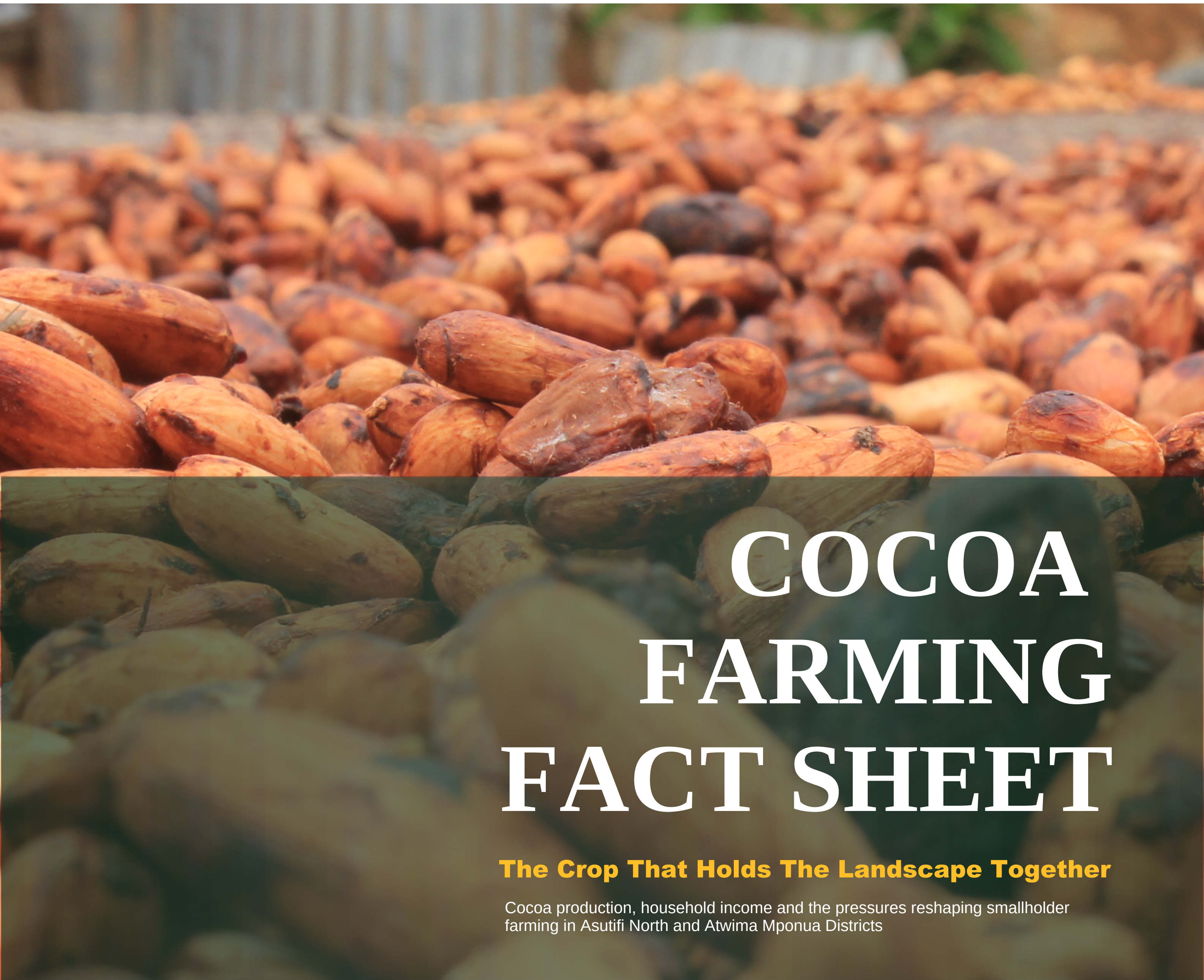
Thematic Fact Sheet

RESOURCE CONSERVATION INITIATIVE



COCOA FARMING FACT SHEET

The Crop That Holds The Landscape Together

Cocoa production, household income and the pressures reshaping smallholder farming in Asutifi North and Atwima Mponua Districts

RESCONI . AUGUST 2026.

