



World Cocoa
Foundation

WCF Position Paper

Deforestation and Forest Restoration

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1. Purpose of this Paper

Protecting forests is central to the future of sustainable cocoa. Ending cocoa-driven deforestation is essential to securing livelihoods, resilience and long-term market access. It is also critical to safeguarding ecosystem integrity, supporting healthy water and soil systems, regulating local climates, and curbing greenhouse-gas emissions, while helping to halt biodiversity loss. This paper outlines the World Cocoa Foundation's (WCF) position and priorities to help end cocoa-driven deforestation and promote forest restoration at scale. It presents a unified framework for engagement and communication between industry, governments and all other critical stakeholders to accelerate measurable progress on forest protection, restoration and sustainable cocoa production. It also sets out how the Cocoa & Forests Initiative (CFI) will evolve in its next phase to support delivery of these objectives.

2. Context and Rationale

Cocoa is vital for millions of smallholder farmers and a key source of income for entire communities in West Africa. As global demand for chocolate has grown, cocoa expansion has contributed to deforestation in origin countries. The drivers are complex and interlinked. They include insecure land tenure, migration, weak governance, low farm productivity, and poverty. Land-intensive sectors such as timber and mining are also leading causes of deforestation, and the associated land clearing for roads and resource extraction at times facilitate opportunistic cocoa expansion.

Deforestation in West Africa continues, and studies show that between 2002 and 2024, Côte d'Ivoire's total area of humid primary forest declined by approximately 28%, while Ghana lost around 14% over the same period.¹ Patterns of migration and land pressure from neighbouring countries have increased competition for resources leading to more intensive deforestation.

Moreover, in 2024, global cocoa prices surged to record highs as climate-related crop losses, aging trees and disease reduced supply. While these price spikes reflect scarcity, they also risk driving expansion into forested areas as farmers seek to capitalize on higher returns. This dynamic underscores how environmental degradation, productivity, market volatility, and farmer poverty are deeply intertwined - and why addressing all four elements holistically is essential to achieving lasting forest protection.

The first phase of the Cocoa & Forests Initiative (CFI) demonstrated that progress in curbing deforestation requires directly addressing these underlying factors. Despite collaborative efforts, cocoa-driven deforestation persisted in some areas during CFI's initial phase, largely due to structural drivers such as persistent smallholder poverty, low farm productivity, migration-related land pressures, and the incentive of higher cocoa prices. These lessons have informed the design of CFI's next phase, which focuses more explicitly on tackling these root causes and addressing enabling environment conditions to improve outcomes.

Different definitions of forests, deforestation, restoration and reforestation, along with inconsistent datasets and measurement methods, make it difficult to establish a shared baseline and track progress accurately. This lack of common standards complicates accountability and compliance. To foster clarity, WCF aligns its terminology with globally recognized frameworks like the Accountability Framework Initiative (AFi). Key terms such as "forest," "deforestation," "conversion," and "restoration" are used according to AFi definitions. For example, deforestation is defined as the loss of natural forest resulting from (i) conversion to agriculture or other non-forest land use, (ii) conversion to a tree plantation, or (iii) severe and sustained degradation; and conversion refers more broadly to the loss of a natural ecosystem due to replacement with agriculture/ other land use or a profound and sustained change in ecosystem composition, structure, or function.

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¹ Global Forest Watch (WRI), Primary forest loss in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana (2002–2022), based on data from Hansen et al. (2023), University of Maryland Global Forest Change v1.10 (2000–2022).

Restoration is defined as assisting the recovery of an ecosystem and its associated conservation values following degradation, damage, or destruction². Importantly, WCF's commitments apply specifically to cocoa-driven deforestation and restoration within the cocoa supply chain.

On the legislative side, the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) marks a pivotal step toward more sustainable and transparent cocoa supply chains. The World Cocoa Foundation supports the regulation's underlying objective of ensuring that cocoa entering the EU is legal and deforestation-free, and agrees that traceability, deforestation and legality risk assessment, and mitigation are essential components of effective due diligence. At the same time, WCF acknowledges that the regulation has been challenging to navigate due to historic lack of clarity, a flawed information system, and shifting targets, particularly around traceability and risk-assessment requirements. WCF stresses that what is truly needed is a coherent global regulatory approach built on clear rules and consistent expectations, where the core elements of traceability and deforestation-risk assessment are universally upheld.

