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Smallholder SustainAbility
Upscaling Programme

IMPROVING THE TRACEABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF THE COCOA VALUE CHAIN IN UGANDA

July 2025

voice of the farmers 



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADA	Appui au développement autonome
ATW	African Trade Winds
CIAT	International Centre for Tropical Agriculture
EUDR	European Union Deforestation Regulation
EUR	Euro
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GAP	Good Agricultural Practices
GPS	Global Positioning System
KG	Kilogram
MIS	Management Information System
RFA	Rainforest Alliance
SSNUP	Smallholder SustainAbility Upscaling Programme
UGX	Ugandan shilling



RainForest Alliance, Organic & FairTrade Program *Premium Distribution*

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voice of the farmers

1. CONTEXT



Uganda's cocoa sector is largely informal, with limited farmer organisation into effective cooperatives. Most cocoa is sourced through aggregators and intermediaries who buy from individual farmers or groups. Globally, the cocoa industry has recognised traceability as essential to addressing structural supply chain challenges. Growing regulatory requirements – including the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) – are compelling all market actors to establish systems that identify, prevent, and mitigate adverse impacts across the value chain.

AFRICAN TRADE WINDS LIMITED (ATW) was created by Edelsource SA (formerly Cocosource SA), a commodity trading company, as a platform to source cocoa from Uganda. Drawing on its extensive experience and deep knowledge of origin countries, Edelsource has developed strong relationships with selected suppliers, connecting producers to international buyers. Until 2021, ATW traded only conventional cocoa; since then, it has supported Ugandan farmer groups in obtaining Rainforest Alliance (RFA) and Organic certifications and started selling certified cocoa. Today, ATW is a key player in the Ugandan cocoa market, accounting for 15% of exported volumes.

To support ATW in achieving full traceability across its cocoa supply chain while progressively engaging certified farmers to build a more sustainable and transparent value chain in Uganda, a technical assistance project¹ was carried out between 2023 and 2025 by Alterfin, co-financed by the SSNUP programme. **The project focused on training, auditing, and certifying smallholder cocoa farmers, using a digital platform** to enable farm mapping through polygon mapping and geo-localisation, systematic data collection on farmers and communities, and environmental risk assessments to prevent deforestation. The objective was to increase ATW's share of certified sales, encourage more farmers to join certification programmes, generate premiums, and strengthen traceability and sustainability across Uganda's restructured cocoa value chain.



Market access



Capacity building



Management system

Environment and climate change
Fair agrifood systems

Priority topics

Impact investor

alterfin

Beneficiary organisation **African Trade Winds (ATW)**

Country **Uganda**

Agricultural value chain **Cocoa**

Project period **September 2023 - January 2025**

Duration **16 months**

Total expenditure **€ 40,655**
Including a contribution of **€ 19,468 (48%) from SSNUP**

¹ This document contains the results of a survey carried out with farmers who are members of a cooperative structured during the project. The results of the full technical assistance project are available [here](#).

2. PROJECT OBJECTIVES



Objectives

Alterfin's technical assistance project "Improving the traceability and sustainability of the cocoa value chain in Uganda" with ATW had **3 objectives**:



To strengthen traceability through comprehensive farmer mapping and data collection

Comprehensive mapping of existing and newly integrated farmer-suppliers underpins a strong traceability system. This includes collecting geolocation data and polygon coordinates to define farm boundaries, alongside relevant economic and social data on farmers and their communities. Accurate spatial data supports environmental risk assessments, strengthens monitoring processes, and enables full traceability of cocoa beans from mapped farms in line with certification and regulatory requirements.



To digitalise operations and ensure traceability

Digitalising business operations through a Management Information System (MIS) allows internal processes to be monitored efficiently while enabling precise and timely data collection. By integrating mapping, inspections, and farmer information into the MIS, the system supports full traceability of cocoa beans originating from the farms, improves transparency and control across the supply chain, and facilitates compliance with certification standards and regulatory requirements.



