Thematic Fact Sheet

RESOURCE CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

LIVELIHOODS FACT SHEET

What People Live On, and What Is Taking It Away

Evidence from Asutifi North and Atwima Mponua Districts on smallholder farming, cocoa income, forest resources and the pressures reshaping how households make a living

RESCONI . AUGUST 2026.

ABOUT THIS 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 livelihood evidence presented here comes from a survey of 528 respondents — 294 in Asutifi North and 234 in Atwima Mponua — carried out between 23 March and 7 April 2023, supported by focus group discussions, community durbars and interviews with COCOBOD's Cocoa Health and Extension Division, the MoFA Directorate and the Nkawie and Goaso Forest Districts. Charts have been redrawn from the report's own figures.

HEAD OFFICE
No. 12 - 13 PAMA House
105 Westland Boulevard West Legon
Accra - Ghana
GE-314-0597

REGISTERED ADDRESS
RESOURCE CONSERVATION INITIATIVE
P. O. Box 12811
Kumasi

PHONE
+233 (0) 24 460 3904
+233-(0) 24 218 4162
+233-(0) 24 608 5656
EMAIL: info@resconi.org

1. What people actually live on

In both Asutifi North and Atwima Mponua districts, most households depend on farming for their livelihood. Mining is well known, but only a small number of households depend on it for their living.

KEY FACTS

- **91%** of respondents in Asutifi North and **94%** in Atwima Mponua are engaged in farming; **7%** and **5%** respectively in mining.
- **94.22%** and **95.30%** of respondents came from farming households.
- Agriculture employs not less than **60%** of the districts' workforce.
- Cocoa is the most cultivated crop — **22.66%** of farmers in Asutifi North and **31.85%** in Atwima Mponua — and provides over **67%** of income in cocoa-farming households.
- Most farms are **3–6 acres** (29.61%); farms of 15–20 acres are the least common. Smallholding is the norm.
- **97%** of respondents are aware of the importance of forests.
- **94.55%** in Asutifi North and **98.65%** in Atwima Mponua indicated forest cover and the benefits they draw from it have dwindled over thirty years.

A smallholder economy

Farming here is overwhelmingly small in scale and mixed in purpose. Crop farming accounts for 86.64% of farmers in Asutifi North and 89.24% in Atwima Mponua, with the remainder practising mixed crop and animal farming. Households grow cocoa alongside plantain, cocoyam, cassava, maize and vegetables — cash and food from the same plot.

Poultry is the most common animal kept in both districts (49.06% and 62.07%), followed by sheep and goats. Agroforestry was observed in both districts, with farmers integrating trees into crop and livestock systems for shade, soil fertility and diversified income.

These mixed systems are a **deliberate resilience strategy**, not just tradition. Intercropping cocoa with plantain, cocoyam and maize, and keeping livestock alongside, spreads production risk — so crop disease, a failed season or a price fall in one commodity does not take the whole household income with it.

Three livelihoods, very unequal in size

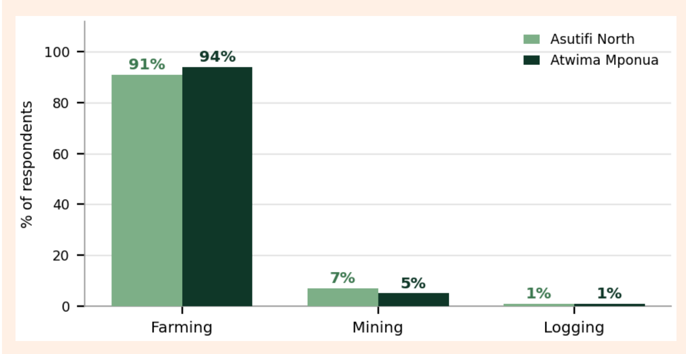
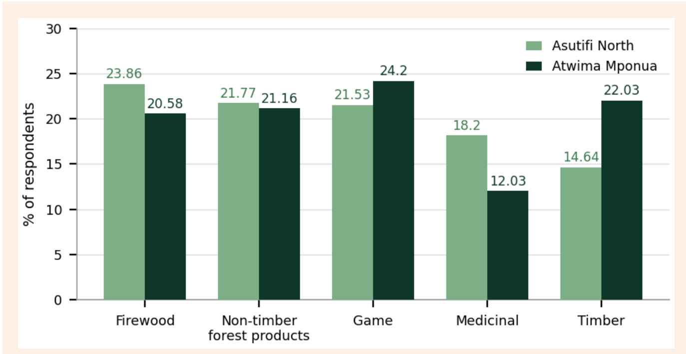


Figure 1. *Forest and land-based livelihood activities by district.* **Source:** *RESCONI Final Study Report (2023), Figure 2.4, p. 22.*

Only 1% of respondents in each district work in logging — the report attributes this to forest sector operations being capital intensive and dominated by medium and large timber companies, leaving little room for local participation.