WCF supports the EUDR's aims, particularly where legality requirements become clear and remain focused on forest-related issues. For WCF, successful implementation of the regulation will require stable, unambiguous rules; clear and consistent targets; and high-quality traceability and risk assessments across all producing countries. It also believes that the sector needs a standard mitigation protocol to provide companies with a baseline approach for addressing and eliminating deforestation-related cocoa from the supply chain.

Full traceability is considered non-negotiable: WCF views it as 100% necessary to achieve deforestation-free cocoa, regardless of the intended market. Achieving farm-to-point of export traceability at scale, supported by national systems shared between governments and industry, remains central to its strategy. Through the Cocoa & Forests Initiative, WCF and its partners are therefore developing verifiable systems and methodologies to make cocoa in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire fully traceable.

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2 Accountability Framework initiative, [Definitions](#)





Whilst this paper focuses primarily on protection and restoration efforts in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, where cocoa-driven deforestation has been severe and where opportunities for large-scale restoration exist, WCF recognises that similar challenges occur in other cocoa-producing countries. Issues such as land-use pressure, weak governance, and forest degradation are also present in regions including Liberia, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ecuador and parts of Southeast Asia. WCF acknowledges the need to expand and adapt its approaches to these contexts as well; however, the detailed strategies for those countries fall outside the scope of this paper.

Complementing regulatory compliance, WCF believes that a landscape-based, collaborative approach to forest protection and restoration is essential. This includes a combination of protecting remaining forests, reducing poverty, increasing cocoa production on existing land through multiple farm-level improvements, and supporting reforestation. Such a holistic landscape approach integrates diverse land uses and stakeholders, recognizing the interconnectedness of regions and their communities. It balances competing social, economic and environmental priorities and moves beyond fragmented, supply-chain-by-supply-chain approaches that are insufficient to address deforestation at scale. This reflects WCF's conviction that lasting progress requires strong, clear regulation, multi-sector collaboration, and practical, inclusive interventions that enable farming communities to thrive while keeping forests standing.

3. WCF's Perspective and Principles

Ending deforestation and restoring degraded land are essential to securing both environmental and economic sustainability. WCF's position rests on six principles.

1. Protect what remains

WCF advocates strengthening protection of intact forests through regulation, strong protected area management plans, enforcement, clear boundaries, transparent governance and accurate forest monitoring with alerts. Central to this effort is the availability of high-quality, up-to-date, and aligned forest data that is validated through systematic ground-truthing. Such data is essential not only for accountability and deforestation-risk assessment and mitigation, but also for prioritizing where protection efforts must be focused, particularly in areas of high conservation value, and where restoration should begin to achieve greatest impact.

At its core, WCF aims at conserving existing forests rather than converting them. To safeguard forest integrity, WCF promotes practical, on-the-ground mechanisms such as detailed mapping and demarcation of protected areas, installation of visible boundary markers, and the establishment of fire-resistant buffer zones to prevent encroachment. These actions are complemented by community based natural resource management, agroforestry, agronomic practices that increase cocoa productivity on existing land and incentive payments that empower cocoa producing households to participate directly in protection efforts while continuing to produce cocoa outside of forest boundaries.

WCF envisions forest monitoring as a shared responsibility. Governments are tasked with defining and maintaining national baselines, setting and enforcing boundaries, and sharing reliable geospatial data. Companies are expected to ensure full traceability and uphold due-diligence standards within their supply chains, while local communities contribute to daily monitoring, restoration, and management of forest resources. This collaborative model places public systems at the centre, used by industry rather than replaced by it, ensuring coherence, transparency, and shared ownership of forest protection outcomes.

WCF also underscores the importance of policy environments that enable and encourage company investment beyond their direct supply chains, recognizing that forest protection and restoration require action at landscape and national levels.

