

Statement by ECOTOP on the Brussels Declaration of the World Cocoa Conference 2024

Brussels, 22 April 2024 – ECOTOP Suisse is pleased to acknowledge the successful conclusion of the fifth edition of the World Cocoa Conference (WCC), held in Brussels on April 24th, 2024.

Background:

Delegates from 52 ICCO member states demonstrated their commitment to addressing critical challenges in the cocoa sector by adopting the 'Brussels Declaration.' This declaration emphasizes the need for sustainable cocoa production and highlights key aspects such as ensuring a living income for cocoa farmers, empowering farmers, accounting for environmental and social costs, and promoting reforestation and agroforestry.

The current crisis in the cocoa sector is a structural one, rooted in the decomplexification and intensification of agroecosystems. The largest cocoa-producing region, West Africa, faces substantial challenges in sustaining its industry. Despite a steady decline in productivity over the past 20 years, total output has been masked by expanding the agricultural frontier, which has led to significant deforestation and land degradation. This unsustainable growth has reached a critical juncture, with diminishing productivity per hectare and a plethora of cocoa plantations in dire condition. Compounding these issues are declining staple food production, land resource competition, environmental degradation, and climate change-induced variations in rainfall and drought threats.

Conclusion:

Traditional solutions such as mineral fertilizers and pesticides have proven insufficient. A paradigm shift toward agroecological approaches, such as Dynamic Agroforestry (DAF), is now crucial. DAF aims to restore soil fertility, enhance biodiversity and yields, and ensure the long-term viability of cocoa production, while providing a dignified living income for farmers.

Inspired by Albert Einstein's insight that "Problems cannot be solved with the same thinking that created them," we believe it is imperative to fundamentally rethink our approach to cocoa cultivation. The urgency of the situation requires a united effort to address these challenges through appropriate actions that extend beyond simple measures like planting some trees in cocoa plantations.

In recent history, cocoa cultivation has been the driver of deforestation. However, we now recognize an opportunity for a significant paradigm shift. Far from being a problem, we see it as a key element for reforestation.

This shift also calls for a new understanding of the cocoa complex. Our focus should be on optimizing the cultivation of an entire system, not merely maximizing crop yields and output in the short-term. As part of that system, cocoa-producing families must also sustainably produce food, moving away from slash-and-burn practices and the reliance on agrochemicals.

In conclusion, ECOTOP Suisse and ECOTOP Foundation reaffirm their commitment to promoting agroecological solutions for cocoa production in producing countries. Through collective action and holistic approaches, we are dedicated to paving the way for a more resilient and sustainable cocoa industry, ensuring a brighter future for both farmers and ecosystems.