

POWER OF DATA

Traceability solutions in cocoa to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

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To what sustainable development goal do you deliver?

Product traceability always means knowing the people behind a product. As such, traceability helps to support farmers, their families and communities with the services they really need. This allows us to support farmers in getting more efficient, to diversify and rejuvenate their farms, to protect forests and to assess and address children and other people at risk.

What was the situation?

Most farmers we work with, were formerly not organised. This means they sold cocoa to any buyer who was ready to buy. This cocoa is usually not traceable and the buyer has no objectives other than buying cocoa. Once a farmer starts to deliver cocoa to us on a regular basis, we integrate him or her into our traceability system. This allows us to have the farmer and their family benefit from our certification and sustainability programmes.

What did you do?

We manage traceability pragmatically within a hybrid system. Given the frequently poor access to electricity, poor network coverage and low experience of buyers with digital systems, we trace the buying process with the farmer on paper up to the reception in our warehouses. We then digitise these and any further movements of goods in our digital database system. The system allows us to track the product flow from farm to port and, more importantly, link it with information about the farmer, his family, their plots and the programmes they are involved in.

We plan to digitise the entire process in the future. But this only becomes really powerful if combined with digital payment for the cocoa. We are, however, far from this in West Africa. It is a situation that needs to be addressed on higher levels and would resolve many issues of an untransparent supply chain like cocoa.

What are the results?

Because of traceability, we know more about the farmers, their families and the plots they grow cocoa on. This allows us to certify the farmers and pay premiums. We can identify the needs of farmers and their families more easily and, with time, are able to follow the impact our sustainability programmes and adopt them if necessary.

Who was involved and how?

Traceability is a concept that involves everybody along the supply chain. This starts with the farmer communities, involves buyers, truck drivers, warehouse managers and the administration in the office. The management is strongly involved as traceability is a concept that has to be introduced top-down. Traceability means to introduce a corporate culture that is based on transparency. This means challenges along a supply chain become visible. To accept and then address these challenges is the ultimate goal of traceability.

How could the solution be scaled?

Scaling traceability is not a technical problem but rather an issue for people management and corporate culture. Technology is just a tool, digitisation in itself not an asset. It's about the people along the value chain who need to see value behind traceability and transparency.