“Without Us, There Is No Cocoa”: A Study Exploring the Aspirations and Livelihoods of Young Cocoa Farmers in Ghana

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Abstract

Cocoa is the cornerstone of Ghana's economy and a lifeline that sustains the livelihood of thousands of households. Against the backdrop of Ghana's young population, most of the workforce engaged in cocoa farming is aged. In light of the sustainability of cocoa, the engagement of young people is seen as the future of cocoa farming in Ghana. Therefore, the perceptions, lived experiences, and aspirations of young cocoa farmers are influencing the shape of the future direction of the sector. This study examined how Ghana's younger generation of cocoa farmers perceives their role in the future of cocoa farming, and the key factors that influence their decision to pursue cocoa farming as a livelihood. The fieldwork of this study was conducted using a qualitative research design, drawing on ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews with cocoa farmers between the ages of 18 and 35 years from the Ashanti Region and Eastern Region in Ghana.

First, the findings of this study revealed that the engagement of the young cocoa farmers participating in this research is motivated by intergenerational influences and the presence of successful role models in cocoa farming. Then, the study showed that the livelihood of young cocoa farmers is shaped by opportunities and vulnerabilities; the context of this livelihood is primarily enabled and constrained by financial capital. Furthermore, cocoa farmers are challenged by a storm of pressing constraints, primarily bound to financial capital, such as limited access to land, lack of farm inputs, and the rising effects of climate change. Lastly, these challenges threaten the sustainability and productivity of cocoa farming.

This study revealed that the livelihoods of the young cocoa farmers are shaped by constrained agency and broader social structures. Furthermore, economic well-being emerges both as a key driver and a potential pitfall in the engagement in the cocoa farming enterprise. Altogether leading to the conclusion that it is essential to improve and promote the engagement of the younger generation to secure the future of cocoa in Ghana.

Keywords: Cocoa Farming • Younger Generation • Aspiration • Livelihood • Ghana

Cover photo: Cocoa farmer, Abenabo, Suhum, Eastern Region, Ghana.
Taken by: Meike Westmaas, March 2025.

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Finally, I dedicate this thesis to the young cocoa farmers in Ghana, who hold the future of the cocoa farming sector in their hands. *Medaase!*

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Prologue

Today is a very sunny day. Again. Although it is late March, the wait for the rain is still outshone by the beams of sunlight filtering through the leaves of the cocoa trees surrounding us. The fallen leaves crunch beneath our boots as a young cocoa farmer and I wander through his cocoa plantation. The greenness of the unripe cocoa pods is starting to fade away to a slightly yellow colour. We break open one of the half-ripe pods, and the sticky white pulp that encases each of the beans in the fruit reveals itself. I hold a cocoa bean in my hand and imagine the impact of this little bean as we walk through the trees.

The young cocoa farmer asks me if he can tell me a story. I happily accept.

“When I was in secondary school, my dad thought it was wise to give me a portion of this land to start farming. So initially, as a student, I had it in the back of my mind to be a lawyer in the future.”

“A lawyer?” I asked.

“Yes. Growing up, that was the focus. I didn't understand the reason why my dad brought up that idea for me to go into farming. Initially, I did not want to go into it. But what influenced me was that whenever he sold his cocoa, he would give me money, some of it, to spend it, without telling me what to do with it. I kept on enjoying it. At a point, I realised that this space was there for my father to get money, to give me some free money to use. Then I had to also think about it again. So, I started [farming] when I was in secondary school. After secondary school, there was this financial challenge. I couldn't proceed to the university. So I had to be in the house. I was in the house for three years. While I was in the house, I was focused on farming, on my farm, solely. After some years, a group of farmers came up to start this cooperative, the ASETENAPA cooperative. I also got involved. I participated very seriously in it. Along the line, they told me to help them in the office.”

I respond: “That is how you got into the office?”

“Yes, that's how I got into the office. While I was in the office, I was also focused on farming. In 2020, I started mobilising some farm. I said, let me proceed on my educational journey. I started at the university in 2020. Gradually, I was paying my school fees from the money I got from farming and also from the office. I also got some premium. So I was paying my school fees, going to school, and buying some books. Until last year. I graduated last year. I graduated from the University of Ghana. One of the best universities.”

For my own reference, I come back: “That is the one in Accra Legon, right?”

“Yes, it's in Legon. That is my school. The best school in Ghana. That's how far I have come. I'm planning on even proceeding today. To my master's level. I want to pursue a master’s degree in international development. That is what I am planning.”

Cocoa Farm | Abenabo, Suhum Municipal District, Eastern Region, Ghana | March 25, 2025

Chapter 1
Introduction

"Ghana is…", the firm voice of the extension officer echoes through the modest structure that serves as a church and community hall. The cocoa farmers gathered as the audience followed his lead, completing the sentence: "…cocoa". He continued: "Cocoa is…", to which the farmers, once again in unison, replied: "…Ghana". As the saying goes: "Ghana is cocoa, cocoa is Ghana." Cocoa is the mainstay of Ghana's economy, the livelihood that sustains thousands of households, and a symbol of national pride and cultural identity (Kuusaana et al., 2021). Fundamental to this economic backbone is an extensive assembly of smallholder cocoa farmers. These cocoa farmers, young and old, male and female, parents and grandparents, siblings and partners, neighbours and friends, are daily out and about growing, maintaining, or harvesting cocoa.

Since the 2000s, Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) has registered the fastest growth in agricultural production compared to all other regions of the world (Yeboah & Jayne, 2020). As the fundamental nature of African economies lies in agriculture, the sector is identified by many as an 'engine of growth' for SSA's development and food security. In combination with the rapidly growing young population, the future livelihoods of many young people will have to be found in rural agriculture (Amon-Armah et al., 2022). Therefore, young people and the renewed interest in agriculture have become the focus of policymaking and academic studies. The narrative is built on the image of revitalised and sustainable models of agriculture driven by the influx of educated, entrepreneurial, and technology-embracing young people. In addition, the participation of young people in agriculture is suggested to help address the challenge of youth (un)employment (Amon-Armah et al., 2022).

