

Keeping value added in the country of origin – organic chocolate from Ghana

Producing bars of chocolate in the middle of where the cocoa is grown instead of processing raw cocoa abroad, and thus creating jobs which are fairly paid – this is what cooperation between the two social businesses Yayra Glover Group and fairafric has made possible.

By Dierk Jensen

It is early morning in the small cocoa plantation. The sun is sparkling gently through the trees, on which the ripe yellow pods are hanging. Farmer Vida Bediako has wrapped her baby firmly to her back, and it is in deep sleep. Her husband Justice takes a machete and cuts the cocoa pods off the branch. Every two weeks, the couple go to their in all six hectares of cocoa to harvest. Shortly after sunrise, it is humid and warm. Vida, Justice and their co-workers separate the fruits from the trees, break open the husks and spread the whitish, sweet fruit pulp onto banana leaves. Finally, Vida covers the mushy pulp with more banana leaves. Under this hood, a fermentation process then starts, which will be over after seven days; then the cocoa beans will be fetched from the forest and dried at home.

The family has been working according to ecological principles for three years, applies no pesticides and makes do without chemical fertilisers. Instead, droppings from eleven pigs and a clutch of chickens as well as peel from other crops are spread between the cocoa trees in order to provide the soil with sufficient organic nutrients. However, especially in times of a changing climate, dialogue with nature is not simple. “These have been hard times,” Justice admits. “But support from our business partner, which buys our cocoa beans, has secured us financially. Also, Glover sees to our health insurance.”

In favour of green cocoa production

Just a kilometre away from the Ghanaian farmer family’s farm, in Suhum, in Ghana’s cocoa belt, there are a warehouse and offices, and there will soon be a small hydro-electric plant and brand new processing for peanuts from the Yayra Glover Group. “We are fighting for cocoa production to become green in Ghana,” states charismatic company founder Yayrator Glover, who used to work in Switzerland and returned to his home country 15 years ago.

The visionary has since brought about many changes. The company now employs a staff of 80 and buys the bio-harvest of around 5,000 producers in the district. This amounts to about 5,000 tonnes, most of which has so far been processed into chocolate in Europe. However, some of the raw cocoa, the “black gold” the prices of which reached record levels on the commodity futures exchanges throughout the world last winter, is already being processed locally – in fairafric’s German-Ghanaian chocolate factory, which was set up during the corona pandemic within sight of Glover. It is a highly modern investment of millions clearly designed to at last create added value in the cocoa and chocolate business where the cocoa itself grows.

“Now you are in Europe,” says Community Relations Officer of fairafric Ghana, Mubarak Okyere, grinning, as we tramp around the factory, clad in white protective suits. Hygiene is meticulously observed, everything is gleamingly clean, and high-tech installations have been mounted everywhere which enable the daily production of 80,000 bars of chocolate,



80,000 bars of chocolate are produced daily in fairafric’s factory in Ghana.

Photos: Jörg Böhling



Vida and Justice Bediako preparing the cocoa beans for fermentation.



The beans are sorted and filled into jute sacks.

many varieties of which are vegan. The greatest challenges are a secure supply of energy, which is absolutely crucial to production, and above all to seeing to it that the cooling chain is not interrupted, as well as skilled maintenance of the machines. Part of the energy is supplied by rooftop photovoltaics.

Just like in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire, processing raw cocoa in Ghana continues to be the exception. World-wide, the two countries are by far the largest producers of the valuable beans. Although the Ghanaian cocoa industry scored a turnover of approx. 500 million euros in 2021, given the ravenous appetite the world has for chocolate, far more would be quite feasible. For while 70 per cent of global raw cocoa produce is still grown in West Africa, only

around one per cent of the global chocolate volume originates from this region.

Good prospects for eco-production

In Ghana, the cocoa industry employs several million people, most of them as growers in agriculture, but also as staff in the transport sector and trade. However, just like Côte d'Ivoire, Togo and Benin, Ghana is struggling with a range of challenges which the cocoa farmers are taking on. In many places, cocoa plots are being logged so that gold and other valuable metals can be dug for. Also, natural pollination of the cocoa trees is often no longer sufficient to achieve sustainable harvest volumes given changing weather conditions and rising dis-

ease levels. Specialists from the Government's Ghana Cocoa Board concede that conventional cultivation practised over the last few decades has only yielded stagnating or even falling harvest volumes. For example, the sole use of mineral fertiliser, without organic components, does not appear to have done the soils much good – they suffer from salinisation and acidification. Thus it is no wonder that many are eagerly awaiting the impact the activities of Glover and fairafic as well as other actors are having in the socio-ecological segment of the economy.

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Yayrator Glover buys the harvest of around 5,000 producers.



After fermentation, the cocoa beans are dried in the sun.