same way. It's about preserving the present for the future, making sure we leave behind a healthy environment and resources for those who come after us.

Is agroforestry a topic that is new to cocoa in Cameroon?

Actually, it is not – in Cameroon, cocoa is produced under agroforestry. This is the normal way of growing it, so the producers we work with already do this, even if it is not formally called agroforestry.

Please could you tell me more about cocoa in Cameroon?

Cameroon is the fourth-largest cocoa producer globally and the third-largest in Africa, with a production of 296,000 metric tonnes, according to FAO data in 2023. This production spans around 600,000 hectares and supports approximately 600,000 families, with many more benefiting indirectly. Of the total production, about 70% is exported while 30% is processed locally either for export as cocoa products or for internal consumption. Cocoa is mainly grown by smallholder producers with farms of one to three hectares in size, though some larger farms reach up to 100 hectares or more. The Netherlands is the largest destination for Cameroon's exports, receiving about 65% of the total.

I imagine AMS is like our other origins, with field officers that do the training and sensitisation with producers.

Yes, certainly. We work directly with a large number of producers, more than 10,000 in total. To effectively engage with these producers, we have a diverse team of field staff, including purchasing clerks, agronomists, technicians, traceability officers, stock keepers and drivers, among others. The majority of our close to 300 workers are out in the field, maintaining direct contact with the producers to ensure smooth operations and support. Over the years, we've focused on helping producers improve their yields. Through training and follow-up, we've successfully supported some producers to increase their yields by nearly 60–70%, going from around 450kg per hectare to about 750kg per hectare on average. This has been the result of our efforts to improve farm productivity.

4.9

Billy Tchakam

Project Manager &
Agronomist, Cameroon



Agroforestry in Cameroon continued

You told me that cocoa in Cameroon naturally grows in an agroforestry system. Could you tell me what you consider to be agroforestry and how it's done in practice and if it has changed over the years?

Agroforestry is a key strategy for us, where cocoa is grown alongside trees either within or around the farm. This approach offers multiple benefits such as diversifying income through fruit production, protecting soil, improving yields and supporting pest control, shade management, security and environmental sustainability.

In Cameroon, cocoa farms are usually established by clearing the forest understory while keeping larger native trees. Cocoa is planted beneath these trees, and shade is gradually adjusted as the plants mature. While this system generally works well, trees are sometimes removed unintentionally, leading to over-clearing. To address this, many producers also plant fruit trees to restore shade and diversify their crops, strengthening the agroforestry model.

You mentioned that many producers aren't familiar with the formal concept of agroforestry but it is one of the Smarter Cocoa KPIs. Is this something you're actively educating producers about?

As I mentioned earlier, our initial system wasn't really focused on agroforestry, even though it was practised in the field. If you asked a farmer about agroforestry as a formal concept, they might not fully understand its importance, but they do it naturally on their farms. We educate producers about the benefits of trees, such as how they help with soil protection, pest management and climate resilience, without specifically labelling it as 'agroforestry'. We focus on the maintenance of trees and their positive impact, but we don't necessarily present it as a formal chapter on agroforestry.

In addition to the training and follow-up, over the past 10 years, we have distributed more than 1.5 million improved seedlings to producers. We also supply them with high-quality agrochemicals to ensure they are using the right products and not relying on harmful chemicals.

How does land ownership work in Cameroon?

In Cameroon, there are different types of land ownership. Native land is typically inherited from family members, passed down through generations. These producers own the land because it has been in their family for many years. On the other hand, there are agricultural migrants who are displaced from their original homes, often because inheritance has left them with very small portions of land. These individuals move to forested areas to clear land and start farming cocoa.

It's important to note that nearly 50% of Cameroon is covered by forests, which creates a necessity for land regulation. People who want to settle in these areas often migrate to forested land, where they may pay a small fee or token to acquire a piece of land. Once they start farming, the land generally belongs to them, as they are able to establish their farms there.

The national law provides designated areas where people can settle and develop as producers, while also establishing forest reserves that are protected from encroachment. It is perfectly legal for someone to settle on national land and begin farming on it. However, the long-term demand-side regulatory impacts of this are yet to be fully realised. Specifically, the EUDR deforestation cut-off is the last day of 2020 and it takes cocoa around five years to start producing, so we're not seeing widespread exclusions yet. In the coming years, we will likely see the negative effects of producers who cleared land several years ago not being able to access the EU market. This will become evident in our systems in the future, as we only track producers who are actively producing. Based on our current compliance research, we've found that only a very small percentage of producers are non-compliant, meaning they have recently deforested land.

What's the turnover with producers like?

The farmer population is largely the same. Over the past 10 years, we've been working with producers, and the trends remain consistent. Some leave, while others return, but the percentage of those who leave is not very high. Additionally, many producers are eager to join the programme because they trust the sincerity of what we are doing.

Is there anything else from your side that you want to share or anything that I've maybe missed out on?

Cocoa production in Cameroon has remained relatively stable or only slightly increased over the past years; this can largely be attributed to the strong agroforestry system in place, which helps make the sector more resilient to pests and diseases. In the meantime, farmers continue to enjoy high bean prices since 2023. While the higher cocoa prices are attracting new people to the sector, including workers from the public and private sectors who have the means to invest, this also poses a risk of deforestation. Though it's a new challenge, it's something we must address moving forward.

We've also noticed that producers are now able to pay their workers better, offering fair wages. They are investing in their families' wellbeing, such as improving their living conditions, housing and access to better food. Some producers are even buying cars, and others are sending their children to better schools. We just hope that the prices remain stable, as any change could pose challenges for them in the future.



Progress against our KPIs Continued

4.10

Preventative strategies for deforestation

NEW KPI: Implement preventative strategies for 100,000 individuals to contribute to halting or the reversal of deforestation by the end of 2028

Status: In progress

In 2023, as per a previous Smarter Cocoa KPI, we completed deforestation risk assessments across all our origin-sourced operations. The assessment identified high-risk areas based on recent deforestation, supporting us to prioritise regions where cocoa threatens standing forests. Preventing deforestation is central to our decarbonisation strategy and our broader commitment to climate resilience, ecosystem health and the long-term sustainability of cocoa farming. Rather than responding to deforestation after damage has occurred, we aim to focus on proactive, preventative approaches that address the root causes, such as poverty, land use pressure and weak forest governance, before forests are cleared. We have seen that investing early in education, livelihoods and land use planning is far more effective and sustainable than remedial action.

It is important to note that not all deforestation is agriculturally driven. In some countries, it is a much more complex social phenomenon where people are farming the land to claim it for future generations, making preventative measures to address this much more complicated.

Similar to our preventative strategies for child labour KPI we equip our teams with a menu of options, allowing them to choose the most suitable approaches based on local needs. These initiatives may include investing directly in our supply chain or collaborating at the sector level. At the farm and household level, we work directly with producers to promote sustainable agricultural practices such as agroforestry, efficient land use and soil conservation. These practices improve yields and soil health, reducing the economic pressure to clear forests, while supporting long-term farm productivity. We also raise awareness in farming communities about the environmental risks and long-term costs of deforestation, empowering them to become stewards of their local ecosystems. This is particularly relevant in light of growing legislative risk such as that presented by the EUDR, which requires that cocoa is deforestation-free and traceable to farm.

At the sector level, we collaborate with industry peers, grassroots organisations and local authorities to strengthen forest governance through landscape interventions and larger sector-wide efforts. This includes understanding and supporting local land use policies, implementing robust due diligence and contributing to the development of community-led forest management plans. Strengthening governance structures and enabling local ownership of forest conservation is essential for long-term impact.

Technology as a tool

Technology is a powerful enabler in our goal to implement effective, preventative strategies against deforestation. We can use tools such as geospatial analysis, satellite imagery and land use mapping to identify high-risk areas and prioritise regions where interventions are most urgently needed. In parallel, traceability systems, such as our blockchain first-mile platform, **BanQu**, help us increase visibility across our supply chain. This data-driven approach allows us to provision resources and support in a targeted, efficient manner, helping us prevent deforestation before it happens.