ABOUT THIS FACT SHEET

Every figure in this fact sheet is drawn from the RESCONI Final Study Report, *Support to Promote Community Resilience and Rights in Competing Land Use for Mining, Agriculture and Forest Utilization in Ghana* (November 2023), and is referenced to the sections, tables or figures it came from. The cocoa evidence comes from a survey of 528 respondents across 20 communities in March–April 2023, from scheduled interviews with COCOBOD's Cocoa Health and Extension Division at Goaso and Nyinahin, from the MoFA Directorate, and from production statistics supplied by the Ghana Cocoa Board. Charts have been redrawn from the report's own figures.

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1. The Cocoa crop as the economic backbone

Cocoa is the most cultivated crop in both districts and supplies over two-thirds of income in the households that grow it — on farms of a few acres, at yields well below what the land could carry.

KEY FACTS

- Cocoa contributes about 7% of Ghana's GDP and 20–25% of export earnings; it is grown by nearly 800,000 households nationally.
- Cocoa is the **most cultivated crop** in both districts — **22.66%** of farmers in Asutifi North and **31.85%** in Atwima Mponua.
- Cocoa cultivation provides over **67%** of income in cocoa-farming households.
- Cocoa farms here are **smallholder farms with small farm sizes and comparatively low incomes** — most commonly GH¢1,000 – 3,000 a year in Asutifi North District and about GH¢3,000 – 5,000 a year in Atwima Mponua District.
- Productivity per hectare sits **well below** the required range of **1,000–1,900 kg/ha**.
- **12%** of land assigned to third parties in Asutifi North and **30%** in Atwima Mponua is converted to illegal mining.
- More than **19,000 hectares** of productive cocoa farms across two regions were ravaged by illegal gold miners between 2019 and 2020.

Cocoa leads the cropping pattern

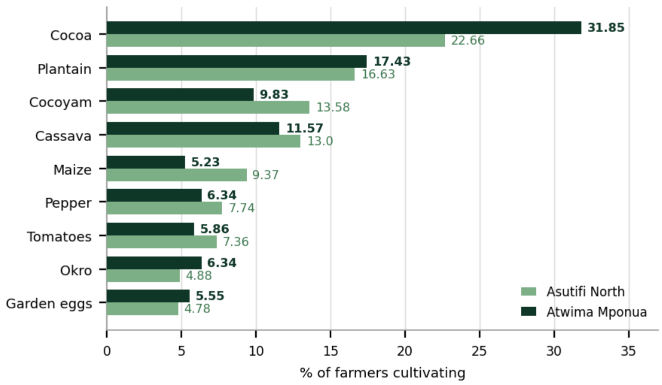

Figure 1. *Percentage of farmers cultivating each crop, by district.* **Source:** *RESCONI Final Study Report (2023), Figure 2.7, p. 25.*

A note on crop ranking

Figure 2.7 of the RESCONI Final Study Report (2023) ranks cocoa as the most cultivated crop in both Asutifi North and Atwima Mponua districts, ahead of plantain and cassava. Section 4.1 ranks crops by overall importance to farming livelihoods, on which cassava ranks first and Cocoa second. The two statements measure different things and are not in conflict.

Source: Report Figure 2.7, p. 25; Section 4.1.

Why cocoa matters here

The report treats cocoa as the crop that establishes the nexus between production and livelihood in the study districts. It is the main cash crop and a major contributor to both district economies, accounting for a significant share of employment, household income and sub-national revenue — and it supports smallholder farmers, traders,processors and other actors along the value chain.

Cocoa is also grown primarily for export, so it carries the districts' contribution to Ghana's foreign exchange earnings. What happens to a three-acre plot in Ahwianfutu is connected to the national balance of payments.

What cocoa actually pays

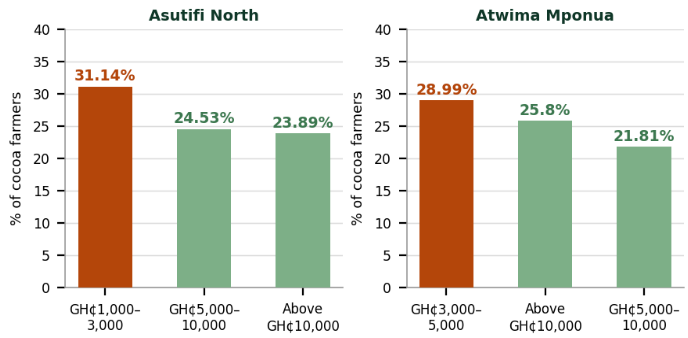

Figure 2. *Annual income of cocoa farmers, 2020–2022 averages, for the bands reported in the source.* **Source:** *RESCONI Final Study Report (2023), Figures 2.11 and 2.12, p. 30.*