Agriculture and the engagement of young people are also one of the central themes of the national developmental agenda of Ghana. The government of Ghana introduced various youth in agriculture programmes to promote youth participation (Kodom et al., 2022; Wuni et al., 2017). However, despite this renewed focus on agriculture in recent decades, concerns have grown about the unenthusiastic attitude among young people to engage in agriculture. Studies have shown that they are more interested in not engaging in farming and moving away from rural areas (Anyidoho et al. 2012; White, 2012). This shift poses a serious challenge to the long-term viability of cocoa production in Ghana.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has highlighted a gap between the aspirations of young people in Africa and the reality of the demand of the labour market. The preferences of young people are misaligned regarding aspects of job satisfaction and opportunities in the labour market. In agriculture, young people are less often satisfied with their work than those in other occupations (Lorenceau et al., 2021). They face growing obstacles challenging farming and rural life, as well as the negative public perception about farming. To undertake meaningful agricultural practices, a high initial credit to access capital is required. To start a farm, the farmer needs to acquire a piece of land, purchase farming equipment, and obtain inputs such as seedlings, fertiliser, and pesticides to cultivate the crop (White, 2012). Furthermore, the general societal perception portrays non-agricultural careers as the path to economic prosperity, whereas farming as an occupation is reserved for illiterate or unskilled people and elderly rural poor (Kodom et al., 2012). This ties in with the educational system, contributing to the deskilling of rural youth by excluding agricultural knowledge and downgrading farming as an occupation (White, 2012). Therefore, perception and opportunity shape the behaviour of young people by limiting their appeal and involvement in agricultural activities (Anyidoho et al., 2012).

Understanding how young farmers perceive their livelihoods, the challenges they experience, and the aspirations they have is essential to shaping their engagement in and out of cocoa farming. In Ghana, young cocoa farmers are challenged by a storm of pressing constraints, such as a lack of capital, limited access to farm inputs, and climate change, which threaten the sustainability and productivity of the cocoa farming sector (Agyapong et al., 2024). At the same time, the sector faces a generational issue. While the sector has been dominated by older farmers, the engagement of the younger generation is uncertain. Many young people perceive farming as a low-status, financially fluctuating, and labour-intensive occupation. Considering the revitalised framing of young people in agriculture, this perception of cocoa farming is far from the promises of modernity and urban opportunities (Amon-Armah et al., 2022; Anyidoho et al., 2012). Others, however, see in cocoa farming a potential pathway to a livelihood and intergenerational continuity (Kodom et al., 2022). Therefore, the aspirations of young farmers are an important aspect to bring to the fore. The choices and pathways of young people will shape the future of rural livelihoods, but also the broader picture of cocoa as a national and global commodity.

This research explored the world of cocoa farming and sought to grasp the lived experience of young cocoa farmers in relation to their livelihoods and aspirations. The research adopted a multidisciplinary lens, gathered ethnographic data through in-depth

interviews and observations in various cocoa communities in the Ashanti Region and Eastern Region in Ghana. The fieldwork was conducted over a period of ten weeks, from January to March 2025. This research aimed to map out and bridge the gap between the aspirations and livelihood dynamics of young cocoa farmers. The wish for this research was to present stories of the lived experience of cocoa farmers, to shine a light on the voices of people who hold the future of the production of cocoa in Ghana. To address this aspiration, the following research question is asked: *How does the younger generation of cocoa farmers in Ghana perceive their role in the future of cocoa farming, and what key factors influence their decision to pursue cocoa farming as a livelihood?*

Outline of this Thesis

As this introductory chapter comes to its final notes, the structure of this thesis will be as follows. In Chapter 2, the literature review that examines the academic debate on young people in cocoa farming in Ghana is discussed. In Chapter 3, the analytical framework, outlining the conceptual instruments and theories that guide the objectives of this study, is presented. In Chapter 4, the methodological framework used during the fieldwork and writing of this thesis is discussed. Chapter 5 delves into the historical and contemporary context of Ghana's cocoa sector. In Chapter 6, the empirical findings from the fieldwork are presented and discussed. Finally, Chapter 7 provides the concluding remarks of the findings of this thesis.

Chapter 2

Cocoa and Young People in Ghana: A Literature Review

This chapter presents a literature review of the academic debates on young people in Ghana's cocoa farming sector. The chapter begins with a general overview of cocoa and young people in Ghana before diving into the young people in cocoa farming, and ending with the challenges cocoa farmers face, to identify the existing perception in the contextual landscape and livelihood environment dynamics that shape their aspirations.

Cocoa in Ghana

For over a century, cocoa has been inextricably linked to Ghana. Since its introduction during the 19th century, cocoa has bound Ghana's past to its present and is the cornerstone of the nation's political economy, culture, and development (Kuusaana et al., 2021). The output of the cocoa production has become a major source of agricultural commodities and export earnings, contributing significantly to the government's income and gross domestic product (GDP). In 2022, cocoa generated an annual $2.3 billion in foreign exchange, equivalent to a share of 3% of the country's GDP (GCB, 2023; USDA Foreign Agricultural Service, 2025). To this day, Ghana is one of the world's largest producers and exporters of cocoa, together with neighbouring country Côte d'Ivoire. Therefore, cocoa is the backbone of Ghana's economy and contributes significantly to economic growth, the expansion of infrastructure and social services, and poverty reduction (Amon-Armah et al., 2022; Anyidoho et al., 2012; Kolavalli &Vigneri, 2011).

Central to the Ghanaian cocoa sector is a vast labour force of around 800,000 (smallholder) cocoa farmers and many seasonal workers who account for about 90% of the national output of cocoa. Various studies state that the Ghanaian cocoa farming population is aged and ageing. Based on previous studies, Amon-Armah et al. (2022) state that this ageing cocoa farming population is a myth. They suggest that the population is, in fact, not ageing because the average age of cocoa farmers remains constant over the years (1995-2015). Yet, the average age of the cocoa farming population in Ghana is around 50 years old (Amon-Armah et al., 2022). This demographic trend raises concerns about the long-term sustainability of the cocoa sector in Ghana. Furthermore, this is compounded by the suggestion that older farmers tend to be more risk-averse and less inclined to adopt

productivity-enhancing agricultural practices, compared to younger farmers (Amon-Armah et al., 2022).

Young People in Ghana

Ghana is a youthful country. According to the population consensus of 2021, 73.5% of Ghana's population was aged between 0 and 35 years. The youth (between 15 and 35 years) make up 38.2% of the population (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). Of this proportion of young people, 60.5% (7,125,070) live in urban areas, whereas 39.5% (4,657,544) are located in rural areas (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021).