By combining environmental geospatial data with supply chain traceability systems, we can assess both deforestation risk and the natural capital value of specific landscapes, such as carbon storage potential, biodiversity richness and ecosystem services. This enables us to direct our efforts towards protecting areas that are not only environmentally sensitive but also vital to the long-term sustainability of farming systems.

By taking this approach, we ensure our climate and land use interventions have the greatest possible impact. Protecting ecosystems is essential for maintaining resilient cocoa production and supporting the health of the planet as a whole.

Spotlight

4.11

Promoting conservation and community empowerment in Peru

ECOM's carbon team is partnering with Fronterra, a Peruvian project developer specialising in nature-based solutions in collaboration with local communities. Together, we are supporting a conservation initiative in the Sierra del Divisor ecosystem, a vital region of the Peruvian Amazon.

The project aims to create a collaborative conservation model that unites public, private and community stakeholders to protect this ecologically important area. It focuses on preserving primary forest, promoting sustainable rural development and involving local communities in biodiversity friendly practices that contribute to climate change mitigation.

Our objective is to prevent deforestation and protect at least 1.6 million hectares of this unique landscape, while safeguarding the rights and territories of indigenous communities, including those in voluntary isolation. At the same time, the project supports the development of sustainable livelihoods for local residents, fostering both environmental and economic resilience.

Core components include forest control and surveillance, biological monitoring, sustainable economic activities and carbon impact certification. ECOM will help commercialise the carbon credits generated through avoided deforestation and serve as a market for cocoa produced in the region.

In its initial phase, the project is expected to reduce emissions by 121,664 tCO₂ annually, totalling approximately 3.65 million tCO₂e over 30 years. This initiative marks a significant step in ECOM's broader commitment to climate action, biodiversity conservation and community-led sustainable development.



4.12

Biodiversity risk

- **NEW KPI:** Assess biodiversity risk for 100% of the origin-sourced supply chains by the end of 2027
- **Status:** In progress

Healthy ecosystems support vital functions such as pollination, soil fertility, water regulation, disease prevention and pest control, which are crucial for the productivity and survival of our crops. Biodiversity ensures that ecosystems remain resilient, adaptable and capable of supporting agricultural systems over the long term, and by maintaining a diverse range of species and ecosystems, we safeguard the balance of natural processes on which our operations depend. Without preserving biodiversity, the long-term resilience and success of agricultural practices as well as the needs of our clients and communities are at risk.

Biodiversity and climate change are closely interconnected, each influencing and being influenced by the other. As biodiversity declines, ecosystems become less resilient, reducing their ability to mitigate climate change impacts. We believe it is vital for us to increase our understanding of biodiversity risks across our origin-sourced supply chains so that we can strategically intervene with the support of our partners.

We are identifying a global biodiversity risk tool to assess our supply chain, now that we are gaining increased traceability. This will enable us to target specific landscapes using locally adapted, landscape-level risk assessments, allowing us to identify the most strategic opportunities for intervention.

Spotlight



4.13

Landscape-level biodiversity risks evaluation in Ecuador

In last year's report, we highlighted the early stages of our collaboration with Reckitt and Nature-based Insights (Nbi) to conduct a biodiversity screening of cocoa farms in our supply chain in Ecuador. This partnership aims to identify both risks and opportunities related to biodiversity and implement activities that support nature recovery at the landscape level.

In 2024, ECOM continued this collaboration, with Nbi assessing the state of nature across terrestrial, wetland and river ecosystems. The assessment identified key pressures on biodiversity in the landscape. Central to this strategy is the Biodiversity Impact Metric (BIM), which estimates the impacts of ECOM cocoa supply chain in Ecuador as a function of six pressures, including land use intensity, and other spatial characteristics such as the patch size of ecosystems or proximity to noise disturbance from roads. A high BIM score indicates a higher pressure on biodiversity. This metric is complemented by additional data sources, including deforestation risks linked to cocoa production, carbon stock and sequestration potential, and water-related risks and opportunities. These insights will guide the prioritisation of key areas for conservation and restoration.

The landscape in the region is predominantly agricultural and most of it – including ecologically valuable wetlands – is classified as having medium to very high biodiversity impact. Areas with high or very high BIM values cover approximately two-thirds of the landscape and substantially overlap with regions where cocoa farms in our supply chain are located. This presents a clear opportunity to shift towards more sustainable on-farm practices that contribute to biodiversity recovery. The largest area with a lower BIM score is the Cotacachi Cayapas Ecological Reserve, one of Ecuador's most important protected areas. Natural forest represents the most intact ecosystems in BIM, and legal protection assumes that they are less prone to disturbance, hence why this area has a lower BIM score. However, this particular region sits on the agricultural frontier and is currently under threat from nearby agricultural expansion.

Moving forward, through our continued collaboration, we will model how different on-farm interventions – such as agroforestry – affect BIM scores. This will enable Reckitt to invest in the most impactful actions to reduce its footprint in the Ecuadorian cocoa-sourcing landscape.

5 Managing change through transparency and traceability



“Transparency and traceability are essential in agricultural commodity supply chains – not only to build trust with clients and partners, but also to empower us to identify risks, drive responsible sourcing, and ensure that the people and environments behind our products are protected and respected.”

Annemiek Righarts
Development and Sustainability Manager

5.1 Managing change through transparency and traceability: Overview

Our focus

In an increasingly interconnected global economy, the responsibility to ensure ethical, transparent and sustainable practices across supply chains has never been more critical. Due diligence is essential not only for identifying and mitigating social and environmental risks but also for fostering long-term resilience and trust. By embedding responsible processes into our operations, we aim to uphold the highest ethical standards throughout our operations and those of our suppliers.

ECOM acknowledges inherent challenges within our supply chains and commits to ongoing improvement, stakeholder engagement and aligning with international standards. We have robust corporate governance systems in place to support human rights and protect ecosystems. Through our actions, we aim to promote better economic, social and environmental outcomes, and ensure we are always ready to meet changing global regulations.

ECOM's operations are guided by a suite of policies that reflect our commitment to ethical management at all times. We expect our suppliers to share these standards and ensure this through our **Supplier Code of Conduct**. The impacts of our actions on farming communities are monitored and managed, and we aim to ensure that risks are mitigated to lower levels. Our **Supply Chain Due Diligence Policy** outlines our comprehensive approach to due diligence practices.

Traceability and transparency are at the heart of a responsibly managed supply chain and fundamental to ECOM's sustainability strategy. As we operate globally and have long and complex supply chains, achieving traceability can be challenging. ECOM has been collecting farm-level and farmer-level data digitally for a long time. We continually seek to refine and improve this process, which has now been strengthened through the introduction of our blockchain solution, Integrity powered by BanQu, which enhances our first-mile transparency in our direct supply chains.

Read more about our work to manage change through transparency and traceability in our **2024 ECOM Group Sustainability Report** (pages 50 to 56).

