

Mondelēz
International



Solidaridad

KNOWLEDGE PRODUCT



**BUILDING INCLUSIVE AND
EMPOWERED COCOA COMMUNITIES**

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I INTRODUCTION



Strengthening the capacities of cocoa-growing communities to determine and achieve their own long-term goals, geared toward driving their economic development and prosperity, is key to ensuring that interventions are not only responsive to community needs but also rooted in the realities of cocoa-growing regions.

Under Cocoa Life, the cocoa sustainability program of Mondelēz International, Solidaridad supported cocoa-growing communities to design and implement social and economic development projects to improve cocoa productivity, farmer livelihoods, youth participation, gender equality and child protection.

This brief offers a comprehensive overview of Solidaridad methodologies and approaches employed in the implementation of the community development component of the Cocoa Life program. Solidaridad's approach prioritizes collaboration, inclusivity, and participatory engagement in achieving sustainable development outcomes.



Solidaridad supported cocoa-growing communities in the Eastern region of Ghana to design and implement social and economic development projects to improve cocoa productivity, farmer livelihoods, youth participation, gender equality and child protection.

OVERARCHING APPROACH TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Solidaridad’s overarching approach was establishing a robust, iterative consultation with the Mondelēz International Cocoa Life team to build upon existing expertise to effectively address community needs. During the inception phase, Solidaridad engaged with the Mondelēz International Cocoa Life team alongside other Cocoa Life implementing partners such as Child Rights International and Abantu for Development to discuss and agree on the proposed methods and strategies for addressing each deliverable and target.

This collaborative effort aimed to synchronize Solidaridad community development experiences with those of Cocoa Life, build consensus, and ensure mutual learning for effective program implementation. Additionally, Solidaridad leveraged existing materials and tools developed in previous Cocoa Life interventions and other publicly funded projects. These resources were used to deliver training support and enhance organizational capacity for various stakeholders, including the Village Savings and Loans Associations, Community Development Committees (CODEC), and enterprise groups.



METHODOLOGIES

To enhance participation in the implementation of its approaches, Solidaridad employed two primary methodologies. These are consultations and roundtable discussions and focus group sessions.

1. Consultations and roundtable discussions

Using transparent consultative processes and dialogue proved essential in addressing the diverse needs of farmers, community members, and other stakeholders. This fostered a sense of shared ownership among all parties involved, empowering them to collaboratively develop robust strategies to enhance the resilience and prosperity of cocoa-growing communities.

Acknowledging the efforts of various organizations, stakeholders and government initiatives, Solidaridad prioritized building upon existing achievements. This methodology was extended to gender mainstreaming and child protection efforts.

2. Use of focus group discussions

The use of focus group discussions was integral to various stages of the implementation process, including Community Action Plans review, strengthening farmer unions and Community Development Committees (CODEC), enhancing existing Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) and establishing new ones, as well as supporting and training community animators, establishing enterprise groups, and providing training to farmers on food crops.

During these discussions, groups with similar backgrounds and experiences were carefully assembled to facilitate in-depth conversations on relevant topics and modalities related to the aforementioned activities. This participatory approach ensured that the insights and perspectives of diverse stakeholders were effectively captured and integrated into our programmatic efforts, fostering greater inclusivity and ownership within the communities Solidaridad worked in.



I APPROACHES

Solidaridad implemented a diverse range of strategic approaches to promote collaboration, participation, women empowerment and sustainable growth within the communities.

- **Participatory review and implementation of existing Community Action plans**

Solidaridad employed the Community Driven Development (CDD) approach to facilitate the development and implementation of Community Action Plans (CAPs). This approach encompassed a range of activities, including focus group discussions, community resource mapping, pair-wise ranking and prioritization, community-based problem analysis and objective setting, as well as the participatory formation of community project/program management teams. Through these methods, Solidaridad ensured that the local communities had a strong sense of ownership over the development activities and processes.

Furthermore, Solidaridad ensured that Farmer Unions were involved in the CAP review process, allowing every community to contribute and propose solutions that catered to their specific needs. This helped create an environment that supported self-driven development initiatives.

Drawing on insights gleaned from the implementation of the Mondelēz International Cocoa Life program in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana, Solidaridad was able to refine and effectively implement CAPs that addressed the unique challenges and opportunities within the cocoa-growing communities.



