



Science Shop

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Policy Brief

# Returnees' contributions to Ghanaian cocoa value chain

Benefits, challenges and ways forward



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Africa In Motion (AIM), a non-governmental organization of the African diaspora in the Netherlands that focuses on the economic emancipation of Africa, requested the Science Shop of Wageningen University & Research to carry out research on how the cocoa value chain can become more socially and environmentally just from African perspectives. Several research projects were carried out. This policy brief reports on the outcomes of research undertaken to describe the roles taken up by, the constraints faced by and the opportunities available to members of the Ghanaian diaspora who have returned to Ghana, and are linked to the Ghanaian cocoa value chain.

## Key recommendations

- 1. Acknowledge returnees as partners who may be permanently situated within the cocoa value chain.** The expertise and perspectives of returnees place them between two worlds. Those who return risk having what they have learned rejected. They often lack the resources required to overcome structural barriers and inertia. Returnees are well placed to serve as inside partners, integrating sustainable innovations in local institutions, and thus come with the added benefit of wishing to remain beyond the term of external funding.  
  
*"There needs to be a bridge between the top down and the bottom up approach to implementing cocoa sustainability initiatives to suit the African context."* (Adelaide Yeboah Cole)
- 2. Leverage returnee networks when promoting system level changes.** Returnees are located in a diversity of positions across many of the stakeholders involved in cocoa value chains. In addition to possessing the perspectives and capacities that their time in the diaspora provided, these returnees are linked to each other through their social networks. These networks may be particularly valuable when undertaking initiatives that require system-wide coordination, such as addressing inequalities among the different social actors.
- 3. Strengthen returnees' community of practice.** While returnees are connected to each other, they may not realize the extent to which they are each a piece of a larger puzzle that needs to be put together. For example, it appears that the Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD) may have knowledge gaps regarding the implications of Fair Trade certification, which can be addressed by involving returnees and drawing upon their vast knowledge and networks.



## Research Outcomes

- 1. Returnees strengthen certification**  
There are many certification protocols. While each makes sense to their proponents, their multiplicity is confusing from the perspective of farmers. Returnees draw on their knowledge of best practices throughout the world in working with stakeholders to harmonize these certification products and protocols. Many COCOBOD staff who are returnees have taken part in studies to understand and develop ways to strengthen and harmonize Fair Trade and related protocols. For example, returnees have led efforts to use biometrics for traceability. Returnees within NGOs and advocacy organizations also lobby and advocate to require the harmonization of Fair Trade protocols.
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## 2. Returnees protect cocoa growing land

Financial pressure encourages cocoa farmers to sell their land or convert parts of it for other uses such as illegal mining or alternative crops like rubber or palm oil. Returnees work in public and private sector initiatives to protect cocoa producing land by dissuading farmers from selling to miners, advocating for policies that support cocoa production whilst educating farmers on the importance of Fair Trade certification and sustainable farming practices.

*"The challenge is that COCOBOD is not able to enforce the sustainable practices that have been introduced among farmers."*

*(Returnee engaged in cocoa sector)*

## 3. Returnees mitigate the impact of climate change on farmer livelihoods

Climate change has produced complex and often context-specific impacts. Many of these reduce incomes and increase the risks faced by cocoa farmers. Returnees train and offer support services to farmers via their organizations/institutions on holistic, innovative and GAP practices, contribute to the development of improved and resilient crop varieties, and introduce new value chain and market-oriented business models.

## 4. Returnees strengthen farmer associations

The education received by most cocoa farmers is informal. It does not normally include management, bookkeeping, lobbying, advocacy or the assets required to successfully engage policy decision makers or buyers. Returnees strengthen farmer associations by working with them, drawing on farmers' capacities in value chain management, governance, lobbying, negotiation and bookkeeping.

*"There is lack of farmer representation in most decision making."*

*(Returnee engaged in cocoa sector)*

## 5. Returnees reduce storage losses

Not all farmers follow best practices for on-farm storage; not everyone can easily transport cocoa pods from farms to community sheds for drying, storage and sale. Returnees have developed and currently use innovative strategies to improve on-farm storage and prompt transport. They also lobby for improved transportation infrastructure to reduce the difficulty and costs of transporting pods to the homestead sheds. Expert returnees have initiated and are coordinating efforts to improve local-level record keeping, as it is required for the traceability demanded by Fair Trade certification and the transparency needed to counter fraud.

## 6. Returnees have many roles

- *Skills transfer*: training and capacity building in good agronomic practices, advocacy, certification and auditing, records keeping, marketing and sales
- *Advocacy*: Lobbying a diversity of stakeholders for fairer trade among actors and cocoa value chains within and outside Ghana
- *Value chain*: Purchasing, sales, marketing, product development of cocoa beans as entrepreneurs, employees of License Buying Companies (LBCs), and as employees of the Government of Ghana (COCOBOD) etc.
- *Regulation*: Working with and within a diversity of stakeholders to develop protocols and policies to enhance Ghana's Cocoa value chain.
- *Certification*: Providing tools, logistics and project development that strengthens the equity and environmental performance all along the cocoa value chain.



## 7. Returnees are not always welcome

For many returnees, cocoa value chains are a closed system. While they have expertise and perspectives that are immediately relevant, they face a number of personal and structural barriers that make it difficult for them to secure positions in existing organizations or set up alternative innovative organizations that demonstrate their value.

*"Many of the interventions are made redundant by others; for example, the Forestry Commission, International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, World Cocoa Foundation, and so on, all have similar standards."*

*(Returnee engaged in cocoa sector)*

## Methodology

Findings are based on in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with returnees, their clients and their employers (n=50), in positions ranging from peasant farmers to government ministers. Respondents were selected to secure the broadest possible diversity of perspectives.

## Acknowledgement

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*"I helped to set up many cocoa farmers' associations in Denkyira District."  
(Returnee engaged in cocoa sector)*

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Wageningen UR Science Shop supports non-profit organisations by implementing research projects with a potential societal impact in the fields of nutrition and health, sustainable agriculture, water management, environmental quality and processes of social change.

[www.wur.nl/en/project/Beyond-Fair-Trade-Transnational-entrepreneurship-and-partnerships-with-African-Diaspora.htm](http://www.wur.nl/en/project/Beyond-Fair-Trade-Transnational-entrepreneurship-and-partnerships-with-African-Diaspora.htm)

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