Sweet Sustainability: Cocoa Agroforestry Advantages
Conference Report
May 2021

The three-day virtual conference, Sweet Sustainability, explored the environmental, social, and economic aspects of cocoa agriculture with a focus on sustainable implementation of agroforestry farming systems. The event, which was hosted by the Smithsonian Institution and co-sponsored by Mighty Earth, National Wildlife Federation, CIRAD, PUR Project and Earthworm Foundation, brought together 56 speakers and over 300 participants from 49 countries. The diverse speakers and participants represented cocoa farmers, governments, researchers, non-profit organisations, global brands and industry leaders. Together, this group explored how cocoa agroforestry benefits the environment, a sustainable cocoa supply, and the livelihoods of farmers throughout the cocoa-growing tropics. Importantly, the conference provided space for robust discussion about the political, industrial, and financial opportunities and constraints to implement cocoa agroforestry at broad scales. The conference ended with a **call to action: industry, government, farmers, and researchers must work together to ensure that cocoa agriculture provides living wages to farmers while protecting forests, biodiversity, and important environmental services** such as pest control and carbon sequestration. Agroforestry, the practice of farming cocoa together with other tree species, is a broad solution with applications for all cocoa agriculture. However, cocoa agroforestry faces many challenges that will require local solutions, funding, and collaboration across sectors.

The conference focused on three aspects of agroforestry over the three-day event: environmental impacts, implementation needs, and challenges to sustainable farmer livelihoods. Day 1 opened with a keynote entitled "Cocoa Agroforestry for a Sustainable Environment" that highlighted the biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration, pollination, and climate resiliency benefits of agroforestry farming systems. Four subsequent panels took deeper dives into each topic with representation from key researchers in each field and cocoa industry leaders with a sustainability focus. Day 2 opened with the keynote "Implementing and Financing Productive Cocoa Agroforestry" followed by panels that explored yield-shade tradeoffs and implementation opportunities within country-level policies, global investment and finance. Finally, with the keynote "Making Cocoa Agroforestry Work for Farmers & Communities," Day 3 focused on issues relevant to the farmers and communities that depend on cocoa production for their livelihoods. With multiple voices from farmer organizations, this day included a call from farmers to be involved in all aspects of agroforestry design and implementation. As Eduardo Somarriba, Head of Agroforestry at Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza's (CATIE), said at *Sweet Sustainability* when asked about the biggest challenge for cocoa farmers: "When farmers think of trees as crops, they start using better practices and are more likely to retain and plant more trees." And of course, that's the core of agroforestry, growing trees alongside agricultural commodities.

The unique structure and audience of this conference helped break down silos across regions and disciplines, highlighting the huge amount of cocoa agroforestry literature and knowledge that is newly compiled in the Cocoa Agroforestry e-Library. The conference also exposed geographical and contextual limitations in much of the scientific knowledge and decision-making tools that support agroforestry farming systems. These lessons were important for the major companies that spoke, including Mars, Mondelez, Puratos, AlterEco, Tony's Chocolonely, Barry Callebaut, Halba and Hershey's. The high-level engagement from governments and senior leadership in industry, including closing speaker Michel Arrion, president of the ICCO, ensured that this conference brought agroforestry to the forefront of the minds of major influencers. Care was taken to ensure panelists represented different genders and all regions of the world, as well as different complementary disciplines from science, industry, and civil society. The entire event had simultaneous translation with a French channel for Ivorians, Cameroonians, and other francophone stakeholders, and

upcoming events in Spanish, Portuguese, and Bahasa will be critical to ensure these messages reach the entire cocoa-growing world. The energy from this conference was palpable not only in the preparatory sessions for each panel, but also during the conference itself in the hundreds of discussions facilitated through the online instant message question and answer tab.

Throughout the workshop, we heard about many collaborative successes and innovations fostered by industry, scientists, governments, farmers, and communities. To better protect the environment and strengthen the livelihoods of cocoa farmers, we need further collaborative and aligned efforts to work towards a sustainable cocoa sector that incorporates agroforestry farming systems. We look forward to creating this truly sweet and sustainable future together.

This document was prepared by the Sweet Sustainability co-sponsor institutions: Smithsonian Institute, National Wildlife Federation, Mighty Earth, CIRAD, PUR Project and Earthworm Foundation and organizers: Etelle Higonnet, Ruth Bennett, Andrea Santy, Molly Dodge, Mark Sanderson, Hillary Fenrich, Mariana Empis, Samuel Mawutor, and Julia Jeanty. Although the event has now passed, the agenda, PowerPoints, and videos will remain available online ppts and videos are online, and the vast wealth of knowledge in the cocoa agroforestry library will remain online and regularly updated.

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