



ETG | Beyond Beans: Promoting agroforestry in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire

Beyond Beans foundation and Export Trading Group

The Beyond Beans foundation was established in April 2020 when Cocoanect BV integrated with the Export Trading Group (ETG). ETG | Beyond Beans is ETG's sustainability foundation and it implements activities across the group's cocoa supply chains. Sustainability programmes, including those related to agroforestry, are implemented through ETG | Beyond Beans' subsidiary foundations in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria.

ETG | Beyond Beans makes direct investments in agroforestry, and implements agroforestry activities on behalf of clients. The main activity for this is the distribution of multipurpose tree seedlings for on-farm planting and developing agroforestry systems. In Côte d'Ivoire, ETG | Beyond Beans distributed 233,000 multipurpose trees in 2021-2022 across its 40,000 farmers. In the same period, ETG | Beyond Beans distributed 130,000 multipurpose tree seedlings among 20,000 farmers in Ghana on behalf of its clients.

What is agroforestry and why is it important?

ETG | Beyond Beans works with agroforestry models in line with recommendations from the World Cocoa Foundation and Rainforest Alliance. Agroforestry involves planting a minimum of 16 multipurpose trees per ha, but best practice aims for 25 – 35 multipurpose trees per hectare. They are also working on intense or advanced agroforestry systems with 60+ multipurpose trees per hectare. In these more advanced systems the density and spacing of different trees vary, depending on the system, associated species and environmental conditions.

Tree species are selected based on farmer preferences, while also meeting the desired economic returns from timber, fruit and other products. The aim is to combine species with a range of characteristics, such as fruit and timber trees, fast- and slow-growing trees, high- and low-density foliage, etc. Environmental benefits include improved biodiversity, soil quality and microclimate.

ETG | Beyond Beans promotes agroforestry as part of its wider efforts to improve the environmental sustainability of cocoa landscapes. The foundation also works to promote forest conservation and reforestation in cocoa landscapes, including restoration of riparian forests, support for community forestry, and protection of forest reserves, including mapping of farms to prevent encroachment into, or sourcing from, forest reserves.

This company case report is an annex to the report "[Promoting cocoa agroforestry in West Africa: Experiences from the private sector and opportunities for collaborative action](#)" by Tropenbos International, Tropenbos Ghana and Nitidae.

The opinions and views expressed in this publication are based on the company's input and do not necessarily reflect the views of Tropenbos International, Tropenbos Ghana or Nitidae.



ETG | Beyond Beans' strategy for promoting agroforestry

ETG | Beyond Beans works on agroforestry across several projects with varying strategies. The ASASE project in Ghana's Western, Ashanti and Eastern regions, brings together multiple elements of the strategy (Figure 1). This project is implemented together with Tropenbos Ghana, Meridia and the Ghanaian Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources.

