

CLIMATE-SMART AND INCLUSIVE COCOA

Papua New Guinea | Impact Brief
(2021–2025)



About this report

This impact brief summarises results from World Vision Papua New Guinea's final evaluation of the Climate-Smart and Inclusive Cocoa Project, supported by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP). The evaluation was conducted by an independent consultancy - ADH Consulting (Beatrice Tabebu, Andy Hunter), reviewed by Willie Douglas Kunsei, Dehaan Lapawe, Nancy Kasimani, and Shareena Sarah Griffin, World Vision Papua New Guinea and Vincent Potier, Rivika Bisht and Nicole Joseland, World Vision Australia. For more information, contact ancp@worldvision.com.au

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Front cover photo:
Adrian can build a sustainable future thanks to the COCOA project.

BACKGROUND

Duration	July 2021 – June 2025
Funded by	The Australian Government through the Australian NGO Co-operation Program
Location	Usino Bundi District, Madang Province
Reach	13,837 people in 90 communities across 21 wards

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

World Vision’s Climate-Smart and Inclusive Cocoa Project aimed to improve child well-being through market-based economic development across 21 wards in Usino Bundi District, Madang Province, Papua New Guinea. Implemented from 2021 to 2025, the project combined climate-smart cocoa farming, market access, financial literacy, savings resilience, and economic and social pathways for women’s participation and equality.

As the project transitioned to a new phase in 2025, a final evaluation found strong technical achievements in cocoa production and successful Savings for Transformation (S4T) groups with gender parity. Cocoa cooperatives demonstrated improved operational capacity, including market access, though governance was not yet stable. Participants reported positive impacts including increased household incomes, reduced youth involvement in crime, and improved family relationships.

Goals for women’s improved economic and social status were challenging to achieve, given systemic gender barriers in this context. Women’s duties, including caregiving, contributed to their exclusion from working in nurseries or attending training. Cocoa farmers in this area were almost exclusively male, restricting female farmers’ access to knowledge and technologies to participate in the cocoa market.

The project’s second phase (2026-30) takes up recommendations on safe participation of women in expanded economic value chains, and a strengthened emphasis on climate-smart agriculture and restorative land management.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS



1,916 farmers accessed improved seedlings, with 97% of clone distribution targets achieved.



790 members (with gender parity) joined Savings for Transformation groups, and 398 opened individual bank accounts.



Five private sector partnerships were mobilised and collective cocoa sales of K68,960 (approximately AUD 22,000) recorded.



Women achieved parity in financial groups but were largely excluded from cocoa production training and cooperative leadership due to systemic barriers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. ESTABLISH GENDER-RESPONSIVE EXTENSION SYSTEMS WITH MORE VARIED VALUE CHAIN OPTIONS.**
- 2. BUILD COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS.**
- 3. SECURE REGULATORY APPROVAL FOR SOLAR DRYERS AND EXPAND TECHNOLOGIES.**
- 4. STRENGTHEN FINANCIAL LINKAGES AND MARKET INFRASTRUCTURE.**
- 5. PRIORITISE DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE STRATEGIES WITH TAILORED SUPPORT.**

CONTEXT

Cocoa is Papua New Guinea's third largest agricultural export, providing livelihoods for two million people. It was once a vital cash crop in Usino Bundi, before cocoa borer infested existing plantations. Poor infrastructure and weak market access made it impossible for cocoa growers to recover from this loss.

The COCOA Project was launched to revitalise cocoa production while embedding climate-smart practices and gender advancement. Its rationale was clear: without addressing productivity gaps, market barriers, and systemic gender inequities, rural households could not secure stable incomes or improved child well-being. The baseline found farmers lacked access to quality disease-resistant stock, that existing cooperatives were weak, and financial literacy was limited. Women were contributing significantly to agricultural production but not taking part in decisions about land use, household economies or financial benefits. Widows and people with disability were particularly marginalised.