Our commitments

- To ensure responsibility in our supply chain

Our 2024 KPIs

KPIs	Material Topic	Status
Ensure 100% of beans purchased through ECOM origin-sourced supply chains are sustainable by the end of 2025	Management of relationships with suppliers	In progress
Achieve 100% traceability to farmer for all beans by the end of 2026	Management of relationships with suppliers	In progress
Roll out human rights and environmental due diligence process and assess risks for all tier one suppliers by the end of 2025	Management of relationships with suppliers	In progress
NEW: Identify and prevent deforestation, in respect of land that has been degraded or deforested since 2020, with the implementation of a strong monitoring, risk assessment, due diligence and remediation process in all our supply chains by 2025	Land use management including deforestation	In progress
NEW: Complete a partnership and purchasing practices map across the cocoa supply chain, identifying risks and opportunities to improve transparency and responsible sourcing practices to enable us to provide evidence-based insights to our policies by the end of 2028	Management of relationships with suppliers	In progress
NEW: Benchmark ECOM's forced labour mitigation procedures with the Verité Farm Labour Due Diligence Toolkit and develop a roadmap to work towards leadership in each section by 2027	Forced labour	In progress

See our full list of KPIs [here](#)

5.2 Sourcing sustainable cocoa

- **KPI:** Ensure 100% of beans purchased through ECOM origin-sourced supply chains are sustainable by the end of 2025
- **Status:** In progress

In 2023, we began laying the groundwork to refine the current definition of 'sustainability', moving towards a framework that recognises the term's dynamic nature and the need for its continuous improvement. We acknowledge that the concept of sustainability is not universally defined or interpreted. Local understandings of sustainable practices and priorities can differ considerably based on various factors, such as cultural values, regulatory environments, market maturity and lived experiences. For instance, in certain regions, sustainability may be closely associated with productivity and income stability, whereas in others, it may emphasise environmental conservation. These differing perspectives influence how producers, cooperatives and local stakeholders engage with sustainability initiatives and, ultimately, determine the types of support and investment needed to achieve meaningful progress.

ECOM has previously defined a sustainable farm as one that operates with interventions or investments aimed at supporting cocoa sustainability across three pillars: 1) economic sustainability (e.g. cocoa productivity, alternative income generation or living income measures), 2) social sustainability (e.g. working towards the elimination of child labour and forced labour, promoting community development, or women and youth empowerment), and 3) environmental sustainability (e.g. working towards the elimination of deforestation, promoting reforestation, climate-smart practices or agroforestry). To create strict parameters for reporting, our definition includes all volumes certified by Fairtrade and Rainforest Alliance or sourced from verified client programmes. This approach requires that the cocoa is purchased as sustainable or verified and therefore is dependent on downstream demand. Following these parameters, at the end of 2024, 78% of beans purchased through ECOM origin-sourced supply chains were 'sustainable'.

As regulations evolve and mandatory compliance becomes more prevalent, we are witnessing a decline in demand for volume classed as 'sustainable' under this definition. This is coupled with an increasing expectation that all volumes passing through certain geographies must meet a minimum level of compliance, irrespective of corporate programme investment. In response to this shift, we have begun reassessing our definition of sustainability and exploring ways to decouple it from market demand. For example, in regions such as Mexico and Uganda, we actively collaborate with producers to enhance agricultural practices and support compliance with environmental regulations through various programmes. Despite these efforts, there is currently very low market demand in our supply chain for certified or verified volumes from these regions. Consequently, the cocoa sourced from these areas does not align with the prevailing definition of sustainability, even though significant and meaningful interventions are being implemented on the ground.

We aim to account for these differences by tailoring our approach and working closely with local stakeholders, focusing on the implementation of activities that are suited to the context of each origin. These would include agricultural services, supporting community development and developing strategies to manage land sustainably. Whether it involves shifting from opportunistic purchases to long-term, client-specific sourcing models or adjusting investment levels based on origin maturity, our strategy is grounded in the belief that sustainability must be both globally aligned and locally relevant, but may not always line up with the demands from the market. By integrating local definitions and expectations into our KPI framework, we can ensure that our targets reflect real progress on the ground, not just compliance on paper. We will continue to report against this KPI beyond 2025 based on the original definition but are aware that it may never reach 100%.



Spotlight

Sustainability priorities in Uganda

Can you tell us a bit about yourself and your role?

I'm a Ugandan, from the Bakonzo tribe, and hold a degree and diploma in Procurement and Logistics Management, along with a certificate in Organic and Fairtrade certification from the Uganda Coffee Development Authority (UCDA). With over 12 years of experience in the cocoa industry, I've worked as a field officer, storekeeper and warehouse manager.

In 2020, I joined ECOM (Kawacom) as a store manager before transitioning to my current role as a Sustainability Officer. My main responsibility now is overseeing farmer registration in line with the EUDR. In this role, I focus on ensuring farms do not encroach into natural parks and work towards preserving natural resources for future generations.

What motivated you to work in cocoa?

My journey with cocoa in Uganda began in 2000 when I was in primary school and we learned about cocoa farming in Ghana. I was intrigued, but I didn't realise cocoa was also grown in Uganda, especially in my hometown of Rukungiri, where it wasn't yet established. Later, I discovered that cocoa was one of Uganda's key cash crops and became curious to learn more.

When I saw an advert from another cocoa company looking for storekeepers, a role that matched my background in procurement and logistics, I applied and began my cocoa career. Working in the cocoa industry has been incredibly rewarding, driving both personal and professional growth. Every challenge I face fuels my passion and keeps me motivated, and the people I meet along the way have greatly shaped my career and personal development.

Could you explain a little bit about how the cocoa operation works in Uganda and how many producers you work with?

Cocoa is widely grown in Uganda, particularly in the Bundibugyo district and other regions such as Hoima, Kakumiro and Mukono. The cocoa industry plays a vital role in household incomes and foreign exchange earnings, making Uganda the leading cocoa producer in East Africa, with an annual production of around 60,000 metric tonnes.

The country produces three main cocoa varieties – Trinitario, Creolo and Forastero – in areas with well-distributed rainfall. The growing number of companies entering the market has created strong competition and better opportunities for producers.

Currently, we buy only conventional cocoa. However, we are running a farmer registration programme to train producers on sustainability, traceability and best practices. We see traceability as a key sustainability priority for the producers we source from. Field officers are actively involved in the registration process and helping producers implement these practices on their farms. We are currently working with over 7,000 estimated number of producers as more are being registered.

With traceability as one of your key sustainability priorities, can you tell me a bit about that process and how you approached it?

For me, traceability means tracking cocoa from delivery in Kampala back to the store where it was purchased, and further to the farmer who supplied it. This helps us understand the farming practices and production methods used.

We initially began by purchasing cocoa directly from producers and occasionally from aggregators. In 2022, we started creating a list of our suppliers and implemented a coding system for cocoa bags to track deliveries. This allowed us to identify the batch each cocoa bag came from.

By the end of 2022, we began registering producers to expand our supplier base and improve traceability. In 2023, we assigned codes to all registered producers and implemented a buying record system, where each farmer's delivery is recorded. For example, if Farmer John, identified by his code, brings in 50kg, it is noted under a specific bag number.

We also introduced a well-organised daily purchase sheet and buying report. When a farmer delivers cocoa, we cross-reference their name and estimated yield with the report. At the end of each week, we send these documents to our office in Kampala for further tracking. This system has significantly improved our ability to trace cocoa back to its source, and as the programme continues to develop, we're confident it will become even more efficient.

How do you ensure transparency and accuracy in data collection?

We ensure our field officers are well trained before they begin their work. Data is collected using an internal app and extracted by our local IT officer. I then review the data for errors and, if any are found, I contact the field officer for correction. Once the data is corrected, we send it for verification through to our global transformation team for EUDR checks, to ensure compliance. This process guarantees that the data we collect is accurate and reliable.

How do producers feel about data collection?

Many companies have been running certification programmes and registering producers for years, so most are familiar with the process. However, some producers are sceptical, feeling that previous registrations didn't lead to tangible benefits. This was often due to unmet promises in the past. However, when our field officers explain the long-term benefits and impact of registration, most producers are willing to participate. It's about addressing their concerns and gaining their trust.

5.3
John Bukeka
Sustainability Officer, Uganda

Sustainability priorities in Uganda continued

What do you consider sustainable cocoa beyond traceability?

In my opinion, sustainable cocoa is cocoa that has been grown on land that hasn't encroached on forests or protected public areas designated to preserve our ecosystem. Sustainable cocoa is cultivated in a way that it can coexist with natural systems, such as forests, wildlife habitats and the broader ecological balance. This ensures that cocoa production doesn't harm the environment and supports long-term sustainability.