The single largest group of cocoa farmers in Asutifi North earns between GH¢1,000 and GH¢3,000 a year. In Atwima Mponua the modal band is GH¢3,000–5,000. Set against that, a one-off bulk payment from an illegal miner is not an irrational offer — it is a rational response to a thin margin.

Five ways cocoa carries the local economy

Income	Smallholding	Employment	Rural development	Diversification
The predominant share of household livelihood — over 67% of income in cocoa-farming homes.	Most production is by farmers on relatively small plots who rely heavily on cocoa as primary income.	Beyond the farmers: labourers in planting, harvesting and processing, plus trading and transport.	Income circulates locally, supporting infrastructure, education, healthcare and living standards.	Intercropping with plantain, maize and vegetables spreads risk and adds food security.

Source: *RESCONI Final Study Report (2023), Section 2.3, Cocoa Production and Livelihood Nexus.*

2. What is pressing on cocoa

The report describes cocoa production in Ghana as facing an unprecedented assault from illegal gold mining — but mining is only the sharpest of several pressures acting at once.

Cocoa land is being converted

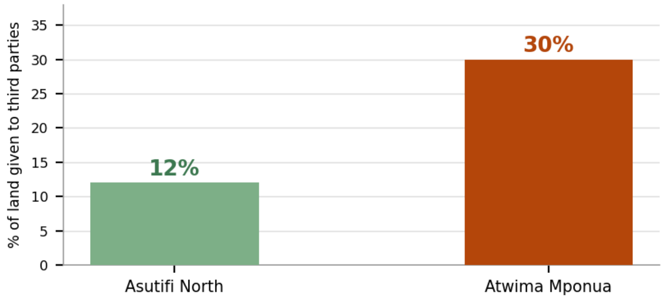

Figure 3. *Share of land assigned to third parties that is used for illegal or small-scale mining.*
Source: *RESCONI Final Study Report (2023), Section 4.1; Figure 2.30, p. 49.*

Cocoa farmlands are being given out for illegal mining. In Atwima Mponua nearly one plot in three assigned to a third party ends up under mining, often in exchange for a one-off bulk payment reported specifically at Achiase, Adobewura and Ahwianfutu. The report warns that if this trajectory remains unchecked, it could cause a **drastic decline in the total tonnage of cocoa** produced in these districts.

Mined-out land was observed directly during field visits at **Gambia No. 2, Obengkrom and Ntotroso** in Asutifi North, and at **Ahwianfutu, Ampemkrom and Ntoboroso** in Atwima Mponua.

> ***Illegal mining operators in some cocoa production communities are making farming very expensive, and their activities are adversely affecting water resources used for irrigation and destroying the environment. Illegal mining has become a national challenge and the nation needs to consider its impact on farmers.***

Chief Executive of the Ghana Cocoa Board, quoted in the source report at Section 4.2 (Sabutey, 2023).

The yield gap

Even before mining is counted, the crop underperforms. The report records that productivity per hectare across these cocoa farms sits **well below the required yield range of 1,000–1,900 kg/ha**, citing Aneani et al. (2012) on the adoption of cocoa production technologies. Farmers compensate by intercropping food crops — cocoyam, plantain and others — to support household livelihoods rather than by raising cocoa output itself.

19,000 ha
of productive cocoa farms across two regions ravaged by illegal gold miners between 2019 and 2020, according to the sector regulator. **Cocoa production in Ghana is facing an unprecedented assault from galamsey.**

Land use and gender

More than **70%** of agricultural land in both districts is used for crop production, predominantly cocoa and food crops. Within that, **female farmers consistently hold smaller plots** — generally under ten acres, against larger male-held holdings.

Report Sections 2.2.5 and 4.1.