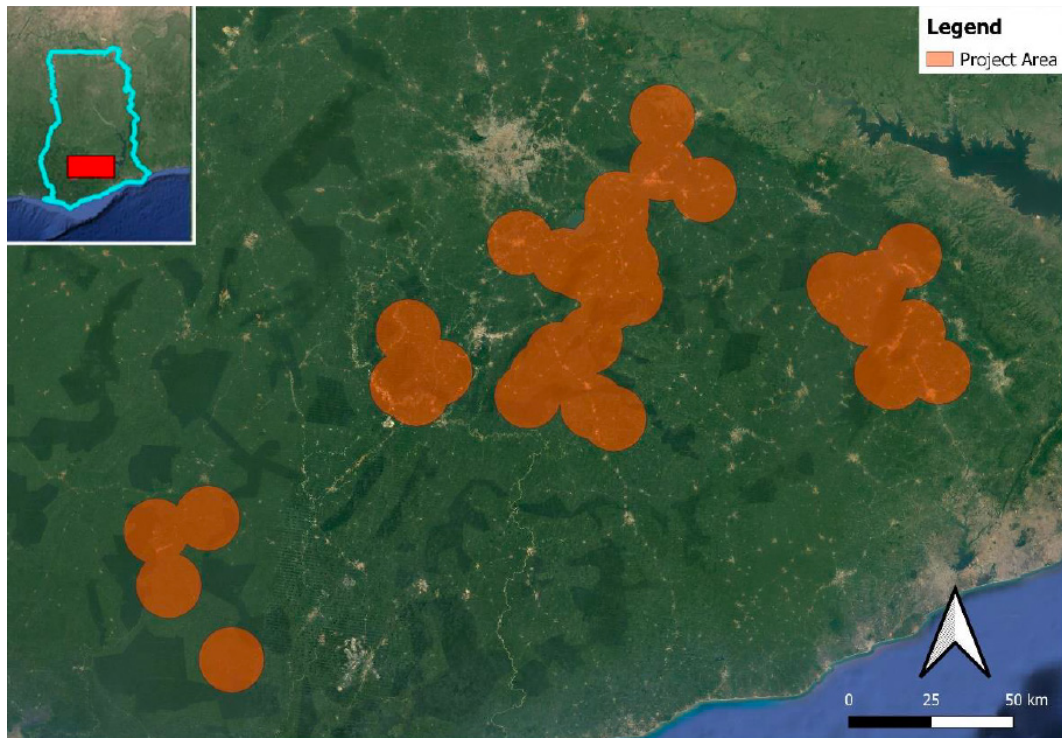


Figure 1. The ASASE project communities

Agroforestry in the ASASE project is part of a wider strategy that promotes forest protection and restoration at the landscape level. It builds on the realization that improving farm yields alone is insufficient to reduce deforestation, and that a landscape-scale approach helps to preserve the ecosystem services that community livelihoods depend on. That means looking beyond the boundaries of cocoa farms.

The ASASE project aims for higher income for farmers, reduced pressure on forests, increased forest protection and on- and off-farm restoration. To achieve this, the project works towards improved tenure security, increased adoption of agroforestry, restoration of forest patches, farmer engagement in forest protection and community forestry initiatives, increased entrepreneurial activity (especially for women) and higher cocoa yields. The key elements of the strategy to achieve these outcomes is described below.

Training and coaching

The ASASE project trains farmers in good agricultural practices, which includes guidance on the planting and use of shade trees. Farmers receive information on suitable species, appropriate tree densities, and various planting models. They also learn about management techniques for shade trees, such as pruning and protecting young seedlings from damage during weeding. ETG | Beyond Beans also carries out individual coaching, which includes the use of a simple to understand calendar tool that supports smallholder producers through a three-year farm development plan tailored to their circumstances. ETG | Beyond Beans has observed that this coaching increases the adoption of good agricultural and agroforestry practices, because it gives farmers time alone with a coach to discuss concerns and select optimal planting locations.

Providing seedlings and supporting nursery establishment

To enable farmers to adopt agroforestry, ETG | Beyond Beans ensures that they have access to multipurpose seedlings by distributing seedlings for free. The most suitable approach depends on the context. In Côte d'Ivoire, ETG | Beyond Beans purchases seedlings from contracted third party nurseries, whereas in Ghana, they support communities to set up local nurseries. This enables farmers to plant more trees of species that are better suited to their needs and preferences. Where possible, ETG | Beyond Beans works with women to set up and find employment in nurseries. To ensure a good match between seedling supply and demand, ETG | Beyond Beans carries out surveys to assess farmer preferences. It digitally captures data on tree distribution per farmer, and verifies uptake at the farm level for a sample of the farmers to estimate survival rates.

Land and tree tenure

In the ASASE project, ETG | Beyond Beans works together with Meridia to support 3,000 farmers to obtain land and tree titles. Tenure security is very important to increase the willingness of farmers to engage in agroforestry and to make other investments that increase the sustainable production of their cocoa farms.