2. Restore what has been lost

Forest restoration, in WCF's view, must include a mixed approach that includes tree planting efforts, forest regeneration and farmer-led agroforestry. A good example of such approach is the Modified Taungya System (MTS), used in Ghana.

Restoration must also be done in a way that is strategic and targeted to areas that are most suitable for restoration and with the greatest opportunities for biodiversity and ecosystem service protection and carbon sequestration³. This should be coupled with consistent, long-term, shared investment from both public and private sectors.

One additional challenge influencing cocoa productivity and land-use change is Cocoa Swollen Shoot Virus (CSSV). The spread of CSSV has led to the loss of millions of productive cocoa trees in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, further compounding livelihood risks and increasing the temptation to expand into forested areas. While this position paper focuses on forest protection and restoration, WCF acknowledges CSSV as a priority issue.

Studies show that tree survival rates in Côte d'Ivoire remain low despite mass seedling distribution campaigns. WCF identifies several barriers to improving survival rates, including wildfire risk, lack of consistent farmer incentives, lack of tree tenure and registration, drought, limited local technical capacity, poor monitoring and lack of replanting. To address these, WCF promotes the use of science-based restoration plans, tree planting registries and remote sensing monitoring, fire-management plans,

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³ Addressing critiques refines global estimates of reforestation potential for climate change mitigation, Kurt A. Fesenmyer et al. (2025), [Nature Communications](#)

training and quality control in nurseries, farmer and hired planting technician capacity building and incentives, land and tree tenure clarity and provision of farmers and planting crew with the necessary tools, materials, and agronomic support. Sustained restoration financing, including maintenance payments and long-term incentives and monitoring is also essential to ensure trees reach maturity and that farmers and others paid for tree maintenance remain committed to forest restoration efforts.

3. Support farmers as agents of change

WCF emphasizes the importance of empowering farmers through access to finance, technical advice and market opportunities, noting that productive, diversified and profitable cocoa households reduce pressure to expand into forests. Forest outcomes ultimately depend on strong, resilient farming systems. WCF and its partners strive to expand smallholders' access to appropriate financing, to technical assistance that improves yields, lowers production costs and increases profitability and to tools, high-quality seedlings and inputs delivered through effective rural extension services. Farming communities should benefit from opportunities to earn additional income from agroforestry products and off-farm activities, a greater capture of the farmgate price and targeted training on climate-resilient practices. These supports can be complemented by payments for ecosystem services that reward farmers for maintaining forest cover.

WCF underscores the strong link between living income and forest conservation, viewing them as mutually reinforcing. Agroforestry, climate-smart cocoa practices, income-generating activities and incentive-based mechanisms should be positioned as practical ways to raise yields and household income while keeping forests standing. In addition, targeted Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) support, with a strong emphasis on soil management, appropriate and efficient fertilizer use, and access to affordable pre-harvest labour, is essential to unlocking productivity gains and income improvements for smallholders.

Achieving a living income, together with adequate forest-protection measures, reduces the incentive

to clear new forest land, as farmers are better able to sustain their families and invest in their farms. Strengthening livelihoods is therefore not an optional complement to environmental goals but a core condition for achieving long-term forest protection.

4. Invest in shared data, traceability, and environmental monitoring

WCF advocates for open, interoperable traceability systems that link farm polygons, cocoa flows and forest monitoring data. Shared tools built on accurate and globally recognized best practice standards and high-quality data improve impact, efficiency, enable compliance and provide credible transparency.

WCF envisions these systems as government-led national platforms developed collaboratively and shared with industry. They would include farmer databases with polygon data; cocoa supply procurement flows; land-use, protected area, indigenous area, and 'admitted farm' maps; tree planting and carbon registries; and active and predictive monitoring tools for forest, carbon and biodiversity.

WCF will also work with producing countries, partly by assisting with the coordination of efforts among various government entities, to establish national data as the most accurate authoritative reference for any environmental analyses. This approach ensures that data remain consistent, authoritative and accessible for intervention and investment planning and decision making, compliance and reporting, while enabling companies to align their due-diligence efforts with national systems.