To provide annual training on RFA standards and implement certification for supplying farmers

Conducting annual training for farmers on Rainforest Alliance (RFA) standards equips them with the knowledge and skills needed to adopt sustainable agricultural practices. This is followed by the implementation of RFA certification for farmers engaged in the cocoa value chain, ensuring compliance with environmental, social, and production criteria while enabling access to certified markets and premiums.





Specific activities

To achieve these objectives, the project implemented **2 activities**:



Polygon mapping and digital traceability

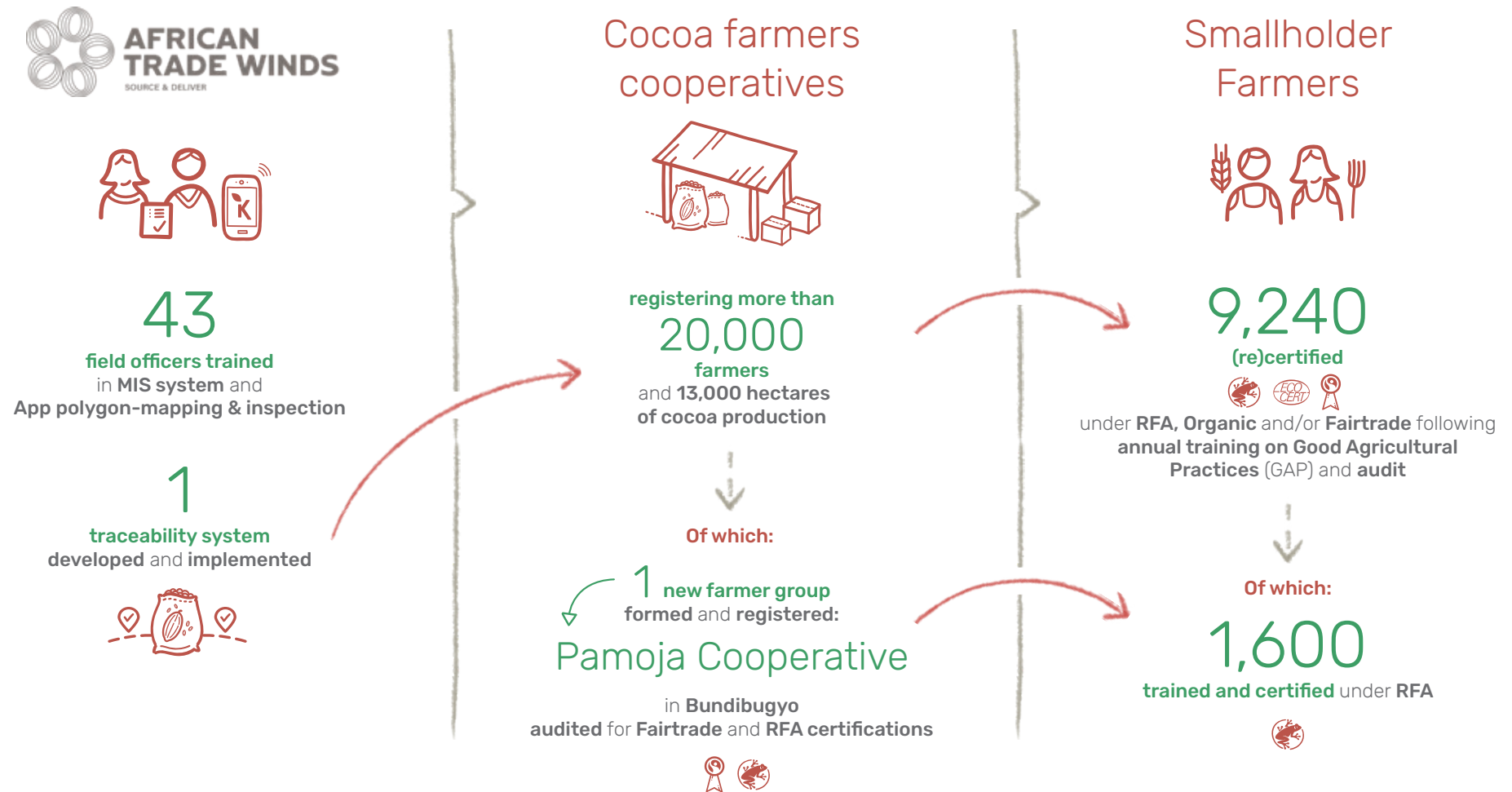
-  **Train field officers** on digital mapping and data collection.
-  **Set up and configure the MIS** to support traceability.
-  **Conduct polygon mapping of farmers** and integrate spatial and land-use data into the MIS.
-  **Develop dashboards and visualisations** to monitor operations and farm data.
-  **Provide ongoing user support and training** to ensure effective use of the system.