Young people these days are increasingly becoming more educated, informed, and exposed due to globalisation and technological advancement. However, the youth face significant challenges of high unemployment and underemployment (Baah-Boateng & Africa Insights Desk, 2021). According to The World Bank the measurement of youth unemployment rate can be defined as the percentage of employable youth, the population 15–35 years of age, in a country's workforce, without jobs, seeking a job, or available for work during a reference period (Dadzie et al., 2020). The 2021 Population and Housing Census of the Ghana Statistical Service states that the unemployment rate among the population aged 15 to 35 years is 19.7% (17.4% male, 22.3% female) and even 32.8% (29.3% male, 36.7% female) among the population aged 15 to 24 years (Ghana Statistical Service, 2022). Moreover, the proportion of unemployed youth is higher in urban areas (15-35 years: 20.4%, 15-24 years: 35%) than in rural areas (15-35 years: 18.7%, 15-24 years: 30.2%) (Ghana Statistical Service, 2022).[1]

The issue of youth (un)employment is rooted in socio-economic and political factors. Despite economic growth, young people continue to face significant challenges in accessing employment opportunities. These challenges include a mismatch between the skills provided by the educational system, the demands of the job market, and the absence of effective job-matching systems. Additionally, high expectations among young people and their social environments, such as families, often clash with the realities of the labour market. Many available jobs are low-paying, and young people often lack the social capital and networks needed to access better employment opportunities. Furthermore, high costs of doing business in Ghana discourage youth from pursuing entrepreneurship and self-employment. Lastly, the

[1] These official statistics tend to overlook the people that work in the informal sector and/or household activities. Therefore, in this context, these numbers on unemployment are an indication.

lack of job security, particularly due to the prevalence of informal sector employment, also contributes to the problem (Baah-Boateng & Africa Insights Desk, 2022).

Young Ghanaians in Cocoa Farming

The study by Anyidoho et al. (2012) investigated the perceptions and aspirations of young people in Ghana's cocoa sector. They selected a diverse group of young people in cocoa farming areas, working in and out of farming as their primary occupation, finding that their aspirations were negatively correlated with their educational level. As the educational level increased, their aspiration towards (cocoa) farming was seen as a fallback or a means to an end, not as a career, with limited future prospects. Whereas individuals without formal education perceived cocoa farming as a potential pathway to a better future. Furthermore, the study showed that the positioning of cocoa farming in the young people's future aspirations was rooted in the observation or experience of the tedious nature of cocoa farming. The study noted a controversial narrative, while young people experience a lack of profit and productivity, policy documents in Ghana explicitly emphasise increasing productivity and income from farming as a strategy to attract young people to the cocoa sector. In addition, the study stated that agriculture is not only rejected by young people for economic reasons, but that social reasons, such as status and prestige, tend to impact their aspirations too. According to this research, a formal, salaried work, preferably in a white-collar job, was the most desirable form of work among young people. Despite this desire for a white-collar job, many of the young people were aware of the unrealistic achievement possibilities, as this kind of work requires education, skills, and knowledge (Anyidoho et al., 2012). Therefore, the engagement of young people in cocoa farming in Ghana depends on various demographic factors that often intersect, such as individual differences in gender, age, education, marital status, social networks, material resources, and location, but also their outlook, attitude, motivation, and aspiration in cocoa farming. Perceptions, attitudes, and aspirations are shaped by life experiences, social interaction, and structural opportunities and constraints (Amon-Armah et al., 2022; Anyidoho et al., 2012).

A study by Amon-Armah et al. (2022) built on the earlier work of Anyidoho et al. (2012) and introduced a typology distinguishing two groups of young farmers, those characterised as 'positive' about farming and 'resigned'. The positive young cocoa farmers expressed pride in their work, viewing cocoa farming as their destiny, a deliberate choice, and a worthwhile investment. On the contrary, the resigned young farmers did not see the occupation as their destiny, and they believed that there were better careers and investment

opportunities outside of cocoa (Amon-Armah et al., 2022). The study showed that young people were more likely to have a positive attitude toward cocoa farming when they were married (meaning easier access to farmland and labour support through family), longer engaged, in possession of secondary occupations, and had successful role models in cocoa farming. This positive outlook was often influenced by adult farmers and their families. Furthermore, they found that the definition of success in cocoa farming was largely linked to material wealth, in terms of property possession, a house, and a car (Amon-Armah et al., 2022).

Lastly, a study by Kodom et al. (2022) investigated how youth-centred training programmes change existing negative perceptions of youth participation in cocoa farming in Ghana. The Next Generation Cocoa Youth Programme (MASO programme) was implemented from 2016 to 2020 by Solidaridad West Africa and other partners, including the COCOBOD. The objective of the programme was to involve young people in the cocoa production by providing an enabling environment (knowledge and skills) to motivate career activity in farming and agricultural-related businesses (Kodom et al., 2022). The study found that youth, before engaging in the MASO programme, viewed cocoa farming as an economic activity primarily suited for school dropouts, people lacking better career prospects and/or an activity for the elderly. Furthermore, their negative perception towards cocoa farming was reinforced by the negative public perception about farming, the lack of successful role models in cocoa farming, the labour- and capital-intensive nature, and the access to production resources. Participation in the MASO programme changed their pre-existing negative perception of youth involvement in cocoa farming and equipped them with new knowledge and skills on cocoa farming practices (Kodom et al., 2022).

Challenges in Cocoa Farming in Ghana

According to Kodom et al. (2022), young people who are involved in cocoa farming face certain obstacles. The first and foremost challenge hindering young people's entry into cocoa farming is access to land and the acquisition of capital. Many of the participating youth in this study did not have the financial means to purchase land. In addition, access to farmland is often complicated due to land grabs, social division within communities, and the older generation controlling land resources (White, 2012). Despite access to land, some of the youth who received farmland from their relatives had difficulties with financial constraints to purchase farm inputs and/or labourers to manage the farming activities. Moreover, the study described that securing funds or credit facilities and/or engaging in lucrative off-farm

activities are ways of gaining the means to purchase production resources (Kodom et al., 2022). Lastly, access to credit facilities in rural financial institutions is frequently tied to the availability of collateral security, typically land, which most young people lack. As a result, their ability to secure loans to invest in production resources is restricted (White, 2012; Wuni et al., 2007).