Overall, deforestation is not common in Uganda, as most forested areas are well protected by the government. Through our programmes, we educate producers on growing cocoa, while preserving natural resources for future generations. By promoting sustainability and providing proper training, we can ensure that cocoa production remains responsible and environmentally friendly, safeguarding the industry and the environment for years to come. Sustainability is about proactively ensuring we live in harmony with the environment.

What challenges do you face?

We encourage producers to familiarise themselves with the questionnaire in the system, and we make the training and registration process more interactive. Instead of a formal, computerised approach, we aim to have a conversation and extract key points to input into the system, making registration less tedious for producers. However, some producers are growing fatigued by the process, so we're continuously seeking new strategies to keep them engaged and improve efficiency.

Another challenge is the topography of Bundibugyo, which is located in the hilly Rwenzori mountain range, making it difficult to reach certain producers. Moreover, many farming areas are in remote regions with underdeveloped road infrastructure. Field officers may have to cross rivers, valleys and ridges to reach these farms, adding further complexity to the registration and traceability process. In some districts, particularly those with vast land coverage, areas are divided into counties, sub-counties and sub-regions. As a result, a farmer may live in one location, but their farm could be 10km away, which may make them hesitant to bring a field officer to the farm.

Accessing these farms can also be challenging due to the terrain. For example, if a farmer's land is located in upland areas, the field officer may need to park their motorcycle at a lower altitude and hike up, which can be physically demanding. Additionally, producers may not be willing to visit the farm on the field officer's requested day, especially if they were recently there and weren't planning to return soon.

Additionally, some producers have multiple farms spread across different locations, complicating the process. Our field officers often have to travel long distances and, in some cases, producers are unwilling to share details of all their farms. This affects the accuracy of our traceability efforts. For example, a farmer might initially report one farm but later disclose an additional one. We update the system to include this farm and ensure the yields are compliant and accurately reflected. These are just a few of the challenges we face.

Do you have any concluding remarks?

I would like to emphasise the need for intensive training on sustainability for all stakeholders. This includes not just producers, but also other players in the industry. We need to ensure that everyone, from producers to other stakeholders, is well informed about sustainability practices and their importance in the long term. This education is key to achieving long-lasting and effective sustainability in the cocoa industry.





5.4

Traceability in partner-sourced supply chains

- **KPI:** Achieve 100% traceability to farmer for all beans by the end of 2026
- **Status:** In progress

We have maintained 100% traceability to farmer organisation or community for all cocoa beans purchased through ECOM origin-sourced supply chains, which is visualised in a dynamic map on our website and updated annually. Additionally, we publicly disclose a list of our direct origin-sourced supply chains on the website, providing stakeholders with detailed information about our sourcing practices and partner networks.

Traceability in our whole supply chain has been increasing consistently and, currently, we can trace 47% of our total supply chain back to the farmer organisation and community level. Through our origin-sourced supply chain, 30% of global procurement is traceable to individual farmer. Newly this year, we also have an additional 10% traceability to farmer via our partner-sourced supply chain due to the increased due diligence and communication with suppliers.

The original language of this KPI had a 2025 deadline and included product, which was designed to be aligned with the requirement of the EUDR, anticipated to come into effect in 2024. However, given the formal postponement of the implementation of the EUDR to the end of 2025 and the complexities associated with traceability to farmer in cocoa products due to blending of large batches and reliance on multiple parties maintaining traceability at a high cost, we have revised the KPI to focus more specifically on our bean supply chain and adjusted the associated timeline accordingly.

This change reflects both external regulatory developments and our internal recognition that we are not yet as advanced in our sustainability integration or the ability to collect the required data from partners as initially projected. In particular, we have chosen to slow progress on this KPI deliberately to ensure thoughtful, inclusive implementation. This includes taking the necessary time to avoid unintended consequences – such as the unfair exclusion of smallholder producers and SME suppliers, or negatively impacting our economic performance – while still upholding the intent and rigour of the original goal (Read more about the **EUDR**.) It also gives us time to refine the tools in place to collect data from our partners, working towards a user-friendly experience with the correct level of support to allow for better data quality and efficiency in sharing.

Spotlight



5.5

Advancing EUDR compliance in Sierra Leone through partnerships

In anticipation of the EUDR, we have taken proactive steps to ensure full traceability and regulatory compliance within our cocoa supply chain in Sierra Leone. We source a significant volume of cocoa from Sierra Leone, working exclusively through a network of local exporters with whom we have long-standing, trusted relationships. These exporters play a central role in maintaining transparency and accountability throughout our operations.

A substantial portion of the cocoa we procure is certified Organic and Fairtrade. These certifications support producers through premium payments and, in the case of Fairtrade, local extension agents have helped provide education and awareness around the EUDR requirements. Furthermore, Fairtrade's model of organising producers into cooperatives has enabled a smoother and faster transition towards full traceability. However, certification alone is not sufficient for EUDR compliance. The EU has made clear that while voluntary sustainability standards can support due diligence efforts, they are neither mandatory nor conclusive proof of compliance. One reason is that certain certifications, including Fairtrade, allow for the use of 'mass balance' systems. This method tracks certified volumes through documentation rather than physical segregation, meaning certified and non-certified cocoa may be mixed, provided that the total volume of cocoa procured as certified is not exceeded in sales.

To support our suppliers in meeting the EUDR traceability and deforestation-free requirements, ECOM has provided local exporters with free access to a digital farm mapping tool and deforestation risk assessments. Exporters collect and manage farm-level geolocation data, and we facilitate external review through ERDA to assess deforestation risk and confirm alignment with the EUDR requirements. So far, over 12,000 farms have been mapped through this initiative in Sierra Leone. This effort reflects our broader strategy to build a deforestation-free cocoa supply chain through early action, investment in digital tools and collaboration with local partners. By equipping all actors in our supply chain with the tools and knowledge required, we are actively supporting EUDR compliance while reinforcing our commitment to responsible sourcing.

Interestingly, the introduction of the EUDR is also reshaping the role of certification within the landscape. The traceability infrastructure required under the EUDR, including farm mapping and geolocation, can also streamline certification audits. In parallel, certification schemes are evolving to incorporate deforestation concerns and higher traceability standards into their criteria, further aligning with the EUDR objectives. While this alignment enhances the integrity of both certification and regulatory compliance, it also raises the bar, potentially creating new challenges for smallholder producers and cooperatives seeking certification and market access.



5.6

Using first-mile technology to improve traceability data

Integrity powered by BanQu – a tool for transformation and change

ECOM has partnered with BanQu to further develop our first-mile data collection and supply chain transparency, with a near-term focus on data collection to help meet the upcoming EUDR. BanQu's patented blockchain technology facilitates an auditable data collection process that allows ECOM to digitise our first-mile supply chain traceability and streamline farmer data collection. While the initial focus is on a baseline system offering to achieve maximum coverage for EUDR readiness, the longer-term strategy is to facilitate increased sustainable and traceable data collection as we connect new supply chains and sourcing through the platform.

Focusing on essential data collection for maximum adoption and compliance, rapid deployment was achieved in 2024, while still ensuring scalability and efficiency as improvements continue to be made. BanQu was initially tested in Vietnam for coffee and Nigeria for cocoa, providing valuable insights that allowed ECOM to address local and commodity-specific challenges before rolling out the system more widely. This method helped ECOM test and refine the system in different sourcing countries with complex commodity supply chains, and gain learning that can be replicated across a global scope for rollout to ECOM's many supply chains.

In 2024, Integrity powered by BanQu was deployed in eight operations. The process involved standardising critical data collection and compliance mapping, while incorporating the necessary tailored updates to fit each country's unique supply chain processes. Throughout the rollouts, local 'BanQu champions' were identified and trained in each operation to promote the platform's use and lead user training sessions in each region. As a result, ECOM migrated a significant number of producers to the platform and completed thousands of transactions during the harvest seasons. The rollout will continue throughout 2025, with ECOM confident that Integrity powered by BanQu will help support our commitments to a more transparent and traceable supply chain.

