



 **Cacaohibalo** (*Cacao knowledge*)

Sustainable cacao development: Lessons from North Luwu, Indonesia



The global cacao market has been booming, which offers a lot of opportunities for Filipino cacao growers and entrepreneurs. However, the country's current share of the world's cacao market is still less than 0.01%. With the status of our cacao industry—with the challenges it faces and various limitations that our producers need to overcome—it might still take time before the Philippines can be placed alongside the top cacao producing countries across the globe.

The good news is that in terms of efforts to increase cacao production and enhance the quality of produce, we are not starting from scratch. The local private and public sector has been actively implementing interventions to support the country's cacao industry—from farm-level to post-harvest. Also, there are tons of opportunities to learn from frontrunners of the industry globally, and there is no better place to learn from than our neighboring country, with almost identical biophysical characteristics yet a more advanced cacao industry, Indonesia.

Last November 2024, the Sustainable Farming in Tropical Asian Landscapes (SFITAL) team in the Philippines visited the SFITAL sites in North Luwu, South Sulawesi, Indonesia to learn about the best

practices in their cacao industry, and to share key strategies from the Philippines. North Luwu is one of the major cacao producers in the South Sulawesi Region of Indonesia. This article features some of the key learnings from that visit that can be applied to the Philippines.

A need for a united vision

The cacao industry is composed of various stakeholders—from farmers to entrepreneurs to extension workers to policy makers. Participation from and collaboration among these different sectors is imperative to foster sustainable cacao development. However, having “too many cooks” can also be a challenge as much as it is an opportunity. This is not new in the Philippines cacao industry. The existence of multi-stakeholder platforms like the Philippine Cacao Industry Council and its respective regional councils have been truly helpful in terms of legitimizing the industry and implementing activities to uplift it, but it is not free from challenges. One of these challenges is establishing a strong commitment among stakeholders.

So, when the planning office of the province was asked, “How did you encourage the active participation of local stakeholders in your initiatives towards cacao development?” they emphasized the importance of having a shared vision. When stakeholders from different sectors with different individual intentions find a common goal, their commitment to the plan gets stronger. Stakeholders are willing to work when they know what they are working for. They are willing to invest if they know what they will gain from all their efforts.

This is also what the SFITAL project has been promoting in its project site in Davao de Oro—co-investment, collaboration, and a united vision—through the development of the sustainable cacao roadmap for the province.

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Sustainable cacao development: Lessons from North Luwu, Indonesia (cont.)

Productive collaboration with the private sector

Working towards a common goal requires collaboration among different stakeholders, regardless of the differences in their individual agenda. This can be seen in how private sector partners like MARS work with cacao growers, non-government organizations, and local government units in North Luwu. They also invest in cacao development—which is a win-win both for them, the farmers, and the government. For example, MARS develops high-yielding and disease tolerant clones of cacao, therefore improving farmers' access to more productive clones. The Indonesian government also has its Indonesia Coffee and Cacao

Research Institute that works on developing and improving cacao clones in the country. However, the efforts from the private sector help hasten the development process. At the moment, in North Luwu, there are good cacao clones that are not yet available in the Philippines such as BB, MCC 1, and MCC 2.

Fortunately, this has been starting in the Philippines as well. Kennemer Foods International, Inc., one of the biggest private sector partners in Davao de Oro and a strategic partner of MARS, has been conducting clonal diversification trials of some clones from Indonesia. This can be helpful in enhancing the knowledge base and source of clones in the country.

Integrated farming partnered integrated business solutions

Currently, majority of the cacao planted in Davao de Oro are integrated with other crops like coconut, banana and fruit trees. In terms of agroecology, crop diversification is good news as it helps in soil fertility management and pest and disease management, among others. It is also supposed to be good news for cacao growers because diversified cropping might also bring diversified income.

However, one of the factors discouraging farmers to practice integrated farming (or causing them to pay more attention to one crop than the other in an integrated farm) is the lack of actual income opportunities for the other components of the agroforestry system. For instance, they can sell the harvest from fruit trees while waiting for the cacao, but the prices are too low. This shows that if we are promoting the integration of cacao with other crops or agroforestry components, the

support should not only be focused on cacao, but also on other components as well.