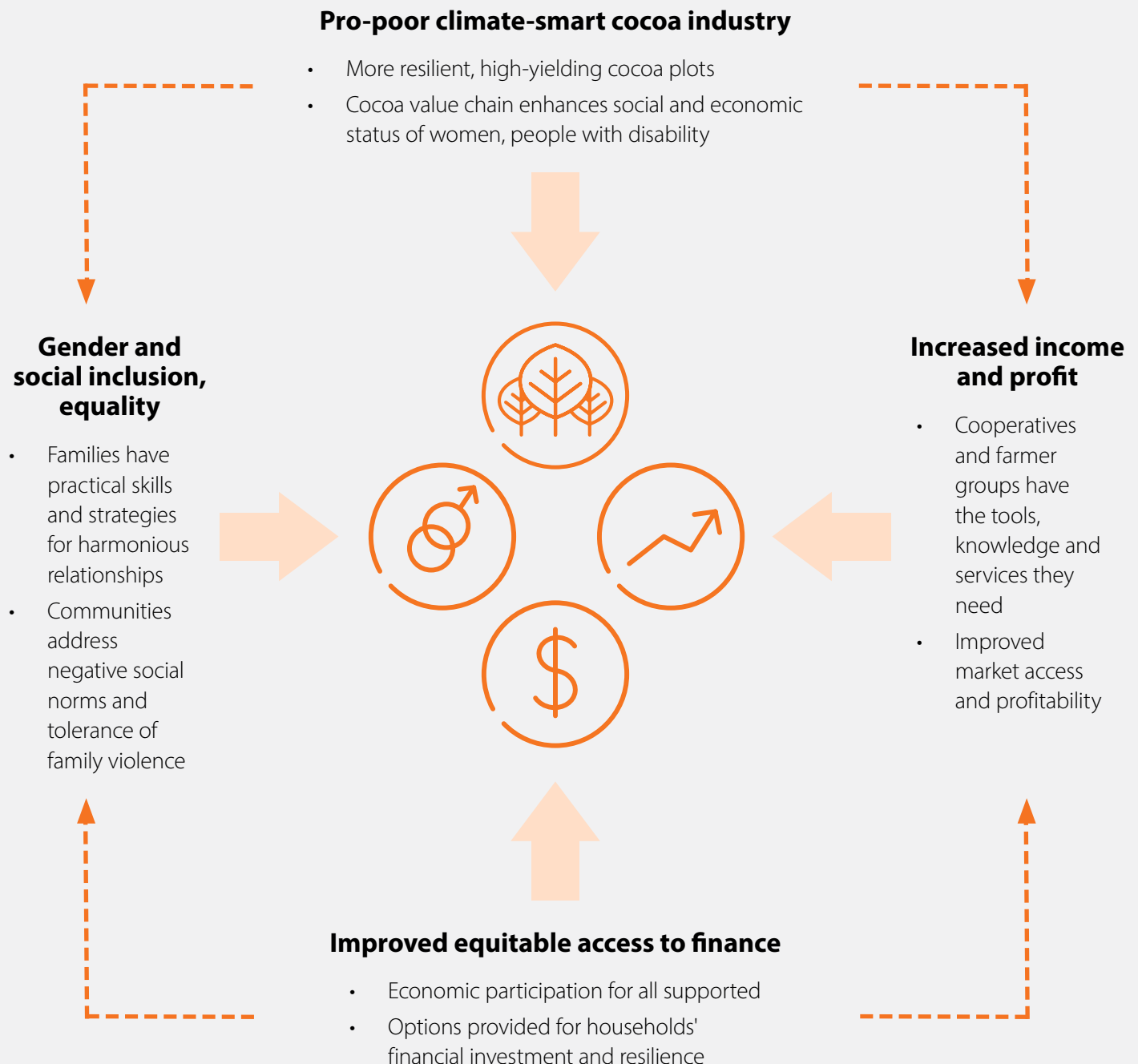
The project built inclusive economic development by:

- Strengthening climate-smart cocoa production capacity
- Improving market access and income opportunities
- Enhancing household and cooperative financial resilience
- Promoting gender equity and social inclusion

The timing of COCOA worked in favour of its economic outcomes, coinciding with rising global cocoa prices, new market entrants, and government subsidies provided an enabling environment for smallholder farmers to participate as equals. Working with two member-led cooperatives, Kou and Gigaso, the project provided technical training, supported nursery establishment and the strengthening of cooperative structures. It also promoted women's economic participation through gender-inclusive financial literacy (couples-based) and discussions with communities on gender equality, women's status and investing in girls and women.

THEORY OF CHANGE

Goal: To increase household resilience while building climate-smart, inclusive market linkages for farmers and their families by 2025.





Getari, a participant in the Cocoa project, learned how to graft and bud pest-resistant cocoa seedlings. She then taught her skills to other local women who were eager to take part in this lucrative aspect of cocoa farming.

EVALUATION OVERVIEW

World Vision Papua New Guinea commissioned a formative evaluation of the COCOA project in 2025, recognising the project's transition to a new phase and the need for a refreshed approach to gender and climate components. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining 19 focus group discussions and 13 key informant interviews with 113 participants (46 women and 67 men) across the Kou and Gigaso cooperatives. It also drew on household survey data from the previous year's mid-term review. Case studies were developed to capture the perspectives of vulnerable groups such as female-headed households and persons with disabilities. Data was analysed thematically and triangulated with secondary sources such as monitoring reports and the mid-term review.

The evaluators, ADH Consulting, noted the following methodological limitations:

- Purposive sampling, which limited generalisability.
- Time constraints for data collection and validation.

These limitations were lessened by the clarity of purpose of the evaluation, which did not require statistically significant change data to inform recommendations and decisions for the second phase.

FINDINGS

The project generated measurable positive impacts, particularly in increased household income and youth engagement. Improved farming practices enabled farmers to rehabilitate old trees and increase productivity, with many attributing income gains to enhanced production rather than just rising cocoa prices. Participants reported two unexpected outcomes: reduced youth involvement in criminal activities through increased engagement in cocoa farming; and improved compliance with necessary annual fermentory licences, a result of joint training initiatives with the PNG Cocoa Board.

