

Six lessons: LEARNING FROM IMPACT EVALUATION IN COCOA FARMING

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A joint report by Ipsos and Mondelez International Cocoa Life



Introduction

Cocoa is a basic resource for a range of popular products, and chocolate is cocoa's most famous face. Like the range of chocolate products, cocoa growing is diverse in that it spans different countries, cultures, and approaches to farming around the globe. Chocolate production comes with sustainability challenges: labor, children's and women's rights, interaction between smallholder farms and their natural environment, the viability of farming businesses, and the ability of farmers to generate sufficient income. In the long-run, a chocolate maker's commercial success will depend on viable solutions to these challenges.

Mondelēz International's Cocoa Life program is a major platform for cocoa sustainability activities. The Cocoa Life program works with thousands of smallholder farmers, their communities, and their families, by providing access to training for on-farm and off-farm skills, building platforms within communities to steer their own development, assisting with funding for community projects, and partnering to protect natural resources.

To be successful, Cocoa Life needs to measure what is needed to promote sustainable cocoa, what works, and what doesn't work. Measurement is a challenge in and of itself: theories about impact and change have to be agreed; indicators and approaches for measurement have to be defined; information on progress has to be collected from farmers, families, and communities in different contexts and with different ability to provide data; information needs to be comparable over time while the program needs to be agile to respond to new situations; and information needs to be simple and generalizable while describing complex and diverse situations.

The most important learning upfront: don't try to do this alone. Among Cocoa Life's independent learning partners is Ipsos, an international research and consulting organization which implements impact evaluations for Cocoa Life in four origins: Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Indonesia, and Dominican Republic. Cocoa Life's impact evaluations have three main elements: household surveys with cocoa farmers and their spouse to understand the situation of their household; cocoa farm visits together to observe the state of the cocoa farm; and qualitative studies with farmers, village leaders and special interest groups such as young people and women.

In this report, Cocoa Life highlights some of the challenges faced in early impact studies and how the learning partnership works to overcome them. The starting point for this learning was the first longitudinal impact study conducted in Ghana in 2015.



When the first follow-up study was completed in 2016, a number of challenges were immediately apparent:



The pace of program evolution and growth since the 2015 Baseline left the study with blind spots concerning Cocoa Life's scale and individual projects.



The aims and priorities for Cocoa Life had been adjusted to adapt to evolving sustainability challenges since program inception.



A change in survey partner had led to some confusion about the meaning of some of the data where there was limited documentation of the design and analytical approach.

While this presented a temporary set-back to the Cocoa Life program in West Africa, Ipsos and Mondelēz International worked collaboratively to turn the challenge into a learning opportunity, implementing mitigation techniques to ensure that these challenges did not occur in subsequent studies. By publishing this article, we hope to help others working in this space to safeguard their research and the integrity of their data.

Six Learnings

Learnings on measurement and evaluation for corporate sustainability projects

We have identified six learnings about how to collect and make the most use of relevant, high-quality data:

1. Don't measure as much as you can, but as much as you have to. Even if it seems like a good idea to add questions or levels of detail to an existing survey because the incremental cost may seem marginal, there is always a hidden cost of dealing with growing complexity of documentation, datasets, and expectations. Overwhelming your teams with too much data is a reliable way to end up with little usable information at all. At Cocoa Life we struggle at times with having too much data available and how to synthesize and make it useful without oversimplifying or overcomplicating. One tool that has helped us along the way was a program theory of change, which is used by our team and partners to keep a focus on key outcomes, impact, and indicators.

2. Key Indicators are not key learning tools. A need for reporting in a concise format and targeting a broad audience which is not deeply embedded in sustainability debates, can lead to focusing resources on high level indicators of success. High-level indicators, however, are not perfectly placed to drive learning with local teams and implementing partners. The Cocoa Life partnership found that important layers of sustainability work need deeper investigation to understand local implementation of program components, without which one struggles to reflect about 'what works' and 'what doesn't work'. Cocoa Life takes care to emphasize direct work with our implementing partners, to draw from their monitoring capacity and build on this with independently collected data through Ipsos.