One of the good examples we observed in Indonesia was the case of Pak Yusuf in Masamba, Indonesia. His cacao farm has moderate productivity due to its biophysical characteristics. One of the solutions introduced by SFITAL Indonesia, through Rainforest Alliance, is integrating apiculture of Trigona (or stingless) bees in his farm. Because of this, he also needed to integrate some flowers in the farm to serve as food for the bees. This evolved into a community business where they produce honey from the trigona and sell it. Pak Yusuf also assists other farmers to cultivate Trigona bees through teaching them the necessary methods and selling the boxes that can be used to raise bee cultures—another income generating activity. These efforts also encouraged his daughters to take part in the business by promoting the products online.

Generating income beyond beans and fruits

The diverse income offered by cacao agroforestry is not limited to selling the various products from the farmer. There are also other opportunities for farmers and farmer organizations to generate income while also directly contributing

to sustainable cacao development.

One of these is the establishment of commercial nurseries of cacao and other crops that can be integrated with it. A good example from North Luwu is the story of the farmers' group, MESAKADA.

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Bag-ong sigulanon

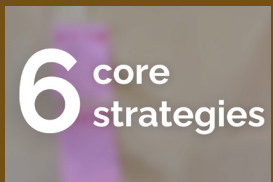
SFITAL Philippines Introduction Video



Get to know the SFITAL Philippines and its activities through this introduction video by visiting this link:

<https://bit.ly/SFITALvideo>.

Sustainable Cacao Roadmap Development Video



Learn all about the recently launched Sustainable Cacao Roadmap for Davao de Oro here: <https://bit.ly/SFITALroadmapvideo>.

Sustainable cacao development: Lessons from North Luwu, Indonesia (cont.)

They are running a commercial nursery that supplies high quality planting materials to their members and to other farmers. With commercial nurseries like this, farmer groups get the chance to help their members by providing discounts on good planting materials while also equipping them with the technical capacities to tend to the nursery, and eventually to their own farms (e.g., grafting, proper selection of planting material).

In the Philippines, accessing high quality yet affordable planting materials can be tricky. However, if more farmer organizations venture into this, not only will planting materials be more accessible for farmers, but their organizations will also gain more income. And with the existence of institutions like farmer cooperatives and associations and the relatively strong support they are getting from the government, this might be a good opportunity to strengthen their business portfolios.

If there is one thing apparent from these set of learnings in Indonesia, it is the truth that sustainable cacao development needs synergized effort from all involved sectors—from the farmers to the businesses, to the non-government organizations, the government institutions, and the private sector. Thankfully, the Philippines is not far behind in terms of this kind of collaboration, and if continued, there is surely a sweet and bright future waiting for the country's cacao industry.

For more information on SFITAL's interventions in Indonesia, you may check out <https://darikebunkelanskapsehat.id/>. 🌱

👋 Atong mga higala (Our friends)

Cultivating resilience: How Davao de Oro's Cacao farmers overcome challenges through sustainable cacao production

In Davao de Oro, cacao farmers face a mix of challenges and opportunities that shape their journey toward sustainable farming. In collaboration with the Sustainable Farming in Tropical Asian Landscapes (SFITAL) Project, these farmers—often balancing tradition with innovation—are transforming their practices and inspiring their communities. By addressing challenges, adopting innovative techniques, and fostering collaboration, farmers like Jun

Villahermosa, Tata Talle, Ronel delos Santos, and Fausto Juab are reshaping the future of cacao farming in the province.

Challenges in cacao farming

For many farmers, the path to sustainable cacao farming is filled with significant challenges. High input costs, particularly for synthetic fertilizers, weigh heavily on smallholder farmers like Jun Villahermosa from Maco. Unable to afford fertilizers, Jun has noticed a decline in his farm's productivity—a story echoed by others who also struggle with pests and disease infestations.