What the forest actually provides



Non-timber and timber benefits respondents derive from forests. **Source:** *RESCONI Final Study Report (2023), Figure 2.23, p. 40.*

Firewood, game (wild animal hunted for food), medicine and non-timber products are not marginal extras. They are a distributed second income that never appears in a wage statistic — and they depend entirely on standing forest.

The livelihood base in numbers

528	60%	67%	3–6 acres
respondents surveyed across 20 communities	of the district workforce employed in agriculture	of household income from cocoa in cocoa-farming homes	the most common farm size (29.61% of farmers)

Source: *RESCONI Final Study Report (2023), Sections 1.9, 2.2.1 and 2.2.3; Figure 2.5, p. 23; Ghana Statistical Service (2021); Vigneri (2005) and Barrientos (2008) as cited in the report.*

2. The squeeze on rural income

Cocoa provides limited income, while forest resources bring in less than before. At the same time, farmland is being sold, reducing the land available for farming.

What cocoa actually pays

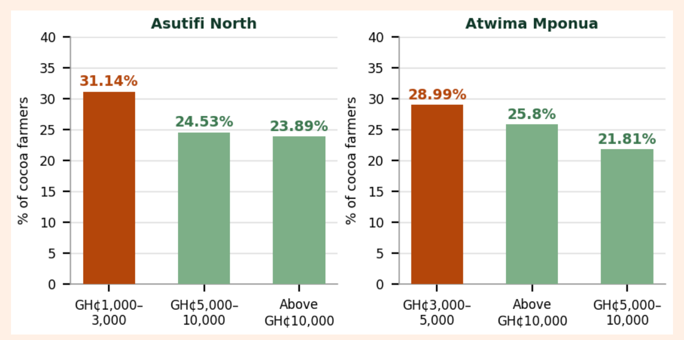


Figure 3. *Annual income of cocoa farmers, 2020–2022 averages, for the bands reported in the source.* **Source:** *RESCONI Final Study Report (2023), Figures 2.11 and 2.12, p. 30.*

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 to GH¢5,000. The report notes that productivity per hectare sits well below the expected range of 1,000–1,900 kg/ha.

This is the income that has to absorb school fees, healthcare, farm inputs and any shock the season delivers. It is also the income against which a one-off payment from an illegal miner is measured.

19,000 ha

of productive cocoa farms in two regions were ravaged by illegal gold miners between 2019 and 2020. **Cocoa production in Ghana faces what the report calls an unprecedented assault.**

Land leaving the farming economy

In Asutifi North, 12% of land assigned to third parties is used for illegal or small-scale mining; in Atwima Mponua the figure is 30%. In communities including Achiase, Adobewura and Ahwianfutu, respondents reported giving out portions of their land to illegal miners in exchange for a one-off bulk payment.

Once degraded, that land does not come back easily. Reclamation, the report notes, is capital intensive, time consuming and locality specific.

In Asutifi North, 94.55% of respondents confirmed that forest cover and the benefits they derive from forest resources have dwindled over the past thirty years; in Atwima Mponua, 98.65%. Dwindling benefits were confirmed by 93.2% and 97.7% of respondents respectively.

Paraphrased from RESCONI Final Study Report (2023), Section 2.5; Figure 2.15, p. 34.

A workforce that is not being replaced

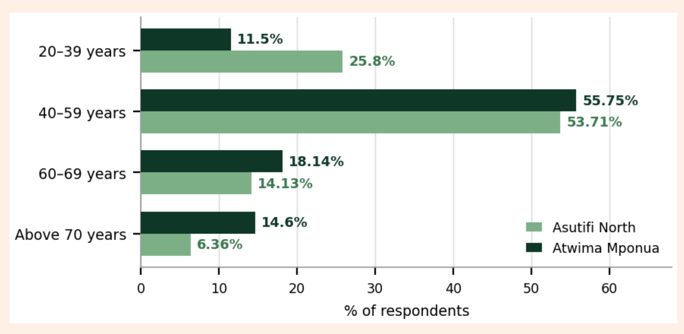


Figure 4. *Age distribution of farming and mining respondents.* **Source:** *RESCONI Final Study Report (2023), Figure 2.1, p. 20.*

Over half of the active farming and mining population in both districts is aged 40–59. 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.

The report links this to documented barriers facing young people: no support from family or government, initial capital requirements, land access difficulties, the physical difficulty of the sector, and no knowledge of good agricultural practices. Where farming does not attract the young, mining does.

