# GhanaCocoaConnect

16 - 17 April 2026
The Hague, Netherlands

## Stakeholder Brief

GHANA COCOA CONNECT CONFERENCE 2026

# CONFERENCE BRIEF

*The Cocoa Sector at a Crossroads:*

*Leadership, Policy Reform and Investment*

16–17 April 2026 • The Hague, Netherlands

Organised by AfroEuro Foundation in collaboration with the Embassy of Ghana in the Kingdom of the Netherlands

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## About Ghana Cocoa Connect

Ghana Cocoa Connect is an annual high-level policy and investment conference dedicated to the resilience and long-term competitiveness of Ghana's cocoa sector. Convened by AfroEuro Foundation in collaboration with the Embassy of Ghana in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the conference is held each year in The Hague.

The 2026 edition took place on 16–17 April 2026 at two venues in The Hague: Waldorpstraat 17 (Day 1, open session) and the RVO premises (Day 2, by invitation). The conference convened over 40 organisations across six stakeholder clusters, including senior representatives from the Ghanaian and Dutch governments, international financial institutions, the cocoa and chocolate industry, civil society, academic researchers, and cocoa farmer representatives.

The theme, “The Cocoa Sector at a Crossroads: Leadership, Policy Reform and Investment”, deliberately framed the occasion as a call for decisive action and collaboration.

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| **Organiser** | AfroEuro Foundation |
| **Co-organiser** | Embassy of Ghana in the Kingdom of the Netherlands |
| **Dates** | 16–17 April 2026 |
| **Venue** | The Hague, Netherlands |
| **Format** | Day 1: Open high-level conference • Day 2: Closed-door strategic roundtable |
| **Organisations represented** | Over 40, across six stakeholder clusters |

## Key Figures

**800,000**
Ghanaian cocoa farmers directly affected by the current sector crisis

**76%**
World cocoa price decline: USD 12,500/MT (April 2024) to ≈USD 3,000/MT (March 2026)

**40%**
Of Ghana's cocoa farmland currently unproductive due to disease and ageing trees

# The Situation

Why the sector is at a crossroads

Ghana's cocoa sector, the livelihood of approximately 800,000 farmers across the Western, Ashanti, Eastern, and Central regions is facing a convergence of crises. Three forces have arrived simultaneously, and no single intervention addresses all three.

## Price Collapse

The world cocoa market has lost more than 76% of its value in under two years, falling from a peak of approximately USD 12,500 per metric tonne in April 2024 to approximately USD 3,000 per metric tonne as of March 2026. At these price levels, cocoa farming is economically marginal for most smallholders. The price decline is driven by a combination of weak global chocolate demand, surplus forecasts, speculator activity, low per-capita consumption in producing countries, and the continued substitution of cocoa butter in chocolate manufacturing.

## Disease and Ageing Farmland

A national survey conducted by the Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD) has confirmed that approximately 40% of Ghana's productive cocoa farmland is currently unproductive. Of this, 23% is directly affected by Cocoa Swollen Shoot Virus Disease (CSSVD), a viral disease that destroys cocoa trees and spreads rapidly. A further 17% comprises over-aged, moribund trees that are beyond productive recovery without replanting.

CSSVD is not primarily a technical problem. As one keynote speaker observed: “a diseased cocoa tree is often not a technical failure, it is a financial one.” Farmers who earn too little cannot invest in replanting. Addressing the disease requires income support alongside agronomic intervention.

## Illegal Gold Mining (Galamsey)

Illegal gold mining is actively competing with cocoa for land across Ghana's growing regions. Soil is destroyed, water sources polluted, and long-term agricultural productivity permanently lost. Where cocoa income is insufficient, illegal mining offers a more immediately attractive return. Addressing this requires making cocoa economically competitive, not only enforcement. The new Cocoa Bill currently before the Ghanaian Parliament addresses this directly with a statutory ban on selling cocoa farmlands for mining activities.

> *“Galamsey has proven to be an existential threat to the long-term sustainability of Ghana's cocoa sector.”*
>
> **— Dr. James Kofi Kutsoati, Deputy Chief Executive (Operations), Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD)**

## Ghana's Policy Response

Four Cabinet-level reforms enacted in February 2026

Ghana did not arrive at The Hague with aspirations. Following an emergency Cabinet meeting on 12 February 2026 convened specifically to address the cocoa sector crisis, the Government of Ghana enacted four structural reforms:

| Cabinet Reform | Detail |
|---|---|
| **New Producer Pricing Model** | Automatic adjustment aligned to world market price and exchange rate. Guarantees a minimum 70% of the gross FOB price to the farmer — providing income security and direct market linkage. |
| **New Cocoa Funding Model** | Restructured funding for cocoa purchases with an explicit focus on enabling local value addition. Addresses the working capital gap that has constrained buying operations. |
| **New Cocoa Bill** | Approved for parliamentary submission. Includes a statutory ban on selling cocoa farmlands for illegal mining activities, measures against cocoa smuggling, and enforcement against farm destruction by illegal miners. |
| **COCOBOD Balance Sheet Relief** | Transfer of quasi-physical expenditures — including cocoa roads — from COCOBOD to the Ministry of Roads and Highways. Refocuses COCOBOD on its core mandate. |