Climate is working on the crop too

Respondents in both districts named **increasing temperature** and **erratic rainfall** as the two topmost negative climate effects on agricultural production. Declining agricultural yield is itself among the most cited perceived effects of deforestation and forest degradation — the most cited of all in Atwima Mponua.

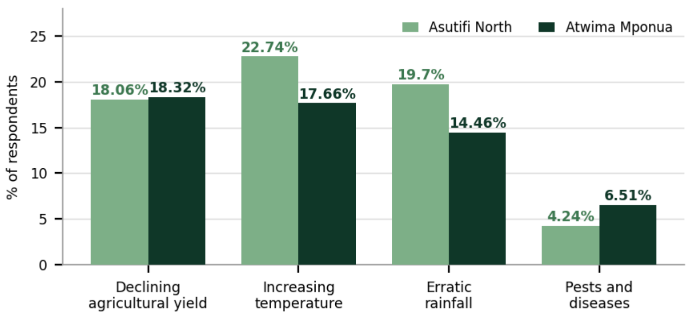

Figure 4. *Perceived effects of deforestation and forest degradation relevant to cocoa production.*
Source: *RESCONI Final Study Report (2023), Figure 2.19, p. 37.*

One climate signal runs the other way. Weather data from the Goaso station shows a consistent marginal decline in annual average relative humidity, which the report reads as positive for cocoa, since high humidity increases the incidence of fruit rot disease — consistent with Lawal & Emaku (2007) and Lawal & Omonona (2014). But the report is clear that this potential gain **appears to be eroded by more salient factors**.

The ground is also shrinking

Cocoa here is grown on small plots that are getting no larger. Most farmers work 3–6 acres. Where topsoil is stripped by mining, reclamation is capital intensive, time consuming and locality specific, so a hectare lost to a pit is in practice a hectare lost to cocoa permanently. **Prevention is far cheaper than remediation.**

And the workforce is ageing

Over half of active farmers are aged **40–59** — 53.71% in Asutifi North and 55.75% in Atwima Mponua. Youth participation is thin, and thinnest in Atwima Mponua, where only **11.5%** of respondents are aged 20–39 against 25.80% in Asutifi North, and 14.60% are over 70 years old. A crop that depends on replanting cycles measured in decades is being carried by a generation that is not being replaced by an over-aged generation.

Where the upside sits

The report identifies routes that would lift cocoa incomes without expanding the farmed area:

Value chain development — processing, packaging, transport and marketing, so farmers capture more than the farmgate price.

Technology and innovation — improved techniques, mechanisation, irrigation and digital solutions to raise yields and cut post-harvest losses.

Cocoa agroforestry — shade-tree systems that improve soil fertility while keeping trees standing.

Source: *Report Sections 2.2.7 and 2.3. Carbon finance and the national support programmes are set out on page 4.*

3. Why it matters, and what must change

Policies that does not yet line up

The report's policy analysis finds four instruments all aiming at the same outcome for cocoa: the **Forest and Wildlife Policy (2012)**, the **Minerals and Mining Policy (2014)**, the **Ghana Cocoa Sector Development Strategy II (2017/18–2026/27)** and **National Climate Change Policy (2013)**. Each seeks to guarantee a sustainable and environmentally safe environment for cocoa production and local livelihoods.

But the report finds **overlaps and inconsistencies that must be addressed** before these sectors can reach their intended state. Cocoa sits at the intersection of all four, which is why it absorbs the cost when they pull against each other.

What the communities asked for

Stakeholders in the study's own consultations identified the sensitisation topics they wanted, and two speak directly to cocoa: **bad farming practices in cocoa**, and **education to prevent the conversion of cocoa farms into mining sites**. They also named the channels that work — community durbars and meetings, and local radio stations.

Why it matters

Cocoa destruction is the mechanism by which environmental damage in these districts becomes household poverty and national revenue loss. Protect the crop and you protect income, employment, foreign exchange and the forest canopy that shade-grown cocoa maintains. Lose it, and each of those goes with it.

67%

of household income in cocoa-farming households comes from cocoa. **It is the single point of failure in the rural economy of both districts — which is precisely why the pressures on it are not an agricultural issue alone.**

The report's own conclusion is that competing interests from mining, agriculture and forest utilization should be addressed holistically within a national land use plan — with District Assemblies, regulators, Traditional Authorities and the private sector all holding defined roles.