Multidimensional Constraints identified by farmers

Constraint	Effect on livelihood
Limited access to credit	No capital to invest in yield or recovery
Inadequate infrastructure	Weak market access and higher losses
Pests and diseases	Direct loss of crop and income
Commodity price fluctuation	Income cannot be planned due to lack of fixed pricing
Climate change impacts	Named by the report as most important of all

Table 1. *Challenges facing farmers in the study districts.* **Source:** *RESCONI Final Study Report (2023), Section 2.2.1.*

Respondents in both districts named increasing temperature and erratic rainfall as the two topmost negative climate impacts on agricultural production.

An aerial image of an illegal mining site where the land has been largely degraded

3. Why it matters, and what must change

The trade-off is not abstract

Mining brings real benefits to these districts, and the report says so plainly: employment and income both directly and in transport, catering and equipment supply; investment by mining companies in roads, schools and hospitals; and government revenue through taxes and royalties that funds public services.

But the same section sets out the cost. Environmental degradation disrupts the livelihoods of communities that depend on natural resources. Operations can displace communities and the social structures around them. Health and safety risks fall on workers and neighbours alike. Also, competition for land and water generates conflict between companies, communities and other stakeholders.

The question the study poses is not to cease mining. It is whether the gains are reaching the households carrying the losses.

Women hold smaller ground

Farm sizes for women in both districts were generally under ten acres, and the disparity was more pronounced in Asutifi North. Women were 41% of respondents — a deliberate design choice by RESCONI to strengthen their participation in decisions about natural resource management. Also, women tend to barely enjoy logging benefits although it is the preserve of corporate entities.

1%

of respondents in each district work in logging, because forest sector operations are capital intensive and dominated by larger firms. **The timber economy runs through these districts without employing the people who live in them.**

Areas of Opportunity

The report identifies routes that would strengthen rural income without expanding pressure on forests. Value chain development — processing, packaging, transport and marketing — would enable farmers capture more than the farm gate price. Market diversification toward high-value horticultural products would widen the income base, and agroforestry has the potential to diversify income while improving soil fertility.

Forests offer further routes the report names directly: ecotourism built on wildlife and cultural heritage sites, and participation in carbon markets and REDD+, which provide economic incentives for conservation rather than clearance.

Cocoa farming provides opportunities for income generation and poverty reduction, particularly in rural areas where alternative employment options are often limited.

Paraphrased from RESCONI Final Study Report (2023), Section 2.3.

Cocoa Farmers in Anwiafutu removing seeds from Cocoa pods after Harvesting

What RESCONI recommends

The strategic measures protect the land base; the community measures build the livelihoods that depend on it. The study's own workshops identified both as necessary.

Strategic measures and forest governance *(Sections 5.1 & 5.2)*

- Promote **sustainable farming practices** — agroecology, soil conservation, integrated pest management and organic fertilizers.
- Address competing land use within a **national land use plan**, so farmland is not lost to mining by default.
- Adopt **IFAMMA** to restore degraded forestland and mined-out areas.
- Redefine **artisanal mining permits** to require Traditional Authority consent, and build their leadership capacity.

Community and livelihood development

- Invest in **youth-focused livelihoods and agricultural skills programmes**.
- Strengthen **land tenure security and dispute-resolution mechanisms**.
- Expand **community-based natural resource management** and strengthen **benefit-sharing**, so communities gain directly from the resources they steward.
- Support **women's access to land, credit and training** across the value chain.
- Create **jobs and alternative livelihoods** alongside enforcement.
- Strengthen **legal enforcement for forest and mining offences**.

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 1.7–1.9, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.5.4, 2.6.2, 4.1, 5.1 and 5.2; Figures 2.1 (p. 20), 2.3 (p. 21), 2.4 (p. 22), 2.5 (p. 23), 2.6–2.9 (pp. 24–26), 2.11 and 2.12 (p. 30), 2.14 (p. 33), 2.15 (p. 34), 2.22 (p. 39) and 2.23 (p. 40).
2. Cocoa production data for 2011/12 to 2021/22 received from the Ghana Cocoa Board and attached at Appendix 1 of the source report.
3. Survey of 528 respondents (294 Asutifi North, 234 Atwima Mponua) conducted 23 March – 7 April 2023 using KoboCollect, at 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. Reported in RESCONI Final Study Report (2023), Sections 1.7–1.9.
4. Secondary sources quoted within the source report and cited there to: Ghana Statistical Service (2021); GLSS (2019); Vigneri (2005) and Barrientos (2008) on cocoa's share of household income; Kuusaana, Kidido & Halidu-Adam (2013) and Lambrecht & Karoff (2020) on gender and farm size; Wuni et al. (2017) on youth participation in agriculture; Tscharnke et al. (2011), Waldron et al. (2012), Blaser et al. (2018) and Niether et al. (2020) on agroforestry; and Ghana Cocoa Board on cocoa farm losses to illegal mining.