### EUDR Compliance: Ghana's Status

Ghana has also made significant advances in preparing for the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR), which requires traceable, deforestation-free supply chains:

- 99% of Ghana's cocoa crop has passed through the Ghana Cocoa Traceability System (GCTS)
- Ghana has been formally classified as LOW RISK for deforestation under the EU assessment framework
- Ghana's Deforestation Risk Assessment Model is developed and operational
- Standard Operating Procedures and Due Diligence Reporting are in validation
- Ghana is targeting full EUDR compliance readiness by 30 December 2026

This positions Ghana ahead of most competing cocoa origins and validates the significant traceability infrastructure investments already made by COCOBOD and sector partners.

> *"Ghana has done the compliance work. What is needed now is the policy certainty from Brussels — and the investment commitment from The Hague."*
>
> **— Strategic synthesis, Day 2 Roundtable**

# Conference Highlights

## Opening Address — H.E. Eddison Mensah Agbenyegah

H.E. the Ambassador of Ghana to the Netherlands underscored the diplomatic urgency of the conference, calling on both Dutch and Ghanaian actors to move from expressions of intent to binding partnership commitments. He specifically raised the challenge of visa delays for Ghanaian professionals, which are actively limiting practitioner-level collaboration between the two countries.

## COCOBOD Address — Dr. James Kofi Kutsoati

Dr. Kutsoati, Deputy Chief Executive (Operations) of COCOBOD, presented a detailed diagnosis of Ghana's farm-level crisis and Ghana's policy response. He outlined COCOBOD's four priority areas: disease management, research infrastructure, local processing expansion, and social support for farming communities and provided the precise data on CSSVD impact and EUDR compliance that anchored conference discussions throughout both days.

## Keynote Address — Mr. Pieter Schulting, JS Cocoa

Mr. Schulting, CEO of JS Cocoa, delivered the keynote as a systemic diagnosis rather than a company presentation. His central argument: the challenges facing Ghana's cocoa sector: youth exit, tree disease, yield decline, eroding farmer confidence are not isolated problems. They are deeply interconnected symptoms of the same structural failures in how the cocoa value chain is designed.

Schulting identified six urgent steps needed to turn the sector around, structured as a framework:

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| **Land Ownership & Responsibility** | Without land security, farmers cannot plan long-term, act as entrepreneurs, or make multi-year investments. Clear, enforceable land rights are a structural economic foundation. |
| **Value Creation & Value Sharing** | The global cocoa chain generates significant value. Only a small share reaches farmers at origin. Industry actors carry direct responsibility for this imbalance. |
| **Farmer Development & Independent Institutions** | Farmer development should not be led primarily by those who depend commercially on cheap cocoa. Independent institutions must anchor long-term outcomes. |
| **Addressing Galamsey** | Illegal gold mining is destroying cocoa land. Governments must act with enforcement, alternative livelihoods, and land restoration — these are not optional. |
| **From Farmer to Entrepreneur** | Farmers must be recognised as entrepreneurs, not raw material suppliers. This requires land security, fair value participation, and access to finance. |
| **From System Challenge to Practical Action** | Cocoa's challenges must be addressed as an interconnected system requiring redesign, not as isolated problems for another pilot project. |

> *"A diseased cocoa tree is often not a technical failure. It is a financial one. If we want healthier farms, we must first enable healthier farm economics."*
>
> **— Pieter Schulting, CEO, JS Cocoa / RESIGHA, Keynote Address, 16 April 2026**

## Panel Discussion I: Policy Reform, Investment & Market Access

The first panel brought together COCOBOD, JS Cocoa, VNO-NCW, and MKB Nederland to discuss the state of policy reform and investment appetite. Key themes included the need for institutional efficiency reform within COCOBOD, land tenure security as a prerequisite for farmer investment, the importance of laboratory and traceability infrastructure, and the persistent gap between Dutch development finance readiness and the bankable project proposals reaching investors.

## Parallel Workshops

Two parallel workshops examined the practical landscape for investment and sustainability compliance:

- Workshop A: Dutch Policy, Finance & PPP Instruments identified the 'bankability gap' as the primary bottleneck to capital deployment. Dutch development finance institutions have an appetite to invest; the barrier is the absence of structured proposals meeting their due diligence requirements.