Meanwhile, aging farmers like Fausto Juab from Nabunturan face the difficulties of maintaining his cacao trees. At 70 years old, working alone on his farm, he has dealt with overshading and diseases like cacao pod rot, which reduced his yield.

Even younger farmers like 30-year-old Ronel delos Santos in New Bataan face resource constraints, leaving parts of their farms unmaintained despite their energy and enthusiasm.

These challenges are compounded by the need for more consistent and efficient support from government and private institutions. Farmers often express a desire for better follow-ups and quicker responses to their concerns, as well as access to biofertilizers, pest management tools, and training programs tailored to their needs.

Innovative solutions and sustainable practices

Despite these challenges, farmers are finding innovative ways to adapt and thrive. Through partnerships with SFITAL and co-investing institutions like the Davao de Oro Provincial Agriculture Office, their respective Municipal Agriculture Offices, Kennemer Foods International and the University of the Philippines Mindanao, they are learning and applying agroecological



Ronel Delos Santos welcomes the SFITAL Project Team on his farm.
Photo: CIFOR-ICRAF/Isabelle Dela Paz

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Cultivating resilience: How Davao de Oro's Cacao farmers overcome challenges through sustainable cacao production (cont.)

practices that improve both yields and environmental health.

Contour farming, for example, has been transformative for farmers like Tata in Laak, whose sloping farm now has stabilized soil and minimized erosion thanks to the technique.

The use of organic materials, such as dried coconut husks and pruned branches, has also gained traction among farmers like Ronel, who incorporate these into their farms to enhance soil health and reduce reliance on chemical inputs.

Fausto has embraced regular pruning and clone diversification to combat overshadowing and boost pollination, while Tata has taken the lead in promoting these practices within his community.

These efforts are not just about individual farms—they demonstrate the value of integrating traditional knowledge with modern, sustainable techniques to address the challenges of cacao farming.

Community leadership and shared impact

One of the most remarkable aspects of these farmers' journeys is the emphasis on collaboration and shared learning. These farmer-cooperators have opened their farms to serve as Cacao Agroecology Learning Farms, hosting training sessions on soil health, pest management, and other agroecological practices. These sessions not only equip other farmers with essential skills but also foster a sense of community and mutual support.



Fausto Juab hosts participants on his Cacao Agroecology Learning Farm for the Training of Trainers in February 2024. Photo: CIFOR-ICRAF/ Isabelle Dela Paz

The leadership of the farmer-cooperators has inspired others to adopt sustainable practices. Their willingness to share their experiences in knowledge-exchange activities like SFITAL Project's

Trainings of Trainers but also the livelihoods of their fellow farmers. Even young farmers like Ronel are stepping up as role models, proving that sustainable cacao farming remains a promising and impactful pursuit for the next generation.

A collaborative effort for sustainable cacao farming

The successes of these farmers would not be possible without the collective efforts of public and private organizations like Kennemer Foods International Inc. and the DTI RAPID Growth Project, alongside provincial and municipal local government units. By integrating technical assistance, capacity development, and resource provision, these initiatives ensure that farmers are not only better equipped to face their challenges but also empowered to lead the way toward sustainable agriculture.

Their stories remind us that the journey to sustainability is not just about improving yields—it's about building resilient communities, protecting the environment, and nurturing a shared vision for the future. From Jun's call for better institutional support to Tata's leadership in contour farming, from Ronel's youthful optimism to Manong Fausto's enduring commitment, these farmers exemplify the transformative potential of collaboration and innovation in sustainable cacao farming. Together, they are cultivating not only cacao but also a legacy of resilience, sustainability, and hope for generations to come. 🌱



Gikan sa Yuta (From the ground)

Two DdO cacao producers bag best cacao beans award in RCQA 2024

Two cacao producers from Davao de Oro have earned a spot among the Top 8 Best Cacao Beans at the prestigious Regional Cacao Quality Awards (RCQA) 2024 held last 5-6 December 2024 at Cacao Culture in Matina, Davao City.