Implementation of RFA certification

-  **Conduct training sessions** for farmers on RFA standards.
-  **Prepare and submit certification applications** with production and farmer data.
-  **Facilitate onsite inspections and evaluation** of the internal control system by the certification body.
-  **Review audit outcomes, present findings,** and discuss follow-up actions with ATW management.

3. PROJECT RESULTS IN 2025





4. VOICE OF THE FARMERS



Methodology

At the end of the project, a survey was carried out face-to-face with the beneficiaries (smallholder farmers and ATW field officers) to better understand their level of satisfaction with the services offered, the positive effects of these services and any sources of difficulty or areas in which improvements could be made. The main results and lessons learnt are summarised below to assist other organisations supporting certification.

-  **Quantitative survey of 252 smallholder farmers in July 2025,** (representative sample of beneficiaries of RFA certification among 1,600 members of Pamoja Cooperative in Bundibugyo, with a 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence level).
-  **Qualitative interviews and group discussions in July 2025, with 7 field officers and 26 smallholder farmers across 3 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs),** providing deeper insight into how and why observed changes occurred.

Bundibugyo
Uganda



SURVEY SAMPLE



Survey tool

Semi-structured interviews



Number of interviewees

252 beneficiary **farmers**

7 ATW field officers

Focus group discussions

1 men-only farmer group (9)

1 women-only farmer group (8)

1 mixed gender ATW field officers group (9)



Farmers' profile



Average age

45
years old



Average education level

6,5 years

Men

Women

7,5
years

5,3
years

Most have attained primary education

Average
household
size



Cocoa is the principal cash crop
and primary driver of rural
income in Bundibugyo

The average farm size is

1,55 hectare



92%
of farmers
own their land



100%
of farmers use
traditional seed varieties
to grow cocoa



92%
of farmers already have
Fairtrade and Organic
certifications

Half of surveyed households are women-headed, and gender-disaggregated analysis shows **no statistically significant differences in outcomes between men and women across virtually all indicators.**



4. VOICE OF THE FARMERS



Training on Good Agricultural Practices for certification

ATW has delivered annual GAP training to contracted farmers as a core component of the RFA certification process, covering a wide range of topics from **crop planting and management to agroforestry, soil and water conservation, pest and disease control, and responsible labour practices**. The training was delivered by ATW field officers who work directly with farmers in Bundibugyo, providing hands-on guidance adapted to local farming conditions.



80+%

of farmers found the training useful and the knowledge and skills acquired from it easy to apply

Relevance of training topics

Topic	Relevance for farmers
Crop planting and management	Highest
Soil and water conservation	High
Forced labour and child labour	High
Waste and pollution management	High
Workers' health, safety and welfare	Moderate
Reducing chemical input use	Moderate
Record keeping and self-assessment	Lower
Traceability	Lower

Adoption of practices



98%

of farmers adopted GAPs and crop planting and management practices

Farmers mainly changed **land and plant management practices**, including pruning, mulching, terracing, and agroforestry.

Other changes in practices relate to:

- ✓ soil and water conservation;
- ✓ reduced use of chemical inputs;
- ✓ integrated pest management;
- ✓ improved post-harvest handling.