5.7

Monitoring and remediation systems

- **NEW KPI:** Roll out human rights and environmental due diligence processes and assess risks for all tier-one suppliers by the end of 2025
- **Status:** In progress

At ECOM, we have long prioritised the collection and disclosure of comprehensive information about our supply chains and sourcing locations, particularly in our direct origin supply chains. Collecting supply chain information enables us to better understand the needs of the producers and communities we work with, as well as identify and mitigate risks, and to be aware of supplier engagement.

Through this information, we can make informed decisions about where to prioritise interventions and support sustainability initiatives. For effective prevention and mitigation of human rights and environmental risks, capacity building and close collaboration with our supply chain partners is essential. Additionally, our long-standing supplier relationships, which have been built on trust and mutual understanding, facilitate our ability to meet the increasing transparency requirements from regulators and clients.

With ECOM's Supply Chain Due Diligence Policy, we continue to identify, mitigate, prevent and address potential adverse human rights and environmental impacts across our operations and within our supply chain. In 2024, we conducted a supply chain risk assessment, covering 34 cocoa sourcing countries.

The risks covered in the supply chain risk assessment were:

- Cross-cutting factors, such as poverty
- Child labour
- Working conditions for children above the minimum legal age of employment
- Forced labour
- Right to life
- Right to safety and health
- Right to equality and non-discrimination
- Rights to freedom of opinion, expression, assembly and association
- Right to adequate wage
- Ecosystem services (including deforestation)
- Climate change effects on communities
- Biodiversity

Interventions need to be designed to be context-specific for them to be effective, and as all countries have their unique set of risks, the risk assessment allows us to consider the wider context when designing these interventions. For example, the risk assessment highlighted that the right to an adequate wage is a key risk to more than 30% of sourcing countries. This reinforces the emphasis on living income and living wage being important topics to address in our own workforce and in our supply chain.

Additionally, in 62% of our sourcing countries, risks related to ecosystem services are significant. Ecosystem services groups together the impact on communities due to degradation of natural resources; for example, if a river is polluted, the local community's water security is threatened. Degradation of natural resources can have a significant effect on the quality of life and the future of cocoa supply. Throughout 2024, we worked to bring together the results and data from the many projects we operate, ensuring that our efforts were being informed by the actual risks and identifying the best ways to fill any gaps we found.

Supplier assessment

In 2023, as a part of our developing due diligence process, we launched a supplier self-assessment for all commodity suppliers in the partner-sourced supply chain to understand how our suppliers respond to major human rights and environmental risks, such as child labour and deforestation.

Following the data collection phase, we thoroughly reviewed and refined the assessment to ensure its relevance and applicability across diverse supplier types and operational contexts, and we carried out a second assessment at the start of 2024. We aim to analyse the results from the yearly supplier self-assessment in conjunction with context-specific risk assessments, fostering collaborative efforts with our suppliers to address the most severe risks within their operations. This comprehensive approach strengthens our commitment to ethical and sustainable practices, and empowers our partners to uphold the highest standards of human rights and environmental stewardship throughout the supply chain.

Our due diligence efforts will also help us to comply with the **EUDR**. We transparently report on the appropriate disclosures, including through this Report and our [2024 Group Sustainability Report](#).

We seek to exhaust all avenues to improve the human rights and environmental impacts in our supply chains. We disengage only when all options have been explored and further steps to prevent and mitigate negative impacts are not feasible. Responsible disengagement ensures that we do not cause undue harm to the most vulnerable actors in the supply chains when exiting business relationships can no longer continue.

Read more about our work to ensure traceability in our supply chains in our [2023 ECOM Group Sustainability Report](#) (pages 56 to 62).



5.8

Legislation

As legislative and client requirements continue to evolve, ECOM remains steadfast in our dedication to upholding the highest standards of sustainability, human rights and environmental stewardship throughout our value chain. Current uncertainty around the legislative environment, with laws being vague or subject to change, is problematic for businesses. However, this situation also presents an opportunity for us to drive meaningful, lasting changes within our operations.

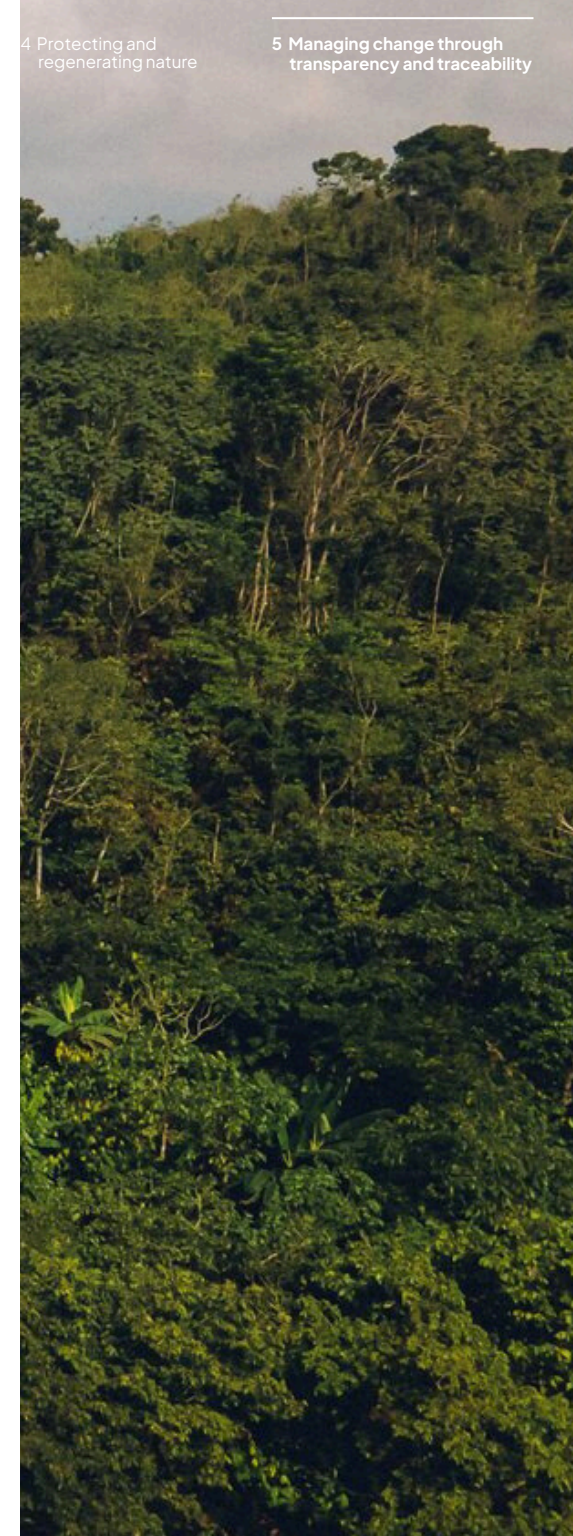
The potential for further delays to the implementation of the EUDR, and possible rollback of the CSRD and CSDDD regulation, could undermine the momentum of sustainability efforts across ECOM. It is crucial that we embed sustainability into our business model, rather than letting compliance with fluctuating regulations be the primary driver of our sustainability initiatives. This approach will ensure that sustainability is a core value, not just a response to legislation.

Globally, forests are being lost at an alarming rate of around 10 million hectares per year, particularly in tropical and subtropical regions. The EUDR, aiming to stop commodity-driven deforestation, is set to come into force on 30 December 2025 for medium and large companies. It will cover all imports and exports to and from the EU of commodities such as cattle, cocoa, coffee, palm oil, soya, rubber and wood. While the EUDR has the potential to create significant positive impacts, such as strengthening traceability, reducing deforestation and fostering greater supply chain collaboration, it also presents challenges.