- **Strengthen Farmer Union and Community Development Committee (CODEC) engagement**

Solidaridad used participatory engagement tools and principles of inclusivity to drive consultations between the unions, their leadership, and the Community Development Committee. Focus group discussions were used to engage the two groups to resolve potential or inherent frictions regarding funding the CAPs and aligning union development plans with community action plans.

- **Formation of Gender dialogue platforms**

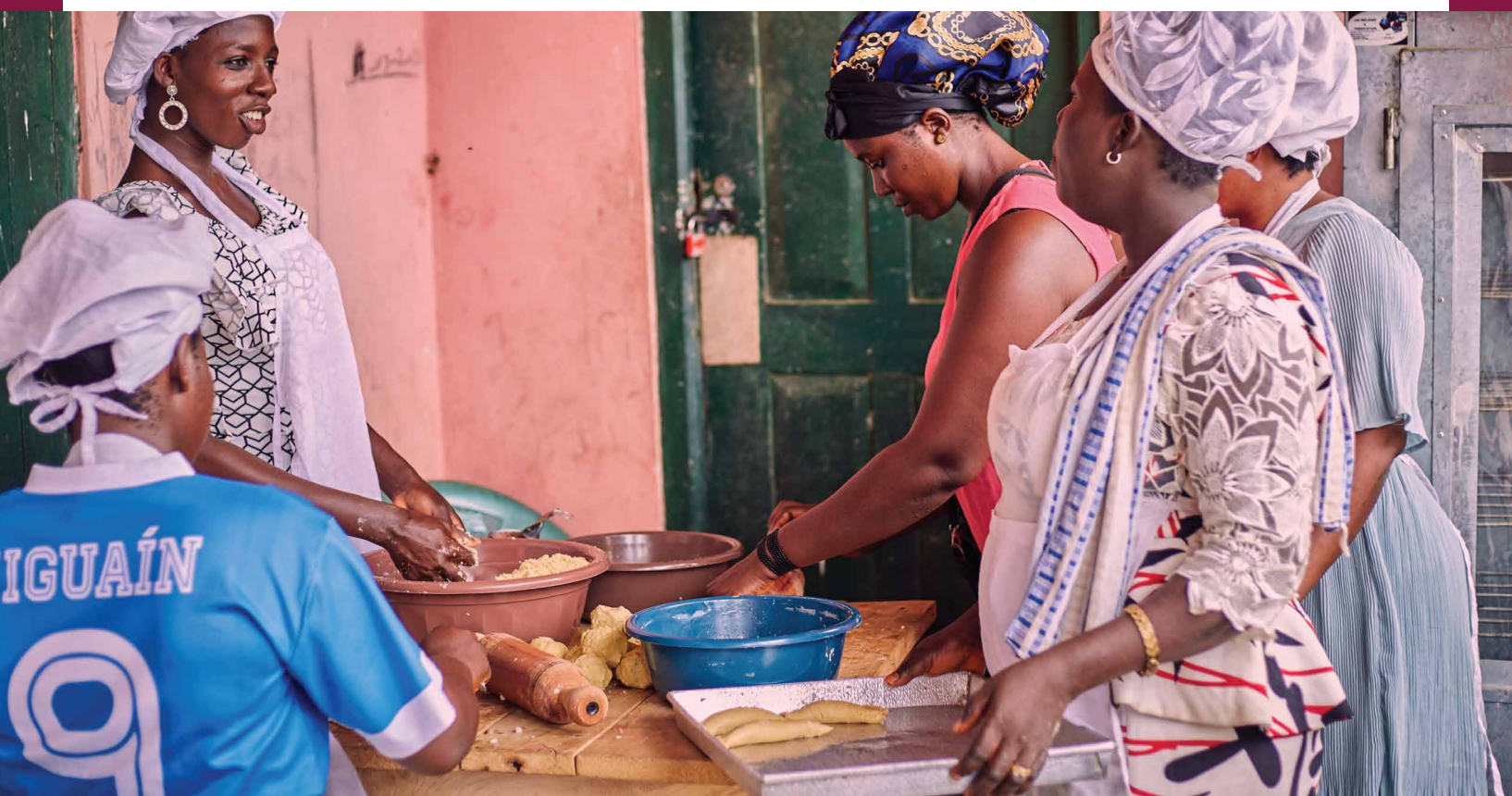
In implementing gender mainstreaming and child protection activities, extensive consultations and roundtable discussions were held with various stakeholders to determine the most effective implementation modalities.