Furthermore, Asumang-Yeboah et al. (2025) raise the issue of exclusion, which is closely related to the issue of land access. Equal land tenure rights and access modes for cocoa cultivation vary depending on gender and person's origin as a native or a migrant to the respective farming area. The ability of women to access land is influenced by the prevailing inheritance system. In Ghana, the traditional farming societies are generally highly patriarchal. As a result of this inheritance system, women are often disadvantaged in access to land for farming activities. The study by Addaney et al. (2022) further highlighted that women's access to, ownership of, and control over productive resources are largely shaped by kinship systems led by male family members, as well as customary laws, norms, and practices that grant men authority over land distribution and the management of family-owned resources. Furthermore, the study of Kodom et al. (2022) highlighted that female participants in the MASO programme mentioned the assigned reproductive role and motherhood responsibilities as a barrier to their desire to venture into cocoa farming. Similarly, people originating from a respective area can often access land through kinship of family ties, while migrants have to rely on alternative arrangements to gain access to farmland (Addaney et al., 2022).

Another significant challenge in cocoa farming is low productivity. Many farmers adopt poor farm management practices, such as cultivating low-yielding varieties, depending on ageing cocoa trees, inadequate crop management to control pests and diseases (for example, the Cocoa Swollen Shoot Virus Disease), and neglecting soil fertility due to inadequate or no use of fertilisers (Kongor et al., 2018). These farm management practices result in reduced yield, which in turn reduces profit margins and limits farmers' capacity to invest in and adopt more advanced agricultural techniques and access effective and affordable farm inputs (Donkor et al., 2023; Kongor et al., 2018). Combined with the high labour intensity and time-intensive nature of cocoa farming, these challenges make cocoa farming tedious.

The study of Kodom et al. (2022) showed that specifically female cocoa farmers experienced difficulties in physically performing the manual activities on the farm, such as clearing the land, pruning, weeding, and harvesting. The intensity of the labour is closely

linked to the nature of traditional cocoa farming practices and limited access to agricultural inputs and technologies. In addition, a major obstacle that challenges productivity is the availability and quality of infrastructure, including roads, electricity, information resources and facilities, such as healthcare and education (Kongor et al., 2018). Furthermore, cocoa farmers face the challenge of labour shortages and the high cost of hiring workers. As a result of this challenge, the sustainability of farm practices and production is affected (Agyapong et al., 2024).

More recently, the effects of environmental factors, such as climate change, pose a challenge. According to Asante et al. (2025), West Africa is considered relatively vulnerable to climate change and is predicted to suffer large agricultural losses as a consequence. Therefore, the long-term sustainability of cocoa farming is increasingly uncertain, as climate change poses the risk of unpredictable alterations in the ecological conditions that are essential to the cultivation of cocoa. Furthermore, due to its biological characteristics, the cocoa plant is particularly vulnerable to diseases and changes in the environment (Bryant & Mitchel, 2021). According to the study by Asante et al., climate change will have both positive and negative effects. In Ghana, a yield reduction, loss of suitable cocoa-growing areas, and hotter and drier weather patterns are expected. On a more positive note, more precipitation is expected in the dry season, which could positively affect the productivity and yield variability (Asante et al., 2025).

Chapter 3

Analytical Framework

The third chapter lays out the analytical framework of this thesis, bridging the literature review and the methodology. The chapter begins by introducing the research problem, research objectives, research question, and the multidisciplinary grounding of the research. Thereafter, the conceptual instruments and theories of the younger generation, aspiration, and livelihood that guide the objectives of this study are outlined.

Research Problem, Objectives, and Question

Cocoa farming is the backbone of Ghana's economy, a major source of employment, and an important generator of foreign exchange. Nevertheless, the sector faces various challenges to its long-term sustainability due to the declining engagement and perception of young people. Despite policy efforts to promote youth participation in agriculture, many young Ghanaians perceive farming as low-status, labour-intensive, and economically uncertain. Furthermore, they encounter capital-demanding barriers, such as limited or no access to farmland, credit, and infrastructure. These issues are entangled through demographic trends, environmental pressures, and socio-cultural attitudes that devalue agricultural livelihood. As a result, there is a need to understand the factors shaping young people's aspirations and perceptions regarding cocoa farming in Ghana.

This study sought to understand the often-overlooked question of what drives young people engaged in cocoa farming to pursue their livelihood in agriculture, aiming to bridge the knowledge gap behind these aspirations and perceptions to nuance the prevailing narrative. By adopting a bottom-up perspective, the research intended to document the lived experience of cocoa farmers related to the sustainability of the younger generation's livelihood in cocoa farming. It further aimed to analyse how the perceptions and aspirations of the younger generation of cocoa farmers are shaped by key social, economic, cultural, political and environmental factors, while also exploring the future prospects and opportunities for the young generation within the cocoa farming sector in Ghana.

The research objectives above translated into the following research question:
How does the younger generation of cocoa farmers in Ghana perceive their role in the future of cocoa farming, and what key factors influence their decision to pursue cocoa farming as a livelihood?

Multi-disciplinary Research

This study is multidisciplinary because it draws on the interdependency of perspectives, theories and methods from several academic fields, which is deemed necessary to gain a nuanced understanding of the engagement of young people in the future of cocoa farming in Ghana. Insights from the disciplines of cultural anthropology, sociology, and human geography are brought together to explore and understand how social, economic, and cultural factors shape young people's engagement, perception, and aspiration in cocoa farming. Specifically, cultural anthropology is used to set out the methodology for the ethnographic fieldwork and to understand the everyday practices, lived experiences, and narratives that cocoa farmers construct around their livelihoods. Through a sociological lens, the study explored how young people's aspirations, perceptions, and behaviour are shaped through social structures, dynamics, norms, and identities. The human geography discipline is used to analyse spatial factors and linkages of livelihood approaches and aspirations within an agricultural context. Furthermore, the research fostered insights from agricultural economics and development studies to situate young people's engagement and practices in the broader context of the cocoa farming sector in Ghana.

The Concept of the Younger Generation

According to anthropologist Honwana (2012), youth are a reflective indicator of the state of a nation, revealing the condition of the nation's politics, economy, social, and cultural life. When studying youth, it is important to not only study their lives but also understand the social, political, economic, and cultural world around them. The world around youth reflects the construction and reconstruction of the older generations, as well as the contribution of youth to the making and remaking of society (Honwana, 2012). Furthermore, youth commonly mirror a symbolic link to modernity, opportunities, change, and the future. However, as Honwana notes, this image is contradicted by the reality that many youth lack access to these very resources due to prevailing socio-economic and political structures, particularly in the African context (Honwana, 2012).