- Workshop B: Sustainability, Traceability & Fair Trade, examined EUDR compliance readiness, fair trade certification, and the commercial premium available for origin-processed, certified cocoa. Regulatory delays from the European Commission were identified as creating uncertainty for early adopters of traceability systems.

## Panel Discussion II: Building Bankable Cocoa Value Chains

The afternoon panel produced the conference's most direct articulation of a systemic challenge: Ghana's cocoa value chain is not currently designed to be bankable. Farmer income levels are too low to service formal credit. Institutional structures are too rigid for commercial risk. The panel examined how blended finance models combining concessional and commercial capital can address these structural constraints.

The panel also heard important data on gender disparity: women represent approximately 25% of the cocoa farming workforce but face substantially restricted access to finance and leadership roles. Research cited at the conference indicates that female farmers consistently produce higher-quality cocoa meaning the gender gap represents an economic inefficiency as well as a social inequity.

> *"Farmers are the foundation of the entire value chain. Yet they are the last to be consulted and the first to bear the consequences of decisions made without them."*
>
> **— Dr. Prince, Conference Participant**

## Day 2: Strategic Roundtable

Closed-door session — Friday, 17 April 2026 • RVO Premises, The Hague

Day 2 convened a closed-door, invitation-only strategic roundtable at the RVO premises, restricted to senior decision-makers from the confirmed stakeholder group. The session operated on a Chatham House-inspired basis: contributions are reported thematically rather than attributed to named individuals.

The roundtable opened by acknowledging a recurring risk: the sector has convened, deliberated, and concluded many times before. The question was whether this occasion would produce a different outcome.

### Investment Opportunities: CPC and PBC

COCOBOD formally presented two state-owned assets as investment opportunities available for Dutch and international capital:

- Cocoa Processing Company (CPC): Ghana's state-owned processor, open for investment in retooling existing production lines, expanding product range, and scaling export capacity of processed goods. CPC represents Ghana's most direct route to capturing value-added margins currently accruing to European processors.
- Produce Buying Company (PBC): Historically managed 30–40% of the national crop. Currently financially distressed, but with intact physical, logistical, and relational infrastructure. Investment in PBC would revive large-scale buying capacity and restore a critical market function serving 800,000 farmers.

### Offline-First Digital Infrastructure

A major operational decision was the formal adoption of an Offline-First model for cocoa sector data systems. This directly addresses the intermittent 4G connectivity that has historically limited traceability data coverage in rural growing regions. Data is collected and stored locally on devices, then synchronised when connectivity is available. Farmforce was confirmed as the platform of record, with a target coverage of 40,000 farmers.

### The Green Lane Visa Mechanism

The roundtable formally addressed the persistent challenge of Dutch visa delays for Ghanaian cocoa sector professionals. A “Green Lane” mechanism, a dedicated, accelerated processing channel for verified sector professionals  was agreed as a formal proposal to be developed jointly by the Ghana Embassy and Dutch government representatives and submitted to the relevant ministries within 60 days.

## 2026–2030 Strategic Pillars

The conference agreed on three strategic pillars defining the sector's transformation agenda for the period 2026–2030. These represent a deliberate shift from pilot projects to permanent operational change at system level.

**01**

### Digital Sovereignty

Offline-First architecture formally adopted. Farm-level data stored locally and peer-synced, eliminating dependency on cloud systems in low-connectivity rural zones. Farmforce platform targeting 40,000-farmer coverage.

**02**

### Traceability & EU Compliance

Real-time monitoring via Farmforce. 99% of Ghana's cocoa already through the Ghana Cocoa Traceability System. Ghana formally classified as LOW RISK for deforestation under EUDR. Full compliance targeted by 30 December 2026.

**03**

### Circular Economy

Scale processing of off-specification and side-stream cocoa into high-value cocoa butter. Increases total value per hectare, returns higher margins to origin farmers, and reduces economic pressure to convert cocoa land to illegal mining.

## The Diaspora as a Structural Actor

From cultural participants to economic co-investors

One of the most significant thematic developments of the 2026 conference was the treatment of the Ghanaian diaspora in the Netherlands as a structural economic actor in the cocoa sector not as a peripheral cultural participant, but as a class of stakeholder with specific and underutilised capacities.