Cost of changing practices



Labour is the largest cost for the majority of smallholder farmers

Challenges reported by the minority who face difficulties included:

- ⚡ labour shortages for compliant post harvest handling;
- ⚡ persistent pest and disease pressure despite IPM adoption;
- ⚡ limited access to organic manure and improved seedlings;
- ⚡ low literacy constraining record-keeping and digital tool use;
- ⚡ transport and logistics costs for inputs and produce.



When our cocoa trees started drying up due to diseases, we did not know – we were forced to go and seek guidance from the field officers of ATW.

We are practicing agroforestry. We were told these trees will help to ensure the sustainability of our gardens because they attract rainfall and improve soil quality for a long period.

Male farmers



The Rainforest Alliance certification



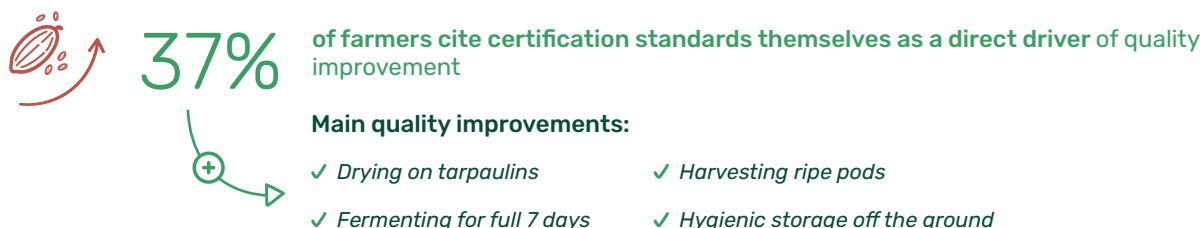
Beyond the immediate effects of training, RFA certification has driven a broader and more sustainable shift in how farmers manage their land, their environment, and their relationships within the cooperative. Certification sets minimum standards that farmers must meet and maintain on an ongoing basis – **covering environmental practices, labour conditions, and farm management** – and subjects them to annual internal inspections and periodic external audits.



Environmental practices adopted since certification

Practice	Effects	% of adopting since certification
Mulching	✓ Conserves soil moisture, improves soil fertility	50%
Agroforestry and shade tree planting	✓ Regulates sunlight exposure, attracts rainfall, improves soil quality, provides firewood	44%
Soil and water conservation measures	✓ Reduces soil erosion on slopes, restores soil quality, slows surface water runoff	41%
Cover cropping and organic soil management	✓ Improves soil organic matter, suppresses weeds, enhances long-term soil fertility	23%
Crop rotation and intercropping	✓ Reduces pest and disease pressure, diversifies income, improves soil health	21%

Changes in cocoa quality since certification



Changes labour conditions since certification



"We pay our farm workers well - we also provide them with breakfast and lunch."

Woman farmer

Farm workers. Better pay for farm workers required under RFA labour standards, has had an unexpected side effect, reducing cocoa theft during harvest. In Bundibugyo, farmers report paying workers UGX 20,000 (EUR 5) per day in line with certification labour standards. Better-paid workers are less likely to steal cocoa during harvest and transport, directly reducing farmer losses.

Child labour. RFA certification explicitly prohibits child labour and requires farmers to ensure children attend school regularly. Farmers report this requirement has directly changed household behaviour



"Children are no longer missing school to harvest cocoa."

Woman farmer

Areas of improvement

Record-keeping and compliance documentation remain a persistent gap. Almost all farmers lack written procedures in key areas such as health and safety, complaints handling, and risk management, despite these being conditions of RFA certification.

Only **1%** document farming practices, **8%** conduct self-assessments of GAPs, and **14%** maintain sales records. Verbal rather than written contracts between farmers and farm workers remain the norm.

4. VOICE OF THE FARMERS



Quality, yields, and market integration

The combined effect of training, RFA certification, and ATW's structured market engagement have resulted in improvements in cocoa quality, farm productivity, and market integration among surveyed farmers in Bundibugyo. Farmers who have adopted improved agronomic practices report that these changes have directly **increased both the volume and the value of their harvests** since becoming certified. These gains are directly linked to the adoption of improved agronomic and post-harvest practices. At the same time, certification has opened access to premium markets, creating a stable commercial relationship with ATW.