The 'younger generation' refers to a socially and culturally constructed category that distinguishes a group of people, based on their age, stage of life, and social position as compared to older generations. The younger generation is often associated with terms such as youth, adolescents, and young adults (Taylor, 2019). In the literature review of this thesis, the terms 'youth', 'youngsters', 'youthhood', 'younger generation', and 'young people' are used interchangeably, reflecting the different terminology used across existing literature to describe

the same age group. This study, however, aimed to adopt a more nuanced understanding of 'youth', recognising it as a life phase that young people move through, marked by different experiences, challenges, and needs. The concepts of 'younger generation' and 'young people' are therefore used throughout this thesis to capture this nuance and encompass the span of the respective age group.

Youthhood in Ghana encompasses several important life phases, including schooling, the transition from school to work, and the establishment of independent livelihood and family life (Amon-Armah et al, 2022). For this research, the concept of the younger generation is operationalised based on the age range, social position and generational distinction of the interlocutors. Universally, there is no agreed-upon definition of the age group of young people. The Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) defines young people or youth as those between the ages of 15 and 35 years (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). Since the study was undertaken in Ghana, the defined age range of the GSS was adopted. Because of ethical considerations, the participating interlocutors in this study were between the age brackets of 18 and 35 years old.[2] Furthermore, the concept of the younger generation is understood as a socially and culturally constructed category that reflects both an age-based distinction and a life-course position in relation to the older generation of cocoa farmers, often their parents or elders. This category captured the role of the younger generation of cocoa farmers as the next grouping, who will shape the future of cocoa farming.

The Concept of Aspiration

Aspiration is conceptualised as a cognitive structure composed of wants, preferences, choices, and calculations made by an actor. Aspiration implies an orientation toward a desired future, connected to attitude, motivation, and action (Appadurai, 2004; Tieken & San Antonio, 2016). Appadurai (2004) argues that aspiration extends beyond individual desires, describing aspiration as a socially embedded cultural capacity shaped through interaction within social life. Additionally, the ways in which aspirations are shaped, supported, and realised vary substantially, leading to very different possible outcomes. Aspirations can be grounded in reality, reflecting expected achievements of an individual, but may also be idealistic, unexpected, and/or not necessarily rooted in components of reality (Anyidoho et al., 2012).

[2] The age of 18 years is used as a benchmark because international legal frameworks define any person below the age of 18 years as a child (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution of Ghana and the Children's Act, 1998 (Act 560) (United Nations, 2021).

Supporting this view and drawing on the work of Bandura (1986, 1997), Tieken and San Antonio (2016) add that aspirations go along with a sense of agency that drives decision-making and action. According to Giddens (1971, 1984), agency refers to the active (conscious or unconscious) actions and capabilities of individual agents. The agent possesses the powerful ability (agency) to impact change based on their motivation of wants and desires, which drives their actions. Agency could be seen as an internalised pattern of thought, behaviour, and critical reflection of an individual, shaped by past experiences and social context, which guides the behaviour and interpretation of the world around them (Van Rooyen, 2013). Structures appear at the level of the broader social system, a site of social conditioning and activity, where specific ways of being, thinking, and acting are legitimate. Individuality and agency interact with this collective and social structure organised through the production and transformation of social and cultural change across historical and spatial contexts (Block, 2013; Van Rooyen, 2013). According to Bourdieu (1977), within the structures of the social system, individuals hold varying positions of inferiority, equality and superiority. The hierarchy of this position depends on the individual's economic, cultural, and social capital in relation to other participants in the social activity (Block, 2013). In contrast, Archer (2007) remarks that the impact of structures is not exercised directly on a person, but rather on the results of the individual projects through which people identify and pursue possible actions (Woodman & Vanderharst, 2021).

Furthermore, the development of a life course entails a series of transitions across the interconnected domains of relationships, employment, and education (Tieken & San Antonio, 2016). Within these trajectories, young people formulate aspirations, make choices, and develop within specific places and historical contexts. As they navigate life transitions, aspirations function as a means of adaptation to the conditions of their lives (Tieken & San Antonio, 2016). At the same time, the material realities of everyday life present constraints and challenges that demand resilience, adaptation, and ongoing adjustment (Bennike et al., 2020; Tieken & San Antonio, 2016).

This study integrated these conceptualisations of aspiration to explain how the younger generation of cocoa farmers in Ghana navigate their future wants and actions to achieve their desires. To capture the aspirations of the cocoa farmers, interlocutors were asked various questions. The farmers were asked to describe their motivation to venture into cocoa farming, how they perceive the sustainability and success of cocoa farming, and their goals, wants and preferred future. Interlocutors were also asked to talk about how relational and social dimension shaped their engagement and aspirations in cocoa farming. Furthermore, to

assess practical affairs that might influence the attainment of the goal, interlocutors were asked to translate their actions, strategies, and adaptations to face potential opportunities and obstacles. Understanding these aspirations requires insights into the contextual factors and transitions embedded in the social, cultural, environmental, and material aspects of everyday lives that are shaped through both agency and structural conditions.