By grounding data, traceability and monitoring in government-led systems and encouraging interoperability across platforms, WCF promotes a model of shared governance that balances quality, performance, accountability, sovereignty and transparency across the cocoa value chain. In addition to forest and carbon monitoring, biodiversity metrics and ecosystem indicators will also be integrated where feasible to reflect the broader ecological impacts of cocoa expansion and the role of forests in sustaining diverse flora and fauna.

WCF's role in data management is to facilitate collaboration and standardization, rather than to centrally own data. Sensitive information remains under the stewardship of governments or communities, and data sharing is governed by clear protocols to protect privacy and sovereignty while enabling effective use of the information for monitoring and compliance.

5. Enable collective accountability

Adoption of a single set of measurable indicators and annual public reporting, recognizing that shared metrics increase efficiency and credibility with regulators, investors and civil society. In line with this approach, WCF and the Cocoa & Forests Initiative are streamlining their measurement frameworks to a concise set of up to ten refined indicators aligned across global environmental sustainability reporting frameworks. These indicators capture the core dimensions of progress in the cocoa–forest landscape. Examples of possible indicators include:

- the percentage of cocoa that is traceable to farm level;
- the percentage of cocoa procured that is deforestation - and conversion - free
- hectares of degraded forest restored
- hectares of cocoa agroforestry;
- the number of trees or seedlings planted and survived;
- climate transitions plans in place to deliver net zero by 2050

By consolidating data in this way, WCF aims to enhance the relevance, quality, comparability, and use of data while reducing reporting burdens and strengthening collective accountability and decision making for forest protection, restoration and farmer well-being.

6. Promote equity and inclusion

WCF emphasizes that forest protection and restoration efforts must be socially inclusive, ensuring meaningful participation and benefits for local communities. Secure land tenure, community engagement, gender equality and participation of migrant communities are necessary for long-term forest stewardship.

WCF positions social inclusion as a core pillar of its implementation approach, not as an optional or peripheral goal. Within the Cocoa & Forests Initiative, WCF treats livelihoods and inclusion as enabling conditions that underpin forest and climate outcomes, recognizing that equitable access to land, resources and decision-making power is essential to lasting conservation success. By advocating that gender and social inclusion measures are taken into account at every stage of project planning and implementation, WCF aims to ensure that forest protection is both environmentally sound and socially just. Crucially, WCF will work to ensure that new sustainability requirements have guardrails in place to avoid unintentionally excluding smallholder farmers from supply chains.

4. WCF's Role and Contribution

WCF brings together companies across the cocoa and chocolate supply chain, various agencies and ministries within governments, farmer cooperatives, technical partners and civil society to build alignment, coordination and best practice solutions for sustainable cocoa.

WCF acts as a sector enabler that:

- Develops shared methodologies and supports the creation of high-accuracy data to guide sustainability impact, maximize ROI, ensure compliance and reduce complexity
- Creates common definitions and reporting frameworks that contribute to regulatory readiness
- Builds a coordinated global voice for sustainability and responsible land management
- Advocates for policy coherence between producing and consuming countries
- Strengthens the link between environmental protection and economic resilience for farmers

By aligning data, governance and communications across the sector, WCF enables consistent high quality and measurable progress on forest protection and reforestation.

5. The Next Phase of the Cocoa & Forests Initiative – Partnering for Impact

Launched in 2017, the Cocoa & Forests Initiative (CFI) is the leading public-private partnership dedicated to ending cocoa-driven deforestation. It has established a shared reporting system, demonstrated the value of collaboration and positioned cocoa as a test case for sustainable agricultural transformation.

The next phase, CFI: Partnering for Impact, builds on this foundation to create a more agile platform focused on measurable outcomes. CFI will now operate through two interconnected workstreams:

An Enabling Environment for Forest Protection and Restoration

CFI will support producing country governments in strengthening forest-protection delivery systems, improving national forest-monitoring and land-use planning, and accelerating restoration efforts. This includes advancing enabling policies, integrated monitoring systems, and alignment between agricultural, environmental and climate frameworks. It also entails support to develop aligned carbon-accounting approaches and carbon-market mechanisms, ensuring that companies and governments operate within a fully consistent and mutually reinforcing framework.