The program prioritized gender inclusion across all interventions, ensuring the active participation of diverse groups. This included training women leaders in effective leadership, supporting the needs of women, boys, and girls in communities, and building the capacity of community animators on gender issues. Additionally, Solidaridad collaborated with partner organizations like Abantu for Development to conduct specific gender training sessions for district-level stakeholders.

To enhance gender dialogue and advocacy at the community level, Solidaridad supported the establishment of District Level Gender Dialogue Platforms (GDP), empowering members to set up Community Platforms democratically. Members of the platform were selected from the communities based on their involvement in activities. These platforms received training from Abantu for Development on advocacy, gender equity, and equality, fostering inclusive community development. These Gender Dialogue Platforms amplify the voice of women as they advocate for their needs while addressing barriers to inclusivity. They also serve as a catalyst for women to grow in leadership.

Solidaridad used community-centred development tools and tailored training content to train and mentor the leaders of platforms, addressing capacity gaps identified through focus group discussions. This ensured the effective establishment and operation of the platform.

Farmers were sensitised on child labour during farmer training sessions as part of Solidaridad's contribution to child protection. Additionally, community durbars were organised to sensitize communities on child labour. Children identified as being in potentially hazardous conditions were reported to Child Rights International for remediation.



- **Enhancing VSLA effectiveness through innovative approaches**

The use of focus group discussions and various qualitative methods to identify current weaknesses hindering the effective functioning of the Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs). Participatory techniques were used to develop tailor-made training content and delivery methods, including coaching and facilitation, to improve the operations of the VSLAs and enhance their efficiency. Additionally, Solidaridad used digital tools to capture information on the activities of the associations. The goal was to support VSLAs by using captured data to independently access financial institutions and establish connections with them, and other relevant service providers, such as youth support groups. This approach was used in the establishment of new VSLAs. The insights drawn from the past challenges informed the setup of improved structures.



- **Strengthening and supporting CODEC**

To identify current weaknesses impeding the effective functioning of the Community Development Committee (CODEC) — which is made up of representatives from the traditional leaders, farmers, youths, gender dialogue platform members, women groups, unit committee members, Assembly members, and two community animators — Solidaridad conducted focus group discussions and employed various mixed methodology approaches. Participatory techniques were employed to create customized training content and delivery methods, including coaching and facilitation, to enhance the CODECs' operations and efficacy. Additionally, Solidaridad explored the utilization of digital tools for data capture to ensure ongoing monitoring of progress and functionality.



- **Supporting and training of Community Animators**

Community Animators play a pivotal role in driving the implementation of various Cocoa Life activities at the grassroots level. Selected from communities where the program is implemented, these individuals serve as vital links between Cocoa Life implementing partners and the communities they serve. Each community appoints two Animators, one male and one female. One Animator is selected within the cooperative farmer society and the other is from the wider community.

The Animators are automatic members of the CODEC and are instrumental in mobilizing community members and raising awareness on topics such as community development, agricultural enhancement, and environmental hygiene. Reporting bi-monthly to Programme Officers, the community animators were provided with continual capacity building through targeted training sessions to ensure they deliver on their mandate. They were also equipped with digital tools to streamline data capture to enable effective monitoring to enhance the impact of the Cocoa Life project at the community level.

- **Establishment and support of Enterprise Groups**

Solidaridad used various methodologies and market research to generate information on opportunities for enterprise development. Tailor-made training content and training approaches, including coaching and facilitation, were used to establish new enterprises as additional livelihoods. These enterprises include pastry making, soap making, grasscutter rearing, snail rearing, beads making, and beekeeping within the respective communities. Workshops and training sessions were organized to facilitate the formation of enterprise groups and equip participants with the necessary skills to operate effectively and profitably.

The enterprise groups were engaged through focus group discussions and in-person consultations to identify their specific needs for operational kits. Based on their operational requirements, Solidaridad followed internal procurement procedures to procure and distribute items such as ovens, patterns, and soap-making materials, empowering these groups to thrive in their entrepreneurial endeavours.