### The Connect, Innovate, Invest & Influence Framework

Prof. Jos Walenkamp of The Hague University of Applied Sciences (THUAS) opened the conference with a framework mapping four distinct contributions the diaspora is positioned to make:

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| **Connect** | Diaspora members function as bridges between Ghanaian farmers and Dutch companies. They carry the cultural knowledge required for genuine trust — a non-replicable asset in cross-border business. |
| **Innovate** | Diaspora professionals with Dutch institutional experience can transfer knowledge and technology into Ghanaian agricultural contexts, particularly in areas of Dutch agri-sector expertise. |

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| **Invest** | Diaspora members can co-invest in small-to-medium processing enterprises, de-risk entry for Dutch companies, and link remittance flows to formal productive investment structures. |
| **Influence** | Diaspora organisations can advocate within Dutch government structures for trade facilitation, represent Ghana in EU policy debates, and promote Ghana-origin premium cocoa in European markets. |

### Structural Barriers Identified

Three structural barriers actively prevent diaspora economic potential from being mobilised: the fragmentation of diaspora networks as an institutional force; limited access to formal co-investment finance instruments; and the misalignment between Dutch and Ghanaian bureaucratic systems, most visibly the persistent visa challenge. These are solvable with political will and coordination.

### Day 2 Commitment: A Diaspora Engagement Framework

The Day 2 Roundtable produced a specific commitment: the establishment of a Ghanaian-Dutch diaspora cocoa working group to explore co-investment models, facilitate matchmaking between diaspora networks and Dutch processing companies, and formalise the diaspora's bridging role in the Green Lane visa process. A diaspora liaison position within the Task Force secretariat was endorsed.

## Key Outcomes & Agreed Next Steps

The conference concluded with a set of specific, agreed outputs. These are the concrete results produced by the two-day convening:

- Formation of a multi-stakeholder Task Force to develop and steward a sector recovery roadmap, with a secretariat, terms of reference, and a 12-month mandate.
- CPC investment prospectus and PBC restructuring plan to be commissioned within 30–90 days.
- Joint Green Lane visa proposal to be submitted to Dutch ministries within 60 days, enabling smoother professional travel for Ghanaian cocoa sector representatives.
- Offline-First data model formally adopted for rural traceability systems, with Farmforce deployed as the platform of record targeting 40,000 farmers.
- Diaspora engagement framework established: a Ghanaian-Dutch diaspora cocoa working group and a dedicated Task Force liaison role.
- Stakeholder contact register to be circulated within 30 days to enable post-conference follow-up.
- CSSVD emergency response programme to be formalised within 90 days, including farmer income protection mechanisms and a replanting supply chain.
- New Cocoa Bill monitored parliamentary progress as a near-term indicator of Ghanaian government political will.

## Conclusion

The Ghana Cocoa Connect Conference 2026 succeeded in assembling a good cross-section of actors required to turn sector ambition into sector action.

What the conference also surfaced, with unusual clarity, is the gap between the scale of the problem and the scale of the current response. Ghana's cocoa sector faces an existential disease crisis, a broken financing architecture, a structurally excluded farmer base, a departing youth workforce, and significant governance tensions. Meeting these challenges requires not more discussion, but a qualitatively different kind of institutional response.

The multi-stakeholder Task Force agreed at the close of the conference is the first and most critical test of that commitment. Its formation, the circulation of the stakeholder register, and the initiation of the Green Lane visa proposal were good steps in the right direction.

> *"The capacity in this room is extraordinary. The question is not whether we can solve this. The question is whether we will choose to."*
>
> **— Closing reflection, Day 2 Roundtable**

## Participating Organisations

The conference brought together over 40 organisations across six stakeholder clusters.

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| **Government & Diplomatic** | Embassy of Ghana in the Kingdom of the Netherlands • Dutch Embassy, Accra • RVO (Netherlands Enterprise Agency) • Ghana Free Zones Authority (GFZA) • Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD) |
| **Financial Institutions** | Rabobank • Invest International • PharmAccess Foundation • MKB Nederland |
| **Private Sector** | JS Cocoa • Produce Buying Company (PBC) • Kumasi Drink • Fairways.tech • Farmforce • Edibor • Contour Union • Equal Trade Partners |
| **Trade & Industry Bodies** | VNO-NCW • NABC (Netherlands-African Business Council) • WINCC |
| **Civil Society & NGOs** | AfroEuro Foundation • Africa in Motion • Ghanaian Chiefs Foundation • Vice Versa Media |
| **Research, Academia & Farmer Representatives** | THUAS / SDG Café • Utrecht University • Cocoa Farmers Association • Individual farmer delegates |

## About AfroEuro Foundation

AfroEuro Foundation is a Netherlands-based non-governmental organisation established in 2003. Its mandate is to promote a positive image of the African diaspora in Europe and to mobilise diaspora capacity and resources for economic and social development in Africa.

The Foundation operates at a policy level and positions itself as a credible institutional convener. Its work spans policy advocacy, investment facilitation, trade and business platforms, and capacity development with a specific focus on strengthening Ghana–Netherlands bilateral cooperation.

Ghana Cocoa Connect as well as the Netherlands-Ghana Business & Tourism Expo are the Foundation's flagship events in the trade facilitation and economic diplomacy space. The 2027 edition is in planning.

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***Building the Bridge.***

AfroEuro Foundation • The Hague, Netherlands • April 2026