Smallholder producers and local intermediaries, particularly SMEs with limited access to the tools and data needed for compliance, risk exclusion from EU supply chains if they cannot meet the regulation's requirements. Without careful implementation and support, this could exacerbate existing inequalities and undermine livelihoods in cocoa-producing regions. However, the EUDR is aligned with ECOM's commitments to protect nature, combat deforestation, and enhance transparency and responsibility in our supply chains, helping to raise awareness of the negative impact of deforestation, while driving positive change across the cocoa supply chain.

Our compliance strategy focuses on working with suppliers and other partners on technology, sourcing and traceability, and the adoption and evolution of policies and risk assessment approaches. We have made strong progress with the deployment of our traceability and mapping technology, implementing a baseline system for short-term compliance, with plans for future upgrades to achieve global scale and efficiency.

The EUDR delay has allowed us to learn from the efforts made in 2024 to continue strategy development and use the extra time to further outreach. However, it has also created uncertainty for some suppliers who are concerned that their compliance efforts may not result in financial benefits or access to the EU market. We are actively working with our suppliers to ensure they understand both our own and our clients' commitments to preventing deforestation. We prioritise partnerships with suppliers who are positively engaging with our preparation and already taking action, while also supporting efforts to assist more producers meet market requirements. We want to ensure that all possible compliant producers have access to the EU market, limiting exclusion. To achieve this, we provide training and information sessions, implement new technology and initiate client-driven projects, while providing continuous support from our origin and global teams.



5.9

Deforestation and land use

- **NEW KPI:** Identify and prevent deforestation, in respect of land that has been degraded or deforested since 2020, with the implementation of strong monitoring, risk assessment, due diligence and remediation process in all our supply chains by 2025
- **Status:** In progress

As highlighted throughout this Report, deforestation is one of the most pressing land use issues worldwide. The growing global demand for resources drives deforestation, which significantly contributes to climate change by disrupting weather patterns, destroying wildlife habitats, and threatening biodiversity and entire ecosystems. Since forests play a crucial role in absorbing carbon from the atmosphere, deforestation accelerates the rate of climate change.

Measuring deforestation

ECOM measures deforestation using its proprietary remote sensing technology, ERDA (ECOM Research Deforestation Analysis). ECOM began to develop ERDA in collaboration with a remote sensing expert group at Cranfield University in late 2022, with the primary aim of measuring deforestation within ECOM's supply chains more accurately.

To create an enhanced remote sensing tool, radar technology was chosen to overcome common issues encountered in publicly available deforestation assessment methods. An advantage of using radar data is that it can penetrate through the tree canopy, allowing for a measurement of the underlying woody biomass. Leveraging the fact that crop trees such as cocoa and coffee have significantly less biomass than forest trees, we are able to better distinguish between forest tree removal and farm management events.

The deforestation risk assessment carried out for each farm consists of measuring the area of deforestation within its boundaries since 31 December 2020. A level of risk is assigned to each farm according to the following categories:

No Risk: No deforestation since the cut-off date

Negligible Risk: Deforestation of less than 0.1 hectares since the cut-off date

High Risk: Deforestation of greater than 0.1 hectares since the cut-off date

Where ERDA identifies potential deforestation, we pause sourcing and initiate the Deforestation Verification Protocol (DVP) for validation. This two-tiered strategy prevents unnecessary farm exclusions due to false positives, ensures supply chain stability and maintains long-term relationships with producers and suppliers.

Deforestation Verification Protocol

The DVP is a standardised, Group-wide procedure for verifying the legitimacy of automated deforestation risk identified in cocoa and coffee farms. It comprises four stages, two conducted at desktop level and two at farm level. If the assessor fails to establish negligible risk by the conclusion of stage four, the deforestation event is confirmed, and we are forced to exclude the farmer from supplying EU-bound shipments. To mitigate the negative social impact this has on affected producers, a remediation strategy should be implemented, which could include reforestation efforts or a payment for ecosystem services programme to incentivise the farmer to reforest their farm.



Spotlight

Implementing the DVP

Can you tell us a bit about yourself?

I'm Regina, I'm based in Mexico, but I am part of the regional team for Peru and Ecuador. I'm a sustainable development engineer by profession and am a Sustainability Programmes Coordinator and Analyst. Currently, one of my main responsibilities is addressing deforestation in Peru, particularly around polygons and deforestation verification.

And how does this work?

Right now, field technicians use different methods to create polygons. In the end, they send them to me and I consolidate everything into a single layer. We use two methods to check for deforestation: one is through ERDA, which is the ECOM global solution, and the other is a government tool in Peru called GEO Bosques, which also shows deforestation based on locally available information.

We then compare the deforestation within the polygons and categorise it as no risk, negligible risk or high risk. When ERDA identifies potential deforestation and categorises a farm as a non-negligible risk, we receive centre points of potential deforestation areas and use the DVP to verify them. But right now we are transitioning to ECOMMaps and I am really looking forward to that - it is really going to help facilitate the process.

Can you explain the DVP in more detail please?

First, you need to have your polygons and send them for verification with the internal satellite deforestation system, ERDA. Once you send them, if deforestation risk areas are detected within farm boundaries, the protocol begins.

The protocol is divided into four stages. Stages 1 and 2 are desk-based, while stages 3 and 4 are field-based. Depending on the results of stages 1 and 2, the process may be escalated to stages 3 and 4. Stages 1 and 2 involve gathering polygon data from the farmer and using a high-resolution satellite system to check for deforestation.

For the EUDR, deforestation that has occurred after 2020 would render the farm ineligible to sell to the EU, so if there is an image from 2022 showing deforestation and a previous one from 2019 showing none, we know that it most likely happened after 2020 and must be escalated to the field.

In the field, if we find it was a satellite system error or just an event that was difficult to confidently assess online, we can determine negligible risk. But we aim to verify as many producers as possible through desk-level checks to avoid unnecessary field visits (more on that below).

Stages 3 and 4 involve visiting the farm, matching coordinates with the satellite system and conducting an interview with the farmer using a series of questions. The process also includes photographic evidence to ensure there's proof that no deforestation occurred. If no deforestation is found, it's recorded and no further issues arise. If deforestation is found, the producer is notified and the purchase is stopped.

I think it's beneficial in the sense that, if everything goes well, it helps not just the farmer, but also our company by protecting us from regulatory risk.

Do you prefer the desk or the field?

Honestly, I prefer working in the office because I am not very used to the long car journeys we need to take in order to get to the Warehouses and farms, but I do believe both have something very compelling.

It's interesting to see how things work on the ground. From a desk, things can seem simple, but in reality, there's a lot of work involved that is often overlooked. For example, at the desk looking at images, you might think there's clear deforestation and, if decisions are made based on that, it could harm many producers. So it's important to go to the field to confirm whether there really was deforestation or if it was caused by natural factors. This way, you reduce the risk of unfair exclusion and can continue with the internal process without any issues.

Communication can be difficult too, particularly with the field technicians doing the verification. This is because they have a lot on their plates, such as managing traceability and also having to fill out new and expansive questionnaires. I understand that this verification is necessary because it helps the producers, but the reality is that it's not easy. Managing a five-hour trip is incredibly complicated, especially right now with the rainy season in the jungle. Of course, it has to be done, because we've seen different satellite systems and none of them are 100% accurate. But it's not as simple as just going to the field to verify - it's much more complex and time-consuming.

What are your thoughts on zero-deforestation regulations and their impact on smallholder producers?

I understand where this regulation comes from, but I also think there's more to it than just saying "they deforested and that's it". Yes, deforestation has negative consequences, but I believe producers don't always do it consciously. They might be misinformed or driven by economic necessity. So, the fact that they deforested and now lose another source of income, from say cocoa or coffee, because of it - it's complicated.