OUTCOME 1 (FARMING PRODUCTION) WAS ACHIEVED FULLY, with 1,916 farmers receiving their allocation of locally cloned disease-resistant cocoa (97% of target). Four central nurseries were completed and certified, four budwood gardens established (special plots of healthy cocoa trees grown to provide cuttings for grafting new, disease-resistant plants), and ten qualified lead farmers identified. The farmer field school model, combined with lead farmer networks and backyard nurseries, proved highly effective for knowledge transfer across literacy levels. However, gender nuances under this outcome were not met given social barriers to accessing training and resources, and for some groups (widows and single mothers) active social stigma.

OUTCOME 2 (MARKET SYSTEM ACCESS) WAS PARTIALLY ACHIEVED.

Five private sector actors invested in the cocoa value chain, with cooperatives improving their operational capacity and facilitating K68,960 (approximately AUD22,000) in annual collective sales. The project's main climate innovation, solar dryer technology, was popular with users because dried beans had better value without the disadvantage of fuel-based drying (usually woodsmoke). However, efforts to have the technology adopted by the Papua New Guinea Cocoa Board have not yet been successful and will also continue under the second phase.

OUTCOME 3 (FINANCIAL RESILIENCE) EMERGED AS THE PROJECT'S STRONGEST PERFORMER, demonstrating remarkable success in financial inclusion and literacy, including for women. Across savings groups, membership was roughly gender-equal. A total of 398 S4T members opened their first individual bank accounts (173 female, 225 male) with formal financial institutions, while 14 groups established group accounts with major banks. The evaluation found meaningful behavioural change in household financial management, with couples reporting improved budgeting skills, shared decision-making, and enhanced family relationships.

OUTCOME 4 (GENDER EQUALITY, DISABILITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION) WAS NOT ACHIEVED, in part due to delayed staff recruitment and a late start on training and activities. While some progress was made in community engagement and establishing GEDSI referral pathways, there was no evidence it had led to meaningful impact on structural inequalities. Men with disability were among lead farmers, but overall disability mainstreaming was not resourced to its full extent, a key recommendation for the second phase.

GENDER OUTCOMES

A notable shift in gender dynamics emerged through S4T interventions, with male participants acknowledging women's superior financial management skills and couples reporting improved relationships through joint savings planning. One male participant noted that "women bring home most of the income and account for every single toea spent," representing a significant recognition of women's financial competence. The evaluation also found notable improvements in household financial decisions when couples were part of S4T. Communities gave many examples of women's financial empowerment where individuals were recognised for their financial capability, managing income from cocoa and building their own assets: tools, seedlings and savings.

Ultimately, though, limited systemic change in male-dominated structures, including the cooperatives, reinforced tightly held gender roles, with exclusive male lead farmer appointments and limited access for female-headed households to extension services.

Tanget is a wild-growing, culturally significant plant across Papua New Guinea. As a trial contributing to women's economic inclusion, 10 lead farmers planted tanget cuttings to act as a fence to divide their allocation of 300 cocoa clones: 200 plants grown for household income, and 100 to show the income belonged to the women and children of the household, along with decisions on how this income was used. Typically, women used their proportion to invest in S4T savings. Given initial promising results, this social change approach will be further tested in the second phase to become a 'gender norm' of its own.

SUSTAINABILITY

The evaluation concluded mixed results for sustainability of project outcomes. Farm-level practices were strong but institutional capacity (cooperative management) less so. Farmers continued to share and adopt improved techniques like budding, pruning, and intercropping even without ongoing support. Climate-smart practices, particularly agroforestry and soil conservation, were seen as economically and environmentally beneficial, and widely used. Though a comprehensive environmental study was not part of the evaluation, participants talked about solar dryers reducing deforestation, as well as improved family relationships around land management decisions. Unfortunately, while cooperative market engagement was successful, both Kou and Gigaso cooperatives lacked robust governance. Cooperative members expressed concerns about post-project transition when project staff are no longer available for oversight.



Cocoa plants thriving as part of the COCOA project.



A STRONG ADVOCATE FOR CLIMATE-SMART COCOA FARMING: HENRY'S STORY

Henry is the Chairman of the Kou Cocoa Cooperative, and is living with a visual impairment. He says that before the project, farmers lacked the knowledge and tools to maintain healthy and productive cocoa trees. As Henry explains, "The cacao tree was not the problem; the problem was with the people farming it because they lacked skills and tools that would enable them to have healthy and productive cacao trees." He notes that the project began at a crucial time, when communities needed knowledge-sharing on climate-smart farming techniques.

Through the COCOA Project, farmers have gained access to practical tools, solar lights, water pumps, and solar dryers, supporting more resilient cocoa production, processing, and sustainable market access. Henry reflects, "This project has helped so much, and we have to thank World Vision for that. As chairman, I have observed real change in the community because of this."

The project has also ensured that Henry has access to assistive devices, enabling him to participate meaningfully in farming activities. "I am one of them, going into my block to prune, clean, and bud my cocoa plants. So yes, I am farming as well — a visually impaired person farming cocoa," he says with a smile.



Kenekem, a farmer in PNG, tends to his cocoa crops.

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