These producers include Mr. Peter V. Cruz from the Municipality of Nabunturan and Ms. Evangelyn A. To-ong from the Municipality of Monkayo, whose cacao beans successfully survived the rigid evaluation conducted by the committee led by the Regional Cacao Industry Development Council.

Several other cacao producers from the province also submitted entries for the regional competition.

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Two DdO cacao producers bag best cacao beans award in RCQA 2024 (cont.)



The Selection Committee evaluates the cacao bean entries during the Regional Cacao Quality Awards (RCQA) in Davao de Oro in December 2024. Photo: PAGRO Davao de Oro

These include MAMA Earth International from Banlag, Monkayo; Helen Caintic, another individual entrant from Conception, Montevista; and Hon. Herv Martelle Apsay of OCTA M in Poblacion, Monkayo. These entries, which were carefully selected during the provincial level evaluation, reflected the province's dynamic cacao landscape, encompassing individuals and farmer cooperatives committed to excellence in production and sustainability.

The RCQA event not only honored the region's top cacao

producers but also paved the way for the national stage of the competition. The two top producers from Davao de Oro, alongside six others from the region, advanced to the Philippine Cacao Quality Awards (PCQA) 2024, held on December 12-13 at the Philippine Baking Institute in Davao City. The PCQA, themed "GO FOR GOLD," serves as a gateway to the prestigious global Cacao of Excellence (CoEx) Programme, celebrating innovation, post-harvest excellence, and high-quality cacao production. 🌱

SFITAL and MAGRO Monkayo team up to train Anagase farmers

The SFITAL Project collaborated with the Municipal Agricultural Office (MAGRO) of Monkayo, Davao de Oro for a Training of Farmers (TOF) on Cacao Cultivation held last 30 October 2024 in

Sitio Anagase, Barangay Casoon, Monkayo. The training emphasized the significance and applications of cacao shade management, Integrated Pest and Disease Management (IPDM), and soil fertility management. To provide the participants with



Erwin Albios, Site Coordinator for SFITAL Project in the Philippines, facilitates the Training of Farmers (TOF) in Monkayo, Davao de Oro. Image: Erwin Albios/ICRAF

in-depth learning experience, hands-on demonstrations on proper pruning techniques for cacao were also conducted during the training.

For this training, 33 small-scale cacao farmers joined the training and expressed their appreciation for the valuable knowledge

it provided through its field demonstration. The Anagase Farmer MPC also supported the facilitation of the training. If your institution is interested in collaborating with the SFITAL Project Team for the TOF on agroecological practices for cacao cultivation, please contact Z.Noza@cifor-icraf.org. 🌱

Research on DDO cacao growers' communication behavior wins best paper in NCRC 2024

Last 22-23 November 2024, Zarrel Gel Noza, SFITAL Project Coordinator for the Philippines, bagged the best paper award for the graduate/professional category in the National Communication Research Conference 2024 held at the De La Salle University, Manila.

Out of over 70 communication researchers from various universities and research institutions in the Philippines, her paper qualified for the top five graduate/professional paper which was presented

in the plenary session and have undergone thorough evaluation.

Using logistic regression on data from the SFITAL household survey conducted in 2021, her paper highlighted that there is a significant relationship between the communication behavior of cacao growers in Davao de Oro and their adoption of cacao-based agroforestry. Specifically, the results of her study showed that cacao growers usually acquire agroforestry-related information from government

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Research on DDO cacao growers communication behavior wins best paper in NCRC 2024 (cont.)



Noza provides NCRC participants with a bird's eye view of Davao de Oro's cacao industry. Photo: De La Salle University – Department of Communication

extension workers and friends or fellow farmers. However, the information sources with significant effect on adoption are government officials and farmer groups. Additionally, most cacao growers in Davao de Oro have access to various communication platforms like television, radio, digital media, and traditional village media. Among these platforms, only radio was found to have a significant effect on their adoption of agroforestry practices.