It's a tricky issue because, from a regulatory and office perspective, it seems like a simple and practical solution to prevent deforestation. But I think having zero tolerance and no flexibility could risk negative consequences in the future.

What is the reaction of producers when it comes to doing the DVP on their farms?

There's definitely a human factor involved - it's not just a matter of asking questions and getting answers. The issue of deforestation is sensitive and comes with consequences. As a result, producers are more reserved now. They're not necessarily surprised or confused about what's happening, but you still have to explain that they need to fill out a questionnaire, because sometimes satellite images could have errors. This process is just to ensure everything is in order with their farm.

By connecting with the farmer, you create a more trusting environment, so they're not as defensive, closed off or afraid of what might happen. They're much calmer in that regard. A lot of times, people in the office don't understand how challenging it is to go to the field and what that really involves. But I believe that, at the end of the day, if you approach it with care and empathy - explaining that it's meant to help, not harm - the farmer becomes much more open. But it can also be a bit tedious for the producers: "Another questionnaire? Again?" I think it's more about the questionnaire itself. When it's short, it's great, but when it's longer, it can be a bit tiring, though I understand why it's so detailed.

What has been your biggest learning?

It's obviously important to have these regulations for better control and to prevent issues, but there also needs to be some flexibility. Allowing room for learning and remediation is essential. A rigid, zero-tolerance approach doesn't work for every case.

5.10

**Regina Garcia
Herrera**
Sustainability Programmes
Coordinator and Analyst, Peru

5.11

Partnerships and purchasing

- **NEW KPI:** Complete a partnership and purchasing practices map across the cocoa supply chain, identifying risks and opportunities to improve transparency and responsible sourcing practices, to enable us to provide evidence-based insights to our policies by the end of 2028
- **Status:** In progress

A partnership and purchasing practices map will allow us to assess and improve our purchasing practices. While this may seem like an internal goal, our aim is to foster collaboration within the sector and increase transparency on this issue. Through this map, we hope to identify risks and opportunities that will enhance transparency and responsible sourcing practices, enabling us to provide evidence-based insights to inform our policies. Achieving this will require collaboration between sustainability teams and various departments within ECOM to ensure that responsible practices are effectively implemented and consistently adhered to.

Investing in communication and strengthening purchasing practices will build partnerships with suppliers and enhance cocoa supply chain reliability, stability and efficiency. Recent momentum from NGOs and multi-stakeholder initiatives has brought renewed attention to responsible purchasing practices as a cornerstone of sustainable supply chains. For example, the Voice Network,¹⁴ DISCO,¹⁵ IDH¹⁶ and ETI, among others, have all published frameworks and theories on how to approach this area.

These organisations are helping to shift the narrative from compliance to partnership and from risk management to long-term value creation. Across the board, several critical elements aimed at reshaping buyer-supplier dynamics have been suggested, such as:

- Pay fair, transparent prices
- Ensure timely and reliable payments
- Commit to long-term relationships
- Support traceability and transparency
- Build strong farmer organisations
- Share and respect purchasing data and practices
- Align procurement with sustainability commitments

These principles aim to ensure purchasing decisions support rather than undermine efforts to promote farmer livelihoods and long-term sustainability. A foundational principle is the recognition of shared responsibility: purchasing companies must ensure that their own practices support, rather than hinder, decent labour standards.

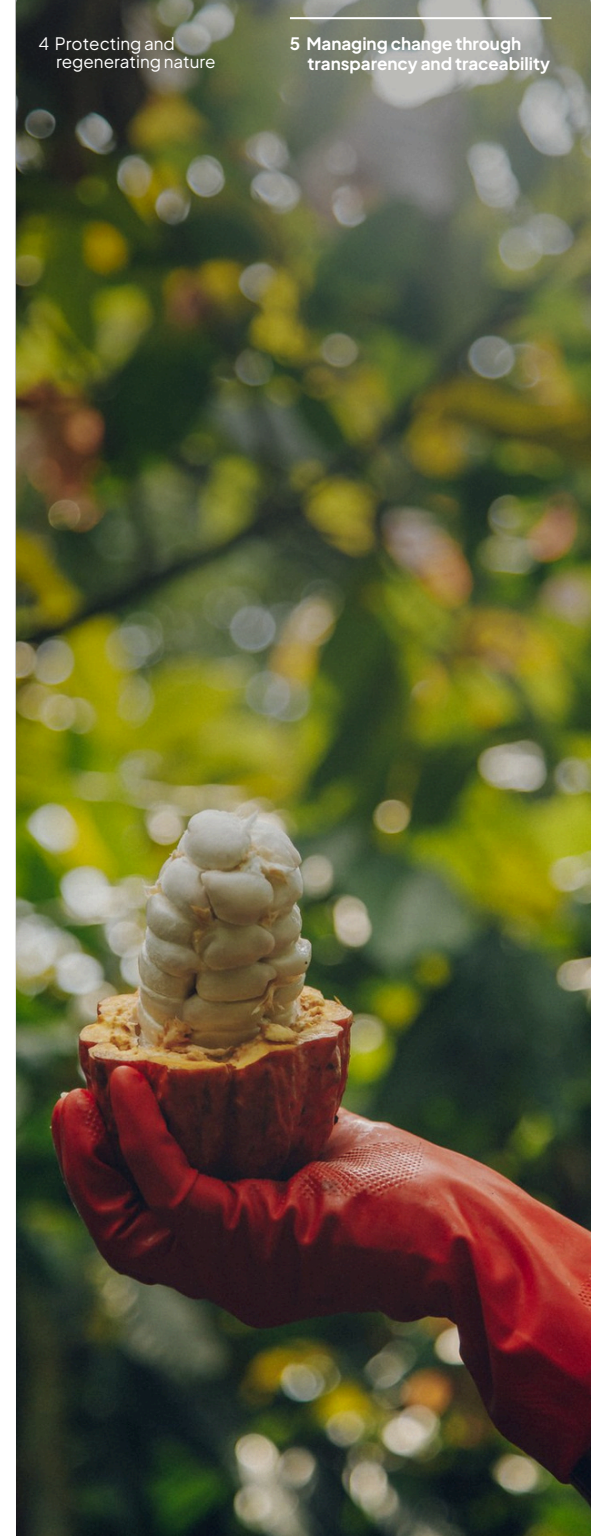
ECOM is already taking some actions in this space. We are working with producers and partners to reduce economic risks. Solutions such as long-term contracts with producer organisations and access to market information for suppliers offer a degree of security and aid with long-term planning. We also offer market-based price risk management tools to our suppliers, including forward contracts, hedging, options, leveraging our trading knowledge for mutual benefit.

Together, these tools and frameworks are valuable contributions to the evolving field of responsible sourcing and purchasing, and we intend to explore them within our organisation. By investigating these resources, we aim to facilitate internal discussions that will help us gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities we face as a company positioned in the middle of the supply chain. This will also allow us to identify how we can better support our stakeholders and improve our practices. Through this process, we seek to push beyond industry standards, while ensuring that we address the unique needs and responsibilities of our role within the supply chain.

¹⁴ VOICE Network. (2023). Purchasing practices in cocoa.

¹⁵ Dutch Initiative on Sustainable Cocoa (DISCO). (2024, April 16). Procurement practices position paper. IDH – The Sustainable Trade Initiative.

¹⁶ IDH – The Sustainable Trade Initiative. (n.d.). Procurement library. Income Driver Calculator.



5.12

Forced labour mitigation

- **NEW KPI:** Benchmark ECOM's forced labour risk mitigation procedures with the Verité Farm Labour Due Diligence Toolkit and develop a roadmap to work towards leadership in each section by 2027
- **Status:** In progress

Accurate and up-to-date data on the national prevalence of forced labour in the major cocoa origin countries does not currently exist, but existing research suggests the issue is significantly less prevalent than child labour. A 2018 study by the Walk Free Foundation estimated that fewer than 1% of children and fewer than 0.4% of adults working in cocoa-growing areas in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana are affected by forced labour. However, because the harms caused by forced labour can be very severe, identifying and preventing forced labour in the cocoa industry remains a critical dimension of responsible cocoa sourcing.