Existing enterprise groups were also coached to improve their operations.



• Promoting Farm Diversification

Participatory processes were employed to identify farmers interested in engaging in food crop farming, such as cassava, maize, plantains, and vegetables, as well as their preferred cropping systems. This selection process was guided by a comprehensive understanding of the marketing opportunities and profitability of these food systems, both commercially and for subsistence use. By diversifying into food cropping, farmers not only secured additional livelihoods but also contributed to enhancing food security in their communities.

Solidaridad assessed knowledge and capacity gaps among farmers to design training content and delivery methods, including Farmer Field School and the establishment of demonstration plots. Through these initiatives, farmers were equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to initiate and manage their farms effectively.

Solidaridad also linked farmers with the Department of Agriculture at the district level to access additional support and resources, further enhancing their success in food cropping ventures.



RESULTS



1,015 women in leadership and/or decision-making positions in **122** communities



1,021 women started or expanded their baking, bead and soap making enterprises



206 community development initiatives/projects supported by district assemblies and other stakeholders



4,139 participants practicing at least one additional livelihood skills trained on



I LESSONS LEARNT



1. In implementing community activities, gender training and child protection were deliberately integrated into our training sessions. We observed that women became more involved in leadership roles and took the initiative to support their families as a result. Appointing women as community animators has proven to be a successful approach in empowering and inspiring more women to take on leadership roles and initiatives to support their households.
2. The issues that contribute to child labour in cocoa-growing communities vary and are not the same across board. Engaging in extensive dialogue with Parent Teacher Associations, opinion leaders, and community and social welfare departments of the various assemblies could be a good way to begin addressing these issues, especially since they may be rooted in cultural, social, and economic factors.
3. Creating a platform where community members come together to discuss and review their action plans creates a shared vision and a sense of collective interest. This, in turn, fosters ownership and accountability towards achieving their community development goals, including resource mobilization strategies.
4. During the Community Action Plans reviews, it was observed that most communities are willing to implement their plans, but often the lack of resources hinders the implementation of the projects. While they actively engage with district assemblies and advocate for support, their efforts often yield little success. This is largely attributed to the assemblies' prioritization of projects initiated and invested in by the communities themselves. Going forward, it is recommended to consider strategies for communities to address or mitigate such challenges. While program officers have been relied upon to follow up with institutions and arrange meetings during implementation, this approach is not sustainable after the project concludes. Therefore, alternative long-term solutions should be explored to ensure ongoing community support beyond the project's lifespan.
5. The challenge of having different development plans at the community and union levels was addressed through participatory engagements, which resulted in aligning most of the Community Action Plans with union agendas and goals. A key lesson learned is the importance of involving both farmer Union and CODEC executives at the community level to prevent project duplication and ensure prioritization of community needs.

6. In strengthening and establishing new VSLAs, it was evident most groups faced challenges primarily related to governance and leadership. Capacity-building training proved instrumental in stabilizing and enhancing the efficiency of these groups in their operations. It was observed that prioritizing governance and leadership development is essential in establishing VSLA groups and ensuring they effectively serve as platforms for farmers to save and access financial assistance when needed.
7. The use of the VSLA scheme has proven to be an effective access to finance tool for cocoa farmers when it comes to formal finance. To scale up its benefits, future projects should promote the formation of district-level credit unions from existing community-based VSLA groups.
8. Most group members tend to join multiple groups within the community to access multiple loans, leading to challenges such as accumulated debts and issues during the share-out process at the end of the VSLA cycle. This phenomenon often results in discouragement and group dissolution. It is crucial that this issue is addressed in subsequent programmes to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of Village Savings and Loans Associations.
9. Generally, the involvement of animators in the project was very helpful in achieving project goals. The use of community animators in project implementation is an approach that serves as an efficient exit strategy for projects. Animators who live in the community with farmers continue to provide technical support to farmers, even after the project ends.
10. Creating enterprise groups for farmers to receive training and start-up kits can help them engage in additional livelihood activities to supplement their income, especially during lean farming periods. These activities can involve recycling farm waste into useful products, such as African black soap, which allows farmers to contribute to the circular economy. Moreover, when farmers diversify their farms with vegetables and food crops, it not only creates income opportunities but also improves food and nutrition security in project communities.



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