3. If it isn't fully documented, it isn't fully usable. It sounds simple, but it is so easy to misjudge the required diligence for good documentation around data collection, which makes this a very common point of failure. The only thing that Cocoa Life and [international space exploration*](#) have in common is that both learned the hard way that metadata, such as 'units of measurement' and 'conversion factors' (especially for regional units), should always be documented thoroughly at the time of data capture. Cocoa Life is on its journey towards best-practice documentation and is drafting reference frameworks for most areas of work in close collaboration with our learning partners. In addition, we encourage standardized reporting, for example, requiring the conversion of any local area measurement unit to 'hectares' by default before finalizing a dataset.

Ipsos "How Tos" For Ensuring Data Quality:

1. Create study tools that reflect the context – this makes them easy for respondents to understand.
2. Test draft study instruments and get feedback from the interviewers and the respondents.
3. Program instruments to ensure consistency and sense-checks are built into the survey process.
4. Train interviewers to understand subject-matter so they can flag unlikely responses.
5. Empower interviewers to work with interviewees to get to the right answers.

* Metric math mistake muffed mars meteorology mission, Lisa Grossman, Wired, 11.10.10




4. See it, then solve it. Every actor participating in an intervention and the collection of data gathered on those interventions, needs to be educated and empowered to shape data collection to be relevant, as well as to identify and correct mistakes. Teams involved in any type of monitoring or surveying work should be educated to understand the purpose of the data collection, why the data need to be collected in a specific way (for example by asking a question or formatting the data in a particular way), and what will be done with the data. When properly trained, data collectors in the field can provide the first and best layer of quality control. Investing in this local capacity by educating data collectors fully will mitigate the costs of correcting mistakes later.

5. Align with measurement standards and be ‘open’ if possible. If surveys and data management are aligned to open standards that are recognized by other actors, this can reduce the burden of planning and documenting while enhancing the acceptance and usability of information. There are many types of standards, for example to ensure that regulatory requirements are met, or that purchasers of goods have assurances that a product meets certain requirements. However, these standards are not usually built to enable the tracking of outcomes and impacts of a program. For a program like Cocoa Life, which is outcome-based, it must go beyond these minimum requirements. To that end, Cocoa Life seeks to align with measurement standards and best practices, such as CocoaAction, living income and other income benchmarking, and [Ipsos’ framework for measuring impact in women’s economic empowerment](#).*

6. Talk about it. Information and learning are concepts that don’t exist without a socialization process: they require people reflecting and acting upon data. Too often, data is seen as a resource with intrinsic value that can be stored and kept as a competitive asset, but most data will diminish or lose its value without being socialized properly. For Cocoa Life, that means continuously re-evaluating and adapting how we create reports for our internal teams, partners, and outside stakeholders. Often this involves an element of innovation, trial, and taking time to talk with recipients about the most comfortable ways to experience data. This is also important from a motivational perspective as there is little more frustrating than doing work that is not discussed or used. That leads us to the story of this very article and your role: we hope that we can encourage you to start or join a learning partnership of your own, and to start writing and sharing about your learnings with others. As a first step, please leave your comments and opinions with us by commenting on this article!

* Measuring Women’s Economic Empowerment, Ipsos, 2018



See it, then solve it Voice from the Ground

“One problem we have is that farmers give incorrect farm sizes, they don’t know the size of their farm. Our interviews have been trained on farming and they are familiar with cocoa farming, so they can talk to the farmers and try to work out what the correct answer is. For example, they do a farm perimeter walk, so they know if the answer is much too high or too low.

Or sometimes they answer in units that aren’t standard, like in poles. Our interviewers can also help farmers to convert the units into a standard one. We have put calculators on their CAPI tablets to help them do this, and we also have made a conversion sheet for interviewers to bring with them to help them do this. In addition, sometimes farmers have trouble estimating or thinking of percentages, because they have low numeracy skills. We have made showcards that have percentages on them to help farmers estimate.”

William Mensah, Head of
Public Affairs, Ipsos Ghana

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