The Concept of Livelihood

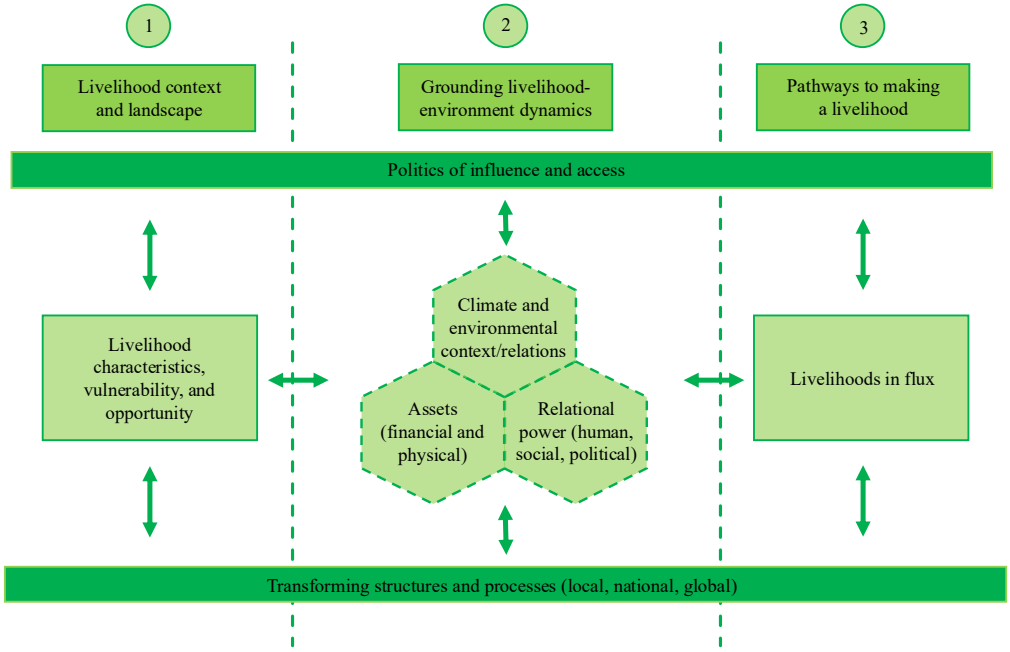
Livelihood, in its simplest sense, refers to the means of gaining a living, and is understood as comprising the capabilities, assets (including stores, resources, claims, and access), and activities needed to sustain and secure the necessities of life. A livelihood is determined through social, economic and ecological dimensions of the reality of the daily lives at the level of individuals, households (defined as human groups who live together and share a cooking space), groups and/or communities (Chambers & Conway, 1992).

The change or development of a livelihood can occur through processes such as education and migration. However, such shifts depend on the availability and accessibility of the means to allow for this change (Chambers & Conway, 1992). Chambers and Conway (1992) introduced the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) in the 1990s. Within this framework, a livelihood is considered sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, while maintaining or improving its capacity to generate opportunities for sustainable livelihood for future generations, both locally and globally, and across the short- and long-term timescales (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Natarajan et al., 2022). Moreover, sustainability is, on the one hand, defined environmentally, referring to the external impact of livelihood strategies on local and global resources and assets. On the other hand, sustainability is defined socially, referring to the internal ability of households and/or communities to cope with disturbance and the capacity for improvement of well-being over time (Chambers & Conway, 1992).

Natarajan et al. (2022) propose a reformulation of Chambers and Conway's SLA to make it more nuanced and applicable to the 21st century. Building on the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) by Scoones (1998), the revised SLF by Natarajan et al. (2022) integrates geographical, ecological, methodological, historical, and political dynamics, offering a more nuanced, context-sensitive and flexible framework for understanding and analysing livelihoods. The authors present the following figure of a SLF for the 21st century.

Figure 1

A sustainable livelihoods framework for the 21st century.



Source: Natarajan et al., 2022: 12 (figure 5).

The figure illustrates three interlinked elements. First, the livelihood context and landscape embed the characteristics of a livelihood (vulnerability and opportunity) within the multi-scalar setting of transforming structures of political-economic processes in which livelihoods take shape. Second, the livelihood environment dynamics reflect how livelihoods are constantly (re)produced and changed through human action within wider societal structures and environmental context. In the new SLF, the authors propose to extend beyond the original livelihood assets pentagon of financial and physical underpinning, and incorporate dimensions of relational power (such as human, social, political: class, gender, ethnicity, caste, and material power relations) and climate and environmental context/relations. The lines between the pentagons are dashed to indicate the transformative interaction between the elements. Third, the pathways to making a livelihood reflect the flux inherent in livelihood processes. Livelihoods continually revise and reform through both short-term conditions and long-term transformations (Natarajan et al., 2022).

In this study, the concept of livelihood addressed the means of gaining a living and the sustainability of these means for young cocoa farmers. The operationalisation of the concept of livelihood is informed by the revised SLF by Natarajan et al. (2022). To collect empirical insights on the livelihoods of young cocoa farmers, the interlocutors were asked to describe

the context of their livelihood by discussing the advantages and challenges of cocoa farming, such as access to land and credit, availability of labour, and exposure to risks. Regarding livelihood resources and dynamics, questions encompassing resources, capability and social relations were asked, concerning financial dependency, physical tools (farm resources, land ownership, infrastructure), experience and training, influence of kinship ties, and environmental context (climate variability). Furthermore, interlocutors were asked about the influences (diversification strategies, adaptation and resilience practices, and intergenerational continuity) of their livelihood pathways and the sustainability of cocoa farming.

In addition to these dimensions, this study foregrounded the lived experience of livelihoods of the interlocutors. Lived experience refers to the human experience of an individual, from the perspective of the living environment (sociocultural, historical, and geographic) and daily interactions, routines, and personal narrative of a person (Dodgson, 2023).

Relationship Between Concepts & Theoretical Lenses

The analytical framework of this study brought together the concepts of the younger generation, aspiration, and livelihood. At the centre of the framework lies the understanding of the lived experience of the research population, the younger generation of cocoa farmers in Ghana. The concept of the younger generation situates the position of young cocoa farmers within a social and historical context marked by the phase of life shaped by different social constructions of transitions and expectations. Aspiration captures young people's future-oriented desires and motivations in cocoa farming. Through their livelihood, their aspirations are enacted in everyday practices grounded in individual agency and broader structures.

Drawing on Appadurai (2004) and Tieken and San Antonio (2016), aspirations are conceptualised as socially embedded and culturally produced, rather than constructed by individual desires. This theoretical lens highlights how the aspirations of young people are shaped through interaction in everyday life and reproduce personal expectations that are connected to structural opportunities and constraints, explained through the debate on structure and agency. The concepts of Giddens (1984) and Bourdieu (1977) are used to interpret how young cocoa farmers' practices, aspirations and livelihoods are reproduced and transformed through social structures and individual reflexivity. These concepts from multidisciplinary fields are all interrelated and provide a framework to explore how young cocoa farmers in Ghana navigate and negotiate the opportunities and challenges to pursue cocoa farming as a sustainable livelihood and aspirations for the future. The concept of

livelihoods, shaped by social, political, economic, cultural, and ecological dynamics and resources that reflect the conditions of the everyday life realities of young cocoa farmers, grounded in the SLA by Chambers and Conway (1992), revised into the SLF by Natarajan et al. (2022), encompasses the material foundation and lived experience through which aspirations are pursued, and agency is exercised.

Chapter 4

Methodological Approach

Chapter four presents the methodological approach used during the fieldwork and writing of this thesis. The approach is grounded in an empirical study, collecting data through in-depth interviews and observations, and analysing the findings based on themes. In this chapter, the research sample, research site and setting, and the importance of ethical considerations and positionality are discussed.