Changes in cocoa quality since partnering with ATW

 **99%** of farmers report improved cocoa quality following ATW contract or certification

Seasonal production data	Season	Average harvest	Average sales	Average farmgate price
	Long rain season	1,173 kg	1,079 kg	UGX 25,713/kg (EUR 6.5/kg)
	Short rain season	516 kg	457 kg	UGX 20,007/kg (EUR 5/kg)

Figures reflect reported production at the time of the survey, after certification and training*.

Changes in cocoa yields since certification

 **98%** of farmers agree training and certification helped increase yields per hectare

- Main drivers :
- ✓ Improved **farming practices** (pruning, mulching, terracing, replanting old or unproductive trees, intercropping cocoa with legumes)
 - ✓ Better **pest and disease management**



Changes in market integration since certification

 **98%** of farmers report both increased cocoa sales and prices since certification

Main drivers :

- ✓ Improved product **quality** (90%)
- ✓ Rising market **demand** for certified cocoa (81%)
- ✓ Better market **access** through certification (54%)

Collective marketing. Certification has strengthened farmers' collective bargaining position at two levels. The Pamoja Cooperative provides the formal framework for certification, market access, and ATW contracts. At the village level, informal aggregation groups allow farmers to bulk their cocoa, jointly transport produce, and market collectively, reducing transport costs through bulk sales and increasing bargaining power with buyers.



Group marketing, formation of farmer groups, savings groups to decrease the need to sell quickly, increased volumes - all of these have improved bargaining.

ATW field officer

Areas of improvement

Transport and logistics costs remain the primary marketing cost driver, cited by 48% of farmers reporting increased marketing costs since certification.

The demand has increased because of the good quality cocoa produced. More buyers have come in from all over the world to buy certified cocoa. The prices have increased because of the quality and the changes in the world market.

Male farmer

Income and livelihoods

The improvements in cocoa quality, yields, and market integration driven by RFA certification and ATW's training have translated into meaningful and widely reported gains in household income across Bundibugyo's cocoa-farming community. Nearly all surveyed farmers report higher incomes since receiving training and becoming certified, and these **gains are being reinvested in assets and activities that build long-term household resilience**, from land and housing to education, small businesses, and livestock.

Changes in income since certification



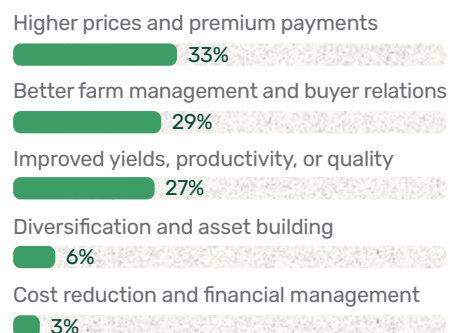
Timeliness of income gains



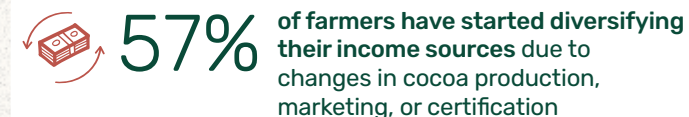
Premiums. RFA certification generates premiums through the sale of certified cocoa to international buyers. These premiums are passed directly to farmers as additional income above the standard farmgate price and are among the most valued benefits of certification reported by farmers.

Community welfare. Income gains from certification are generating broader community welfare improvements across Bundibugyo. Higher cocoa incomes have attracted motorcyclists from other districts during harvest season, stimulating local economic activity. Improved labour conditions and fairer wages are strengthening social relationships between farmers and their workers. ATW field officers note additional gains in community health and nutrition as a result of higher household incomes.