With these findings, her paper emphasizes the need to consider the significance of communication platforms as much as their availability in terms of selecting the proper communication platform to share knowledge and information on cacao agroforestry. It likewise underscores the importance of maximizing government extensionists and farmer groups as common sources of information,

capacitating them and giving them a stage. Government officials being an important source of information also highlights the need to get champions of sustainable farming practices like agroforestry,

These results were then integrated into the SFITAL communication plan and the actual stakeholder engagement strategies of the project. For example, the project ensures buy-in of local chief executives in its interventions—from building the capacities of farmers and local extensionists to developing the roadmap towards sustainable cacao development. Additionally, the project recognizes the power farmer groups as information sources, course all communication and knowledge exchange through them. SFITAL also makes it a point to empower farmer-leaders by providing them with a platform to share their

knowledge (through the agroecology learning farms) and express their concerns (through the workshops). Lastly, the project exerts efforts to enhance the skills of extensionists on maximizing different communication channels to further

strengthen them as reliable information sources on cacao agroforestry.

For more information on this research, the full paper can be accessed on ResearchGate through this [link](#). 🍌

SFITAL PH visits North Luwu for knowledge exchange



Colleague from Rainforest Alliance demonstrates top grafting. Photo: CIFOR-ICRAF/Zarrel Gel Noza

Fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing, the SFITAL Project organized a knowledge exchange mission between the Philippines and Indonesia teams last 4-12 November 2024 in Masamba, North Luwu, South Sulawesi, Indonesia.

Composed of SFITAL Project Coordinator for the Philippines Zarrel Gel Noza and SFITAL Site Coordinator for Davao de Oro Erwin Albios, the SFITAL Philippines team met with colleagues from Rainforest Alliance who are leading the implementation of project activities in the site. Filled with various activities in the field, this knowledge

exchange mission aimed to facilitate exchange of knowledge and experiences between the two countries.

During this mission, the team learned about various income-generating opportunities for farmers and farmer groups in agroforestry systems. They visited farmer group MESAKADA's commercial nursery that supplies high quality planting materials for cacao. They also had the chance to explore the SFITAL learning farm that integrates apiculture, allowing farmers to earn from honey production. To learn more about post-harvest practices, they visited a MARS consolidation point, as well as Chalodo

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SFITAL PH visits North Luwu for knowledge exchange (cont.)

Chocolate, a local chocolate factory in Masamba.

Additionally, the team visited several productive farms to learn more about their cultivation practices, particularly the asexual propagation techniques they use to enhance productivity and manage diseases. On the policy end, the team likewise met with BAPPERIDA, the planning body of the local government of North Luwu. In this meeting, both teams learned about strategies in successfully developing and implementing sustainable cacao roadmaps in Davao de

Oro and North Luwu.

The mission closed with a two-part synthesis meeting—the first one with Rainforest Alliance in Masamba, and the second one with ICRAF Indonesia at the CIFOR-ICRAF Campus, Bogor, Indonesia.

This visit is envisioned to strengthen the sharing of knowledge between the two countries. It is also expected to result in several joint capacity building activities for local stakeholders, particularly in Davao de Oro, as the project approaches its conclusion.

Key learnings from this mission are featured in this article found in [page 1](#). 🐼

DdO launches the first-of-its-kind Sustainable Cacao Roadmap

The province of Davao de Oro is taking a bold step toward revolutionizing its cacao industry with the official

launch of its Sustainable Cacao Roadmap last 15 January 2025 at Café Noventa, Nabunturan, Davao de Oro.



Dr. Rolando S. Simene, OIC of the Davao de Oro Provincial Agriculturist Office, gives his welcome remarks during the Sustainable Cacao Roadmap Launch. Photo: CIFOR-ICRAF/Grace Ann Salvan

📣 Pahibalo (announcements)

Are you interested in partnering with SFITAL to conduct Trainings of Farmers (TOF) on agroecological practices for cacao cultivation? Contact z.noza@cifor-icraf.org.

Join our [Cacaomustahan on FB](#) group to interact with other local enabling institution, post announcements, and learn about program information and cacao market information!

This groundbreaking initiative, developed through the collaborative efforts of the SFITAL Project and local stakeholders, offers a blueprint for tackling long-standing challenges in the cacao sector while charting a path toward sustainability and economic growth.