Research Design

"A central purpose of research is to identify the causes of these specific outcomes for each and every case that falls within the scope of the theory under investigation." (Mahoney & Goertz, 2006: 230). Guided by this principle, the research design of this study adopted a qualitative and ethnographic approach aimed at examining a phenomenon in its respective setting. In the case of this research, the underlying causes shaping youth engagement in cocoa farming in Ghana were explored and explained.

The methodology for data collection of this study is grounded in empirical fieldwork, aimed at gaining in-depth, context-specific insights by way of firsthand participant observation through engagement in the field. An ethnographic approach is used to explore the nature of a particular social phenomenon to understand the social practices, cultural meanings, and everyday interactions within the field of investigation. As part of this ethnographic approach, the researcher creates a social relationship with the interlocutors through participant observation and interviews to document individual stories and explore themes emerging from the field (Suryani, 2008).

In this ethnographic study, the term 'interlocutor' is used to address the people participating in the research project. The term 'interlocutor' is used rather than 'participant' or 'informant' to emphasise voice and speech over embodied participation (Leve, 2022). Interlocutors are not just sources of data, but co-constructed characters of knowledge production. Their perspectives and interactions helped shape the direction and interpretation of this study. The term implies respect and affirms the contribution of those who willingly share their wisdom. Furthermore, a voice is closely associated with agency and power in liberal cultural contexts, by referring to ethnographic subjects in a way that emphasises their own voices and rejects the assumption that researchers speak on their behalf. Instead, it

reflects that researchers speak with the interlocutor and acknowledge their contributions to the study (Leve, 2022). The implementation of this ambition was impacted by the reality of the fieldwork visits of the research. Since every interlocutor was interviewed once, the interaction was rather brief and focused on the response towards the research. Due to this fact, the space for the creation of more in-depth interactions and building a relationship with most of the interviewed interlocutors was compromised. Nevertheless, by conducting the interviews aimed at enabling people to speak about their 'lived experiences' as the primary sources of data, the research aimed to show the insights into the knowledge and represent the voice of the interlocutors.

Data Collection

The ethnographic fieldwork is rooted in participant observation. Participant observation is a humanistic and interactive approach that involves both observing and actively engaging in the setting being studied by the researcher. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), all social research is a form of participant observation, as the social world cannot be studied by someone without being part of it (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). By going to the research sites, the field of study was entered to experience a first-hand engagement with the context and environment of the everyday social life of the cocoa farmers (De Fina, 2019; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

According to De Fina (2019), interviewing creates a moment of direct contact between the researcher and the informants and provides the occasion to investigate people's perception in greater depth than when using quantitative methods (De Fina, 2019). To create a structured but flexible encounter, a semi-structured interview guide was used. Semi-structured interviews are conversations guided by a set of prepared questions on a specific topic, however, the questions during the interview may be modified according to the response of the interlocutor. This approach offers flexibility to deviate or improvise on the topic or theme (De Fina, 2019). Moreover, the questions asked in the interview are open-ended to avoid a limited or fixed response with specific information and/or direction. This technique enables the interlocutor to share additional information and answer according to their understanding (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Furthermore, by using this interview technique, the researcher gains comprehensive insights and an in-depth understanding of the interlocutor's perception, activities and behaviour.

To value each interlocutor's story equally, all the interviews were conducted one-on-one, to allow individual interlocutors to express their honest thoughts, feelings, and

experiences without regard to the social interaction in a peer group. By taking this individualistic approach, an in-the-moment discussion of shared perspectives of the interlocutors was excluded from this research. Next to the decision to aim at avoiding a group dynamics bias, practically, a focus group discussion was not feasible because of the language barrier between the interlocutors and the researcher (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

Sampling

In qualitative research, the sample size is usually not determined by statistical formulas but by the concept of data saturation. The selected sample size should generate sufficient data to capture the diversity and complexity of the phenomenon of interest. Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007) recommend a sample size of one cultural group and 30 to 50 interviews for an ethnographic research design. Furthermore, the method for selecting samples associated with the qualitative paradigm is a non-probability (non-random) sampling scheme. Since qualitative research aims to gain insights into a phenomenon and people involved, the researcher often purposefully selects individuals, groups and settings to enhance understanding of the underlying phenomenon being studied (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). Given the ethnographic approach and objectives of this research, a critical case, convenience, homogeneous, non-random sampling scheme was implemented. These schemes are characterised by the choice of setting, groups, and/or individuals that are available and based on similar or specific characteristics that provide the researcher with compelling insights about a phenomenon (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). The implementation of this sampling method during the fieldwork is explained in the following paragraphs.

Research Site

The fieldwork for this thesis was carried out in several locations in Ghana. The first part was conducted in the Ashanti Region, in the Afigya Kwabre South District, Mampong Municipal District, and the Sekyere South District, located in the middle belt of Ghana. These districts are located north-east of the city of Kumasi, the Ashanti Regional capital. Within the districts, agriculture is the focus of the local economy, with the majority of the land area dedicated to agricultural use (Ministry of Finance, 2023a: 18; Ministry of Finance, 2023b: 6). Under the guidance of the COCOBOD of the Mampong-Ashanti, seven cocoa communities in seven operational areas were visited: 1. Mprim (community of Boanim), 2. Abrakaso (community of Kona), 3. Wiamiase (community of Bipoa), 4. Ahenkro (community of Kwamang), 5.

Bepoase (community of Mamtwense), 6. Apaah (community of Yonso), and 7. Mpobi (community of Mpobi).

The second part of the research was carried out in the Eastern Region, in the Suhum Municipal District, located 70 kilometres north of Accra, the capital city of Ghana. More than half of the households in the district are engaged in agriculture (Ministry of Finance, 2019: 5). Under the guidance of the Tony's Chocolonely Open Chain team and the Asetenepa cooperative, two cocoa communities were visited: 9. Jato and 10. Abenabo.

Figure 2

Map of research sites 1-8 in Afigya Kwabre South District, Mampong Municipal District, Sekyere South District, Ashanti Region, Ghana.