Reporting Standardisation

To help companies meet growing and overlapping reporting demands, CFI will streamline requirements by refining and simplifying indicators, aligning with leading international frameworks (including but not limited to EUDR, CSDDD, CDP, ISSB, GRI, SBTi, Fairtrade, RA, ARS and ISCOs) and transforming data into actionable insights that support compliance and advocacy.

Together, these workstreams ensure that CFI remains the global reference point for deforestation-free cocoa while strengthening alignment with both national systems and international expectations.

6. Enabling Environment Priorities

WCF and CFI members will focus on a targeted set of strategic priorities designed to enable progress at scale.

- **Data-Driven Decision Making & Regulatory Readiness** – Equip companies and producing country governments with gold-standard harmonised methods and data, and the data protection frameworks necessary for their effective use, so that they can be used to enable strategic decision making and meet emerging regulatory requirements while avoiding duplication.
- **Forest Positive Policy Alignment** – Support government efforts to integrate forest protection and restoration into national agricultural, land-use and climate strategies.
- **Climate and Decarbonisation Pathways** – Promote frameworks that allow companies to deliver measurable value chain emissions reductions and invest in verified projects aligned with national climate commitments.
- **Data Integrity and Traceability** – Advance the use of credible shared systems for forest and GHG monitoring and cocoa traceability to strengthen sector-wide integrity.
- **Inclusive Implementation** – Support policies that enable smallholder participation and prevent unintended social or economic exclusion, ensuring that transitions to deforestation-free cocoa are fair and equitable.

These strategic priorities will be delivered primarily through the Cocoa & Forests Initiative, which serves as the main vehicle for coordinated implementation across producing countries, companies and partners.

7. Measuring Progress

WCF will track industry progress on forest protection and restoration through a harmonised, best-in-class reporting framework, grounded in robust methodologies and aligned data systems. Building on established experience and recognised best practices, this framework will deliver a clear, consistent and transparent view of impact through a streamlined set of core indicators, including forest area restored, farmer participation in agroforestry, traceability to farm level and verified reductions in greenhouse gas emissions alongside increases in carbon removals.

Aligned with leading global frameworks including EUDR, CSRD and SBTi, it will support regulatory compliance and due diligence requirements while enabling comparability, consistency and data integrity across the sector, with progress reported on an annual basis

8. WCF 2030 Ambition

By 2030, WCF and its partners aim to support the cocoa sector in achieving zero cocoa-driven deforestation and widespread restoration of degraded land. This shared ambition will only be achieved with strong government leadership and coordinated land-use action across sectors beyond cocoa.

Success will mean:

- Forest protection integrated into all sourcing systems
- Scaled restoration and agroforestry that enhances biodiversity and resilience
- Fully traceable and transparent cocoa supply chains that meet all major regulatory standards
- Cocoa recognised globally as a model for nature-positive, climate-resilient production

9. Communicating and Coordinating Impact

Communications will play a central role in showing that the sector's evolution represents continuity and growing ambition. WCF through CFI will:

- Establish globally shared best practice methodologies for monitoring deforestation, climate and biodiversity
- Share credible data through harmonised annual reporting
- Highlight measurable progress through public campaigns and stakeholder engagement
- Publish technical briefs to help members and governments meet regulatory and sustainability expectations
- Use the annual Partnership Meeting as a platform for transparency and alignment

Through these activities, WCF will strengthen trust and position the cocoa sector as a leader in forest positive agricultural transformation.



10. Conclusion

Ending deforestation in cocoa is both an environmental and economic imperative. Through coordinated action on policy, data-driven decision making and implementation and reporting, WCF and its partners can create lasting systems for forest protection, restoration and sustainable cocoa production.

Collaboration remains the foundation of progress. By uniting companies, governments, globally recognized technical experts and communities behind shared frameworks and measurable outcomes, the sector can deliver a credible and scalable solution to one of the most pressing challenges in global agriculture.