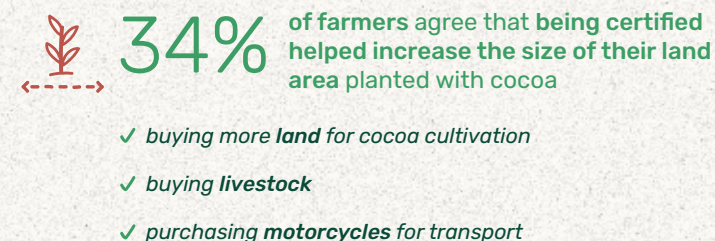
Pathways



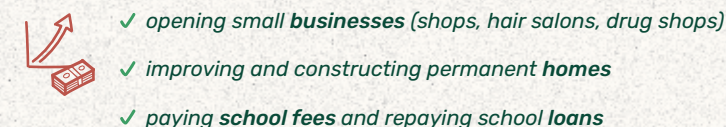
How farmers are spending additional income



Investment in agricultural activities since certification



Investment in assets since certification



“We have been able to open shops to increase income, roadside stalls as well as rental houses in urban areas.”



“We are now good-looking, we can afford to buy cosmetics, good dresses, shoes, and plait our hair.”

Two women farmers





5. CONCLUSIONS



Summary

The project has delivered meaningful and widely acknowledged benefits for cocoa farmers in Bundibugyo and ATW.

At the same time, the survey results reveal persistent challenges that will need to be addressed if these gains are to be sustained and scaled.



For ATW

- GPS mapping, MIS, and certification have strengthened supply chain transparency and positioned ATW competitively for EUDR compliance and international market.
- Farmer loyalty and certified volume delivery have improved significantly because of structured market engagement.
- Certification costs create cash flow pressures, MIS enrollment is not yet complete, and inconsistent post-harvest practices among some farmers remains a quality control risk.



For the Pamoja cooperative smallholder farmers

- Nearly all report improved yields, quality, prices, and household income since certification and training.
- Improved agronomic practices are now widely adopted and directly attributed to RFA certification and ATW training.
- Child labour has reduced and farm worker conditions have improved as a direct result of RFA labour requirements.
- Income gains are being reinvested in land, housing, education, and small enterprises, signaling growing household financial resilience.
- Benefits are realised equitably across men and women.
- Labour shortages, transport and logistics costs for inputs and produce, food security concerns as land shifts toward cocoa, record-keeping gaps, and climate variability remain important constraints to address.

What farmers expected, and what they got

Motivation for seeking certification	% citing	Outcome delivered	% reporting*
Improving agricultural productivity	87%	Increased yields since certification	98%
Access to better markets	66%	Increased sales since certification	98%
Environmental benefits	61%	Increased agroforestry practices since certification	95%
Worker welfare	21%	Farm workers paid UGX 20,000 (EUR 5)/day; child labour reduced; children attending school regularly	Widely reported

*Percentages reflect quantitative survey responses; qualitative descriptors (e.g., "widely reported") reflect themes raised in FGDs with farmers.

Lessons learnt

✓ Certification delivers real value when linked to strong market access

RFA certification generates tangible benefits for farmers when it is connected to reliable buyers who pay premium prices for certified cocoa. ATW's role as a committed buyer, purchasing certified volumes at above-market prices and passing premiums to farmers, has been central to making certification worthwhile for Bundibugyo's smallholder farmers. Without this market linkage, the costs of certification compliance could outweigh the benefits.

✓ Record-keeping and documentation are the weakest link in certification readiness

Almost all farmers lack written procedures for health and safety, complaints handling, and risk management, despite these being explicit RFA certification requirements. Verbal labour contracts remain the norm. Only 1% of farmers document farming practices and only 8% conduct GAP self-assessments. These gaps represent a structural vulnerability that puts the cooperative's long-term certification status at risk. Practical, low-literacy-friendly documentation tools, structured contract templates, and dedicated compliance training are needed, particularly as international buyers and regulatory requirements become more demanding.