A number of structural, social and economic factors make it challenging to address factors contributing to forced labour risk in cocoa-producing contexts. The supply chains are highly informal and fragmented, with many smallholder producers working independently in remote, hard-to-reach areas where monitoring is limited. The lack of formal contracts, documentation and consistent oversight further complicates detection. Additionally, migrant labourers, who may have been trafficked or coerced, are often involved, and they frequently lack legal protections or the means to report abuse.

To contribute to the ability of industry stakeholders to counter the risk of forced labour and other challenging salient issues in the cocoa sector, we worked with the NGO Verité to support the development of a toolkit. This toolkit allows us to better align with detailed guidance on implementing comprehensive human rights due diligence systems in agricultural supply chains such as ours.

In September 2024, Verité launched its [Farm Labour Due Diligence Toolkit](#), a free resource to help companies tackle challenging human rights issues such as forced labour risks – including on-farm and in the 'first mile'. The framework used in the toolkit aligns with and builds on the OECD's Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the OECD-FAO Guidance for Responsible Agricultural Supply Chains, as well as other human rights due diligence touchstones.

The framework comprises six elements, each with supporting components:

- Embed human rights in business management systems
- Assess human rights risks and harms
- Cease, prevent and mitigate human rights risks and harms
- Track and improve human rights performance
- Remediate human rights harms
- Report on progress

By benchmarking our own systems for preventing and addressing risks of forced labour against this framework, and by setting concrete goals for achieving a leadership level of maturity by 2027, we will ensure we can identify and eliminate risk factors of forced labour wherever they arise in our cocoa supply chain.



Appendix

Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
Agroforestry	<p>A plan and criteria specific to the producers' needs, interests and abilities developed in a participatory process and agreed upon with producers based on an assessment of the ability for the plan to deliver three benefits (productivity, economic and environmental). A landscape assessment is acceptable and can be used instead of farm-specific assessments if it is adapted to producers' needs, interests and abilities when implemented. The plan considers and incorporates the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A farmer's production goals, profit targets, interests, ambitions and abilities regarding adoption of agroforestry. 2. A farm's soil, climate, size, current cocoa planting density and other crop density, current yields and net profit. 3. The tree species, planting density/design, timeframe, labour requirements and financial investment needed to deliver the three benefits most effectively. 4. Details on how each farmer will receive the technical support, coaching, inputs and finance that they need to be successful. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Information from a market assessment that identifies the market demand and accessibility for a farmer to sell the agroforestry products identified in the plan.
Carbon reduction roadmap	The purposeful reduction of a carbon footprint through the scientific analysis of a supply chain, mapped out through a comprehensive, long-term plan.
Certified	Cocoa that has been certified by Rainforest Alliance, Fairtrade or Organic.
Child protection and the prioritisation of education training	<p>Informal or non-formal education based on a curriculum and delivered to producers using best practice methods for adult learning. It is focused on increasing knowledge, understanding and skills. It can be delivered one-on-one or in groups and can be continual or a one-off. The training curriculum includes all four core topics as per industry standards:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is child labour? 2. What types of work are children allowed/not allowed to do? 3. What activities are hazardous? 4. What are the associated risks?

Glossary of terms continued

Term	Definition
Climate-smart agriculture (CSA) training	Aims to mitigate carbon emissions from cocoa agriculture and help producers to adapt to the negative impact of climate change on cocoa production and to adapt agricultural practices, if necessary. CSA is not one action; it is rather an approach consisting of several possible actions. CSA is also not a 'one-size-fits-all' approach that is the same for every cocoa farmer; it depends on the specific impact of climate change (the identified climate threat) in a certain area and the capacity of the farmer to respond to this and apply suitable CSA practices.
Certified cocoa	Certified cocoa is cocoa produced according to ethical and sustainable standards set by organisations like Fairtrade or Rainforest Alliance, ensuring better conditions for farmers and the environment.
Conventional cocoa	Conventional cocoa refers to cocoa that is grown using standard agricultural practices, typically involving synthetic fertilisers, pesticides, and non-organic farming methods. It is typically only traceable to origin country.
Counterparty	A legal entity or group on the opposing end of a financial transaction or contract, often to which financial risk exists.
ECOM Group	Our global operations, which cover the Cocoa division, as well as all our other commodities and operations (e.g. coffee, cotton, etc.).
Economic resilience	The ability of an economic or socio-economic system to withstand sudden changes or disasters.
Environmental, social and governance (ESG)	Refers to company practices around, impacts on and efforts to manage environmental, social and governance performance in such a way as to minimise negative impacts and amplify positive outcomes, both materially and from a reputational perspective.
Farm	The total amount of productive cocoa land the farmer manages and harvests from. In many cases, there is a collection of multiple plots for one farmer.
Farmer	One person in a single residence on a farm where the primary occupation of the household is the operation of the cocoa farm.
Implement	Can be done directly by the organisation itself or its suppliers, or indirectly by building capacity among local communities or by supporting local public actors.

Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
Good agricultural practices (GAP)	Agricultural methods that include pruning, pest and disease management, weed management, shade management and harvest management. These practices are promoted to producers to improve sustainable cocoa production, and provide the basic environmental and operational conditions necessary to produce safe, clean and healthy cocoa beans.
Income diversification programmes	Programmes that increase the proportion of income derived from non-cocoa farm sources.
Net Zero	Achieving a balance between the amount of emissions produced and those removed from the atmosphere in order to reduce global warming.
Origin-sourced supply chain	All cocoa beans purchased through an ECOM-managed operation in a sourcing country. Beans do not have to be sustainable or under a programme. In 2024 for cocoa, this includes 11 origins: Cameroon, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador, Ghana, Mexico, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Peru, Uganda and Vietnam.
Partner-sourced supply chain	All cocoa beans purchased through a third-party/non-ECOM managed origin operation. Cocoa can be certified or conventional.
Responsible practices and trade	To actively and consciously ensure that methods and operations within a supply chain do not cause significant negative effects on people, communities or the environment.
Sustainable	A farm that operates under the interventions or investments made to support cocoa sustainability related to economic sustainability (farmer livelihoods, income, productivity, alternative income generation or living income measures), social sustainability (working towards the elimination of child labour and forced labour, community development, and women and youth empowerment) or environmental sustainability (working towards the elimination of deforestation, and promotion of reforestation, climate-smart practices or agroforestry). It must be third-party verified and include components of traceability. It does not include Organic but does include Rainforest Alliance, Fairtrade certification and third-party verified sustainability programmes.

Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
Traceability to farmer or community/farmer organisation	<p>Product traceability in the cocoa sector is the “ability to follow the physical movement and/or mass conformity of cocoa through specified stage(s) of production, processing and distribution” (International Organization for Standardization (ISO), African Regional Standards (ARS).</p> <p>Traceability to farmer: In a traceable supply chain to farmer level, polygons or GPS points are the standard for all farms, with unique farmer IDs tracked to first purchase point.</p> <p>Traceability to community/farmer organisation: In a traceable supply chain to community/organisation level, GPS points are the standard for the first transaction point in the cocoa supply chain, where cocoa transfers from the farmer’s control to the control of a subsequent supply chain actor. This is typically also the first point where one farmer’s cocoa is aggregated with cocoa from other producers (hence, it is commonly referred to as the ‘first aggregation point’). In the direct supply, it may be a buying station, cooperative section, farmer group, Purchasing Clerk Shed (Ghana) or other type of farmer organisation’s cocoa purchasing location.</p> <p>Outside of the direct supply, it may include traitants, pisteurs or intermediaries, who may purchase cocoa at the community or the farm levels.</p>



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