The roadmap, covering the years 2025 to 2030 and with a vision extending to 2050, is a product of extensive research, community engagement, and multi-sectoral collaboration. It aims to address critical issues such as declining productivity, pests and diseases, unsustainable farming practices, and the economic pressures that have driven many cacao farmers to leave the industry. For Davao de Oro's cacao growers, this roadmap represents a lifeline, as well as an opportunity to lead the charge for sustainable farming in the Philippines.

Davao de Oro, as part of the Davao Region, has played a key role in the country's cacao industry for years, contributing to 78% of national cacao output. However, behind this success lies a set of challenges that threaten the long-term viability of the industry. From climate impacts to market pressures,

farmers have struggled to keep pace.

Recognizing these hurdles, the SFITAL Project began laying the groundwork in 2020 by updating land use maps, conducting suitability analyses for cacao farming, and assessing the profitability of various land uses.

The roadmap's creation also involved a series of planning workshops in 2024, bringing together stakeholders from local government units, farmer organizations, cooperatives, academia, and private businesses. Over the course of these workshops, participants crafted a shared vision and identified actionable strategies to address the sector's needs. The result is a roadmap built on six core strategies, each tailored to strengthen the industry and empower its stakeholders.

One key focus of the roadmap is sustainable land use. This includes selecting cacao production areas based on land suitability, climate risks, and compatibility with other crops and forest systems. Farmers will also benefit from rejuvenation efforts for aging cacao farms,

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DdO launches the first-of-its-kind Sustainable Cacao Roadmap (cont.)

supported by co-investment from public and private sectors.

The roadmap also emphasizes farmer empowerment by improving access to resources such as training, market information, infrastructure, and financing. This approach aims to create a resilient cacao farming community capable of adapting to economic and environmental challenges.

Another critical element of the roadmap is enhancing farm productivity and diversifying farmer incomes through agroforestry and ecological farming practices. These methods not only increase yields but also protect farms from climate-related risks and rising production costs.

Additionally, the roadmap seeks to strengthen the cacao value chain through better governance, digitalization, and

incentives for quality production. This includes promoting transparency and fairness in the market while ensuring farmers receive rewards for producing high-quality cacao beans.

Beyond economics, the roadmap acknowledges the environmental contributions of cacao farming. Farmers and communities will be incentivized to provide ecosystem services such as carbon storage, biodiversity conservation, and water resource management.

Finally, the roadmap calls for stronger institutional and policy support to ensure the successful implementation of these strategies. Local government units and cacao enablers will play a vital role in delivering resources, technical assistance, and recognition to stakeholders in the sector.



Showing a peek of the big potential of Davao de Oro's cacao industry, several cacao producers and processors showcased their products during the roadmap launch. Photo: CIFOR-ICRAF/Grace Ann Salvan

Kahinguhaan sa kahibalo (New publications) (cont.)

Roadmap of Sustainable Cacao Development in Davao de Oro for 2025-2030, Vision to 2050



This roadmap is a product of the fruitful collaboration among local stakeholders in the Province of Davao de Oro, particularly from the provincial and local government units, the Provincial Cacao Council, farmer cooperatives and associations, national government agencies, academe, and the private sector. You may access the roadmap here: <https://bit.ly/SFITALRoadmap>.

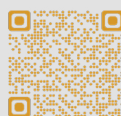
The launch of the Sustainable Cacao Roadmap marks a milestone for Davao de Oro's cacao industry. It is more than just a plan—it is a collective commitment to transform the province's cacao sector into a model of sustainability and inclusivity. As this initiative takes off, the province stands ready to inspire other regions and solidify its reputation as a leader in sustainable cacao production.

Through this roadmap, Davao de Oro is not only investing in its farmers but also securing a brighter future for generations to come. With its eyes on the horizon, the province continues to prove that innovation and collaboration are key to creating a resilient and thriving cacao industry.

To access a copy of the roadmap, just go to <https://bit.ly/SFITALRoadmap>.



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