Access to finance

ETG | Beyond Beans knows that access to finance helps farmers make the necessary enabling investments for adopting agroforestry, for example replanting cocoa, securing land documentation, and investing in income-generating activities other than cocoa. This finance is generally not used to make a direct investment in agroforestry, especially because seedlings are provided free of charge. To increase access to finance for farmers, ETG | Beyond Beans works with communities to establish village savings and loans associations (VSLAs), often involving women. In the future, ETG | Beyond Beans hopes to pilot an approach with microfinance institutions in the landscape, who can offer loans that allow farmers to access more finance to increase on-farm investment.

Payment for ecosystem services

As part of the ASASE project, ETG | Beyond Beans will develop a payment for environmental services (PES) system, together with the farmers who still own the area's remaining forest patches. ETG | Beyond Beans has experience with PES in Côte d'Ivoire, where it worked with a community on the Hanna River to create a 20-metre natural barrier to protect the riverbank and link two national parks. In that case, farmers received in-kind compensation for their protection and restoration efforts in the form of training, fertilizers and seedlings.

Furthermore, ETG | Beyond Beans is implementing a PES scheme for a 2500 of its farmers in Ghana. This scheme is compensating farmers for planting distributed seedlings and making sure they survive the first 3 critical years. The scheme is paying farmers digital payments for each seedling. There are four verification and payment moments: once they have planted the seedlings, and a three consecutive moments for each year that the seedlings survive. This scheme is expected to show an increased uptake, planting and survival rate for distributed multipurpose tree seedlings. ETG | Beyond Beans is advocating including similar payments in its agroforestry projects with clients to ensure uptake and increase survival rates of seedlings.

Supporting community forest management

In the ASASE project, ETG | Beyond Beans collaborates with Tropenbos Ghana to support 25 new community resource management committees (CRMCs). The project strengthens the capacities of these committees in forest management planning, forest protection and restoration, and regulating the harvest of timber and non-timber forest products. The CRMCs are also encouraged to provide input in the formulation of forestry policies at the national, regional and district levels.





Key lessons and challenges

There is no one-size-fits-all approach: Approaches for promoting agroforestry must be adapted to the local context. This requires an assessment of the conditions in each landscape. Carrying out such an assessment is a resource-intensive process and one that makes the implementation and monitoring of agroforestry efforts complex. Also, more guidance is needed on species selection for different climatic regions; at the moment, existing guidelines are too general.

The potential of payment for ecosystem services: PES payments build trust and motivate farmers to collaborate in the protection and restoration of forests, and they encourage farmers to adopt agroforestry. Yet it is still not certain if the benefits of agroforestry, restoration and protection are apparent to farmers, and if farmers would continue with these practices without financial incentives.

Insecure land and tree tenure is a major barrier: Especially in Ghana, insecure tree tenure remains a significant obstacle to tree planting, as farmers are concerned that the Forestry Commission can give their trees away to a concessionaire. There are also communities in the project landscapes where farmers do not have secure land ownership because of disputes between local leaders. In addition, farmers who have moved into a new area are reluctant to plant trees, since they are less likely to have secure land rights, and may have less knowledge of locally adapted tree species if they have migrated from a region with a different climate. Addressing the issue of land and tree tenure is complex, however, and supporting farmers with land and tree title requires substantial resources. In the ASASE project, for example, nearly half of the budget is used to support farmers in obtaining this title.

Multipurpose tree nurseries are not cocoa nurseries: The process of setting up a nursery with a range of tree species as a viable business model is much more complex than establishing nurseries with only cocoa seedlings. The variety of species and the variation in demand make it difficult to establish clear procedures, and farmers are less motivated to pick-up, plant and take care of multipurpose tree seedlings than for cocoa seedlings. Much more knowledge is needed on how to grow different species, and for some species seeds are not easily available. ETG | Beyond Beans also perceives a vicious cycle in tree species selection: only a limited number of shade tree species are offered, so that's what farmers know, so that's what they ask for, so that's what provided, etc.