✓ Advance payments would strengthen farmer resilience and loyalty

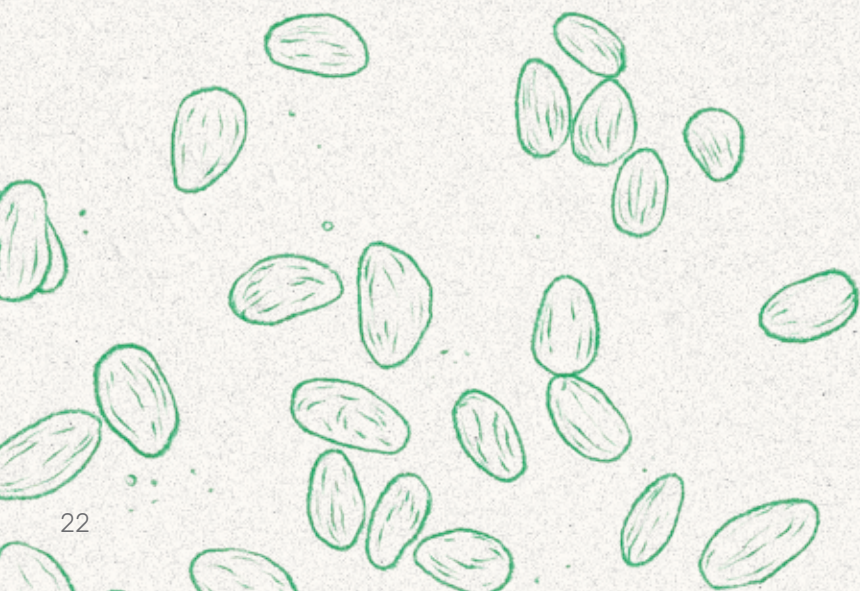
Both men and women farmers surveyed requested access to interest-free advance payments to help manage cash flow between harvests, cover input costs, and meet household needs during the long gap between the short and long rainy seasons. Advance payment mechanisms have proven effective in reducing farmer vulnerability, preventing side-selling, and strengthening loyalty to the sourcing company. ATW should explore partnerships with financial institutions to develop a viable advance payment mechanism for contracted farmers.

✓ **Food security must be monitored as cocoa expansion accelerates**

As farmers invest more land in cocoa production in response to increased market access, food security is becoming a growing consideration in Bundibugyo. Farmers report that most available land is now dedicated to cocoa, leaving less space for food crops; in response, some farmers have begun diversifying their income by investing in livestock, suggesting an emerging awareness of the need to balance cash-crop income with broader household resilience. Complementary food crop support and income diversification initiatives remain essential to ensure that certification-driven income gains translate into comprehensive household resilience rather than increased dependency on a single cash crop. More training on food and nutrition security has already been initiated in some areas by ATW field officers, building on this momentum toward more diversified livelihoods.

✓ **Certification can trigger a virtuous circle of income diversification and financial resilience**

Higher cocoa incomes generated by RFA certification are enabling farmers to invest in new income-generating activities beyond cocoa (opening shops, establishing transport businesses, acquiring livestock, and building rental properties). These diversified income sources reduce household dependence on cocoa as a single cash crop, providing a financial buffer during periods of low harvest, price volatility, or climate shocks. To sustain this dynamic, targeted support in financial literacy, entrepreneurship training, and access to credit could help farmers make the most productive use of their growing incomes.





about the SSNUP programme

Appui au développement autonome (ADA) is involved in inclusive finance in Africa, Latin America and Asia and focuses on three main topics: youth entrepreneurship, agricultural and forestry value chains and access to basic services. These activities address three transversal themes: climate change, gender and the use of digital technologies. ADA is the coordinator of the Smallholder SustainAbility Upscaling Programme (SSNUP), a 10-year programme launched in 2020 that aims to improve the resilience of smallholder households through technical assistance and investment in agricultural value chains, ultimately enhancing the well-being of low-income populations. Funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the Liechtenstein Development Service, and the Luxembourg Directorate for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Affairs, SSNUP works as a facility to co-finance technical assistance projects led by impact investors active in the field. ADA is responsible for coordinating the programme and managing its knowledge management component.

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