

Press Release

German Initiative on Sustainable Cocoa Advocates Forest Conservation in Cocoa Farming

Jointly Turning Small Steps into Big Ones

- **Expert discussion at the International Sweets and Biscuits Fair (ISM) in Cologne: “Cocoa Farming and Forest Conservation in West Africa – towards a Solution“**

Cologne/Berlin, January 30, 2017 – “Every four seconds, forest is destroyed in the size of a soccer field.“ This was pointed out by Gunther Beger, Head of the Directorate “Policy Issues of Development Cooperation; Civil Society, Churches and Private Sector; Rural Development” of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) at the event of the German Initiative on Sustainable Cocoa (GISCO), addressing the topic “Cocoa Farming and Forest Conservation in West Africa – towards a Solution.”

One of the main drivers of deforestation in West Africa is agriculture. In Ghana, one third of the country’s total forest cover has faded since 1990. Côte d’Ivoire has recorded a decrease of 80% since the country’s independence in 1960. Currently, 250,000 ha are deforested in Côte d’Ivoire per year. Beger elucidated that the degraded land is used for growing cocoa in a large part. Because of low yields, cocoa farmers repeatedly convert forests into farming land. At the invitation of GISCO, experts discussed approaches to aligning cocoa farming and forest conservation at the International Sweets and Biscuits Fair (ISM) in Cologne with almost 100 participants.

The Parliamentary State Secretary to the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL), Peter Bleser, opened the event. He underlined the goal of the Federal Government to counteract deforestation, also by means of zero-deforestation value chains. Chairing the group of states supporting the Amsterdam-Declaration, Germany will foster a European-wide dialogue among the various commodity initiatives. The German Initiative on Sustainable Cocoa should be involved in this process. According to Bleser, GISCO’s success is anchored in the joint efforts of the multistakeholder-initiative to tackle the challenges in the cocoa sector and its direct contact with and activities in producer countries.

The German Federal Government, the German confectionery industry, the German retail grocery trade and civil society joined forces in the German Initiative on Sustainable Cocoa, counting over 70 members. The Chairman of the Board, Wolf Kropp-Büttner, emphasized, “It is GISCO’s matter of concern to advance a sustainable cocoa value chain, in which deforestation is granted no space in the medium-term.”

Christian Mensah from the Rainforest Alliance, responsible for the cocoa sustainability program in West Africa, reinforced this concern. “When the last tree dies, your cocoa business dies,” a local proverb says. Yet, Mensah stressed that this knowledge would have little effect if the cocoa farmers continued their life in poverty. “A person confronted with the question of how to feed a family has no choice,” Mensah explained in Cologne.

Landscape Approach as Future Perspective also in Cocoa Farming

The core plea of the environmental and agricultural experts was that sustainable cocoa cultivation and forest conservation must be joined in the form of a landscape approach. The industry needs to exceed its sectoral practice used so far.

One example is the Juabeso-Bia Landscape Management Initiative from Ghana. Its key idea is that cocoa farmers get an additional financial benefit from preserving resources. Elijah Kofi Owusu, Chairman of the initiative, originates from a cocoa farming family. Having been unable to attain proper education himself, he wants his seven children to enjoy a good high school and, if possible, college education. He demanded, “We need to manage cocoa cultivation well. Hence, it is also important to get a good price for this.” The Juabeso-Bia-Initiative counts on a diversified cultivation. Besides cocoa, other crops such as cassava are cultivated and they invest in beekeeping.

Ulrike Tröger, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), referred to the ecosystem services of forests. In addition to known services like providing wood and medical plants as well as storing carbon, forests are also important for the microclimate and water regulation. Thus, forests are of utmost importance for cocoa cultivation in their surrounding regions and contribute significantly to mitigating climate change effects. The environmental expert introduced the Tai National Park in Côte d’Ivoire, the last large-scale, continuous rainforest ecosystem in West Africa, as an example for arguing that the conservation of forest worth protecting and having a unique biodiversity



was possible. Over decades, this forest has virtually remained unchanged, albeit with enormous efforts made by the park managers.

In order to ensure the continuous success of the project despite a growing population, Ulrike Tröger addressed the industry representatives to support the protection of the Tai National Park and its neighboring forests. She said, “Assume responsibility towards the cocoa farmers and contribute to securing the basis for production.” This would work if the remaining protected areas continued to be sufficiently supported and be linked across borders. Cultivating cocoa in agroforestry systems can be conducive to the respective purposes.

How can more productive and also more resilient cocoa plants, for example, against drought impacted by climate change, be successfully developed? Brigitte Laliberté from Bioversity International advocates that the diversity that exists in cocoa can meet these challenges if we safeguard, screen and use it in breeding efforts. The challenge faced is that, “We screen the genetic diversity with the goal of increasing quality and productivity, for instance, yet, at the same time, we need to anticipate which traits will be significant for sustainable production in five or ten years,” Laliberté said. Therefore, the African cocoa, which originates from Latin America, needs more genetic diversity to develop the improved and adapted planting materials needed today and for the future.

Participating in a project for forest conservation in Ghana, Alistair Davis from OLAM introduced the company’s approaches towards solutions. He stated that forest conservation and deforestation should be at the forefront and center of the private sectors’ collaborative initiatives. In addition, “Cocoa farmers need to get better prices and premiums for their product in order to be able to invest in trees, better plant material and shaping sustainable, forest-preserving landscapes.”

The members of the German Initiative on Sustainable Cocoa will follow the core of this appeal even more intensively, also in collaboration with other initiatives.



Forum Nachhaltiger Kakao

German Initiative on Sustainable Cocoa



Picture Caption:

Approaches to aligning cocoa farming and forest conservation discussed at the invitation of GISCO by (from the left): Alistair Davis (OLAM), Brigitte Laliberté (Bioversity International), Elijah Kofi Owusu (Juabeso-Bia Landscape Management Board, Ghana) Christian Mensah (Rainforest Alliance), Ulrike Tröger (GIZ) at the International Sweets and Biscuits Fair (ISM), Cologne.

Photo: German Initiative on Sustainable Cocoa/A. Köhring

About the German Initiative on Sustainable Cocoa

The association German Initiative on Sustainable Cocoa (GISCO) is a joint initiative of the Federal Government, civil society, industry and retail grocery trade. It brings together relevant actors from Germany with those of producing countries and international initiatives. The aim of the initiative is to improve the livelihood of cocoa farmers, to protect and conserve natural resources and biodiversity in the producing countries, as well as to increase the proportion of sustainably produced cocoa. GISCO currently has more than 70 members and welcomes prospect members.

Media Requests:

Contact: Dagmar Seyfert

Tel.: +49 6196 79-1158 | Mobil: +49 151 117 80 4951158 | Fax: +49 6196 7980-1158

E-Mail: Dagmar.Seyfert@giz.de | Web: www.kakaoforum.de