Programmes already running — and the awareness gap

Ghana Cocoa Forest REDD+. Over **240,000 farmers** in 1,400 communities across the seven cocoa-producing regions receive Carbon Emission Fund payments and community projects; Ghana has begun disbursing the **US$4.8 million** received from the World Bank.

Ghana Forest Investment Program (GFIP). Works directly with cocoa farmers and communities to rehabilitate and protect forest reserves by tackling the agricultural drivers of deforestation.

Ghana Landscape Restoration and Small-Scale Mining Project (GLRSSMP). Strengthens integrated natural resource management and community benefits in targeted cocoa-forest landscapes.

But only **32%** of respondents in Asutifi North and **17%** in Atwima Mponua were aware of *any* such initiative. **The support exists; the reach does not.**

Source: *Report Sections 1.1 and 2.5.4; Figure 2.20, p. 38; World Bank (2023).*

What RESCONI recommends

The strategic measures protect the land base; the sector measures raise what the remaining land yields. Cocoa needs both.

Protecting the land base *(Sections 4.1, 5.1 & 5.2)*

- Address competing land use within a **national land use plan** that protects productive cocoa land from conversion to illegal mining.
- Use **collaborative inter-sectoral strategies**, institutional strengthening, policy harmonisation and legal enforcement to mitigate mining's impact on cocoa production.
- Redefine **artisanal mining permits** to require the consent of Traditional Authorities before any grant.
- Adopt the **Integrated Forestry and Mining & Management Approach (IFAMMA)** to restore degraded forestland and mined-out areas to productive use.
- **Regulate the conveyance of farmland** to third parties, to stop cocoa land passing into mining for a one-off payment.

Strengthening the crop *(direct COCOBOD, MoFA and CHED action)*

- Close the **yield gap** through extension support — good agricultural practice, climate-smart techniques and improved seed varieties — so income rises without clearing more land.
- Promote **cocoa agroforestry and intercropping**, which raise soil fertility and diversify household income while retaining tree cover.
- Develop the **cocoa value chain** — processing, packaging, transport and marketing — so farmers capture more than the farmgate price.
- Expand **access to credit, inputs and training**, targeting **women and youth** to address farm-size disparity and an ageing workforce.
- Scale **awareness of REDD+, GFIP and GLRSSMP** so more farmers can actually access carbon payments and community projects.
- Run **targeted sensitisation** on good cocoa practice and on preventing conversion of cocoa farms to mining.
- Support **alternative livelihoods** in mining-pressured cocoa communities, to reduce the incentive to lease land to illegal miners.

REFERENCES

1. Resource Conservation Initiative (RESCONI). *Support to Promote Community Resilience and Rights in Competing Land Use for Mining, Agriculture and Forest Utilization in Ghana* — Final Study Report. RESCONI, November 2023. Executive Summary, p. x; Sections 2.2.3, 2.2.7, 2.3, 2.5.4, 2.6.2, 4.1, 4.2, 5.1 and 5.2; Figures 2.7 (p. 25), 2.11 and 2.12 (p. 30), 2.19 (p. 37) and 2.30 (p. 49); Appendix 1, p. 79.
2. Institutional engagement with COCOBOD's Cocoa Health and Extension Division (CHED) at Goaso and Nyinahin cocoa districts, and with the MoFA Directorate, March–April 2023. Cocoa production statistics supplied to RESCONI by the Ghana Cocoa Board (letter dated 18 September 2023); COCOBOD advises that cocoa district demarcations differ from administrative district demarcations.
3. Secondary sources cited within the source report: Vigneri (2005) and Barrientos (2008) on cocoa's share of household income; Aneani et al. (2012) on cocoa production technology adoption and yield ranges; Lawal & Emaku (2007) and Lawal & Omonona (2014) on climate and cocoa yield; Tscharntke et al. (2011), Waldron et al. (2012), Blaser et al. (2018) and Niether et al. (2020) on cocoa agroforestry; ICI (2017) on cocoa farmer poverty; Kojo Hayford (2022) on illegal mining and the cocoa sector; Sabutey (2023) quoting the Chief Executive of COCOBOD; and World Bank (2023) on Ghana Cocoa Forest REDD+ payments.