Landscape-scale approaches are needed: Individual companies alone cannot achieve scale, because their funds are insufficient for the resource-intensive and large-scale landscape engagements that are required. In the ASASE project, for example, landscape-level activities are possible only with public funding. Landscape approaches are needed, with companies and other actors working together with farmers to adopt agroforestry, in order to restore the land linked to the cocoa supply chain. Training in agroforestry is often included in broader courses provided to farmers, but so far more intensive agroforestry support reaches a much smaller group of farmers who participate in company projects.

Benefits are difficult to monitor: Success in agroforestry adoption is not measured by whether trees have been planted, but whether the social, environmental and economic benefits of agroforestry have become clear to farmers. This takes time, and since many farmers have only recently started planting trees again, these benefits cannot yet be seen or measured. For now, the focus is on monitoring the number of seedlings planted and their survival rates, but this quantitative information does not tell the whole story. Moreover, ETG | Beyond Beans encourages farmers to maintain existing trees and encourage the natural regeneration of native species, and although these efforts certainly contribute to the overall goal of achieving resilient cocoa landscapes, they are not counted in commitments to the Cocoa and Forests Initiative or to clients.

Agroforestry considerations may be different for men and women: Women's plots tend to be smaller than those of men, and from these small plots alone it can be almost impossible to maintain a living income. There is a need to consider this in strategies that promote agroforestry; larger incentives may well be required for women, beyond increased on-farm fuelwood production.



Engaging with local actors in restoration is key, but difficult: The effective restoration of cocoa landscapes, including through agroforestry practices, requires investing in enabling conditions. These include ecological and socioeconomic assessments for developing suitable restoration models, monitoring for adaptive management, and long-term support to farmers to nurture and plant their trees. Projects such as ASASE can provide the necessary support, but only for the duration of the project. To make these approaches more sustainable requires institutionalizing them in the context of local government policies and budgets, but this can be a long-term challenge.

Next steps

To further strengthen its agroforestry strategy, ETG | Beyond Beans is working on the following:

1. ETG | Beyond Beans is partnering with a consortium of universities (ETH Zurich, Cambridge, Oxford) provide their supply chains in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire as case studies for agroforestry research. In Ghana, the consortium will study the effectiveness of land and tree registration as a strategy to promote the adoption of agroforestry systems in cocoa. In Côte d'Ivoire, research will focus on innovative methods of community engagement and sensitisation to encourage agroforestry adoption. The overall outcome should help inform stakeholders (i.e. actors operating in the cocoa value chain) to better implement their activities towards cocoa agroforestry.
2. In Ghana, ETG | Beyond Beans is also collaborating with the university consortium to research effective monitoring and evaluation systems, using its own tree monitoring data to better understand what influences survival rates; for example, by linking this information to data on local climatic conditions. Results will be discussed with cooperatives and companies to better understand the outcomes of tree planting, and to support the adaptation of strategies to suit local conditions.
3. ETG | Beyond Beans is testing different types and implementations of Payment for Ecosystem services (cash, inkind, different amount and payment intervals) to see what is the best way of compensating farmers to adopt more agroforestry practices.

Finally, ETG | Beyond Beans also hopes for further improvements in the cocoa sector that encourage the adoption of agroforestry. Documentation regarding land rights should be better organized and streamlined in both Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. This will contribute to tenure security for farmers, and consequently increase their willingness to invest in sustainable practices, including agroforestry. There is also a need for more information on suitable tree species and planting models for various climatic zones. Currently, ETG | Beyond Beans does some of these analyses itself, based on guidance from the Climate Smart Cocoa manual,¹ but a joint understanding of the considerations involved would be helpful for cocoa farmers, cooperatives, companies and government, especially in supporting positive outcomes for tree planting in the long term.

1. <https://www.worldcocoaoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/climate-smart-agriculture-cocoa-training-manual.pdf>.