# Cocoa in a world of environmental changes - time for "uncommon collaboration"

By Svein Tore Holsether

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The cocoa sector in West Africa is facing many well-known problems. That is a fact. And we all acknowledge those problems. Only by joining forces can we solve the challenges and contribute to sustainable growth and development of the cocoa sector. Succeeding in this, will result in increased farmer profitability, economic growth in West-Africa and reduced negative environmental impact.

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## Creating growth in a sustainable way

About 70% of global supply is produced in West Africa by smallholder farmers. Productivity is low, trees are old and farmers are using old-fashioned methods.

Farming efficiency is a huge issue.

Agriculture with low productivity is a very important driver of deforestation. Production areas need to be replanted with improved varieties. There is a lack of availability of proper fertilisers and other inputs, knowledge on cocoa agronomy and best management practices is lacking. Climate change threatens production, but we can also say that production threatens to contribute to more climate change, through for instance, illegal deforestation. And if you look at it this way, the future can look quite grim. However, I am an optimist - and I believe in knowledge sharing and collaboration.

In Yara, we have put sustainability and farmers at the centre of our business strategy. Not just because it is the nice thing to do, but because it is the wise thing to do. For example, if farmers improve productivity in a manner which destroys the natural resources base, it will not be sustainable over time - not for them and not for us as an input provider. So let us create growth and cocoa sustainability – in a responsible and inclusive way – for our businesses, the farmers and for society at large.

## Uncommon collaboration

To succeed in doing this, however, we need to work together. Government buy-in and leadership is absolutely vital.

Progress will not be sufficient if companies along the value chain continue to work individually in pursuit of parallel but separate strategies. Real and transformative change will require what Howard Shapiro from Mars has coined “uncommon collaboration” between academia, government, non-government, industry players and farmers in tackling global challenges - and where the cocoa farmer is put first.

On the picture below, is cocoa farmer Konfe Sidy from Côte d’Ivoire. Through more modern and sustainable methods, he has been able to increase yields almost ten times. This has enabled him to create a small business, feed his wife and 3-year-old daughter as well as his extended family who live with him. He has even built a new house. Of course, this is small scale. But imagine what the impact could be if we aggregate this to thousands of cocoa farmers.


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We must make the production of cocoa more efficient. Producing more with less, meaning more output based on less input. Increased efficiency will improve forests, diversity and cocoa farmer livelihoods in West Africa. I believe we can succeed if there is a sufficient will and we put ourselves in the correct frame of mind.

The chocolate industry has already paved the way with CocoaAction. In Yara, we have for a long time recognised that we need to look beyond our own sector, broaden our perspective and find ways of working with a range of different partners. We have decided to engage beyond our own interests and contribute to the sustainable cocoa productivity challenge by bringing our unique crop nutrition competence and to form alliances involving partners ranging from UN Environment the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to key companies and organisations in the chocolate industry.

The result so far is a public-private research and development partnership which aims to address critical gaps in the knowledge base required to close cocoa yield gaps and deliver this knowledge to cocoa farmers. I truly believe that this partnership can bring the best of science to tackle the major problems to the service of the smallholders and the cocoa producing countries.

The time to make cocoa production more sustainable is now. Some of the tools and strategies already exist. Through “uncommon collaboration” we can not only turn cocoa around but also lead the way.

## Closing cocoa yield gaps, delivering knowledge to cocoa farmers

Representatives from national agricultural research and extension organisations of the major cocoa producing countries in Africa together with key companies and organisations in the cocoa industrybgathered in Abidjan. The main purpose is to discuss how science can work together with the chocolate industry players to bring the best science to tackle major problems to the service of the smallholders and the cocoa producing countries. It is all happening in the context of the seventh African Green Revolution Forum. Under the leadership of the Government of Cote d’Ivoire, the 2017 AGRF is shaping up to be the most important agricultural platform on the continent for 2017.

As Yara, we are ready and prepared to work with others to improve the knowledge base required to close cocoa yield gaps and deliver this knowledge to cocoa farmers – and we know we cannot crack that nut alone.


## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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