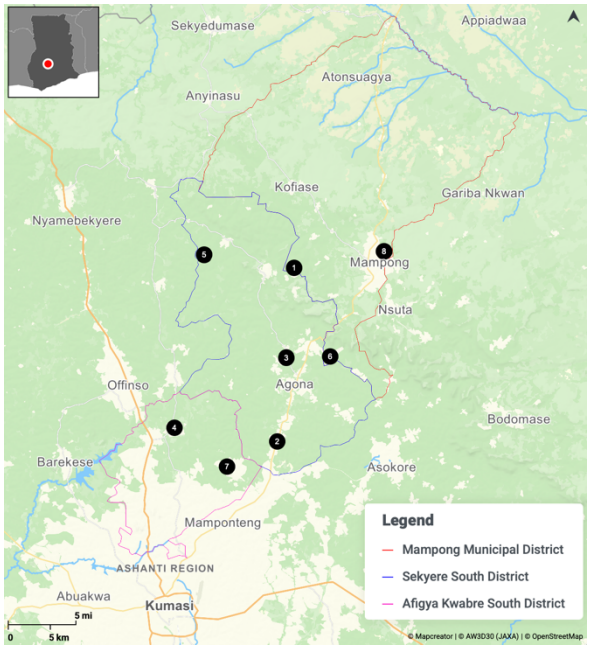


Figure 3

Map of research sites 9 and 10 in Suhum Municipal District, Eastern Region, Ghana.

Source: Mapcreator, AW3D30 (JAXA), OpenStreetMap.

Research Setting and Data Collection

The fieldwork for this thesis was conducted from the beginning of February to the end of March 2025. After arriving in Ghana, I made my way to Mampong-Ashanti to stay at the campus of the Akenten Appiah-Menka University of Skills Training and Entrepreneurial Development (AAMUSTED) in Mampong-Ashanti (Figure 2, research site 8). Together with the host supervisor, we visited the District Cocoa Officer of the COCOBOD Mampong

District on the other side of the town. I was kindly welcomed and received an itinerary for seven visits in the field.

During my time in Mampong-Ashanti, I spoke with 40 cocoa farmers from seven different cocoa communities. The sample of interlocutors was selected by the Community Extension Agent of the COCOBOD. Individuals were selected for the sample based on non-random factors, such as occupation, age group (classification of younger generation), geographic availability, and convenience (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). Most of the interviews were carried out in series varying from four to nine interviews per day, in or around a church, a community space or under a tree in the village. The interviews were conducted one by one, in the presence of the interlocutor, the researcher and translator. The interviews were conducted in Twi, a language that I am not familiar with. Therefore, the interpretation into English was done in real-time by a PhD candidate of the AAMUSTED University. Furthermore, I spoke with the COCOBOD Extension Officer, who assisted as the field guide and is a cocoa farmer himself. The position of these interlocutors within the (international) cocoa value chain is not clear, as the cocoa farmers were selected by the governmental institution and not by a specific cooperative or company.

After my time in Mampong-Ashanti, I made my way back to Accra to visit the Asetenepa Cooperative Cocoa Farming and Marketing Union Limited in Suhum, Eastern Region. The Asetenepa Cooperative is a cooperative of 658 smallholder farmer members (in March 2025). The vision of the cooperative is a thriving farming community, empowering farmers and promoting sustainable agriculture. The Asetenepa cooperative partners with Fairtrade Africa and is a mission partner of Tony's Chocolonely, a mission-driven chocolate company from the Netherlands. The farmers who are members of the Asetenepa cooperative produce primarily Fairtrade-certified cocoa and are visibly linked to an international (Fairtrade) value chain.

I was kindly welcomed to meet the Asetenepa management team at the cooperative's office. I visited two of the cocoa communities and two cocoa farms over two days. I interviewed ten cocoa farmers who were part of the Asetenepa cooperative, as well as a representative of the cooperative, who is also a cocoa farmer himself. Similarly to the previous field visits, individuals were selected for the sample based on non-random factors. Each interview was held individually, with only the interlocutor, the researcher, and the translator. The interviews on the first day of the field visit were conducted in Ga and Adangbe, languages that I am not familiar with. Therefore, the interpretation into English was

done in real-time by the representative of the Asetenepa cooperative. The interviews on the second day were all conducted by me in English.

Data Analysis Approach

During the research project, qualitative data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, informal conversations, field notes, and visual material. After the fieldwork period, all audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed and subjected to discourse analysis to understand the sense of the social world in the speech of the interlocutor and narrative analysis to contextualise how youth construct their self-accounts and make sense of their lived experience on the subject matter (Burck, 2005).

The coding process began with open coding, where the full transcripts were read, and codes were assigned to significant statements. To identify the codes, the technique of identifying themes and patterns was used. According to Ryan and Bernard (2003), themes are central to understanding patterns and meanings in qualitative data. A theme comes from the characteristics of the phenomenon that is being studied. Furthermore, themes can be identified in several ways, by recognising repetition in frequently used words or phrases, by the use of local terms or classification that reveal how people structure their world, by analysing metaphors and analogies to uncover underlying schemas, by comparing similarities and differences across the data and/or by attending to missing and/or unmentioned data (Ryan & Bernard, 2003: 85-94). The identified central themes were farm resources and infrastructure, perceptions towards livelihood, career pathway, challenges and risks of cocoa farming, advantages of cocoa farming, influences and factors, government involvement, pricing, climate change, cooperatives, farmers' motivation, aspirations, and future prospects. The organisation of the central themes and subthemes (codes) was done in a spreadsheet program.

Ethical Considerations and Positionality

This research involved human subjects as a source of data, with myself, the researcher, as the instrument for qualitative data collection. Given this approach, careful reflection on ethical considerations and positionality was essential to ensure the well-being of the participating interlocutors and the researcher.

Positionality refers to a researcher's identity, appearance, background and social position, in terms of gender, nationality, race, age, social and economic status, which may influence their fieldwork through their positions within a complex landscape of power relations. Specifically, my positionality as a non-African, young, white, Dutch female

studying at a university in the Netherlands and conducting research in Ghana influenced my interactions in the field and affected the shaping of the data analysis and thus the information documented and recognised as knowledge (Vlavonou, 2021). A critical and self-reflective approach to positionality is essential because it acknowledges how a researcher's identity and potential biases, such as assumptions, prejudice, expectations, and actions, can shape the research process. A reflection on my positionality is presented in Chapter 7 of this thesis. This reflection is aimed at addressing the subjectivity, surfacing narratives, and considering ethical grounds to strengthen the integrity and credibility of this study.

In the field, all interlocutors were informed about my presence, the purpose of the study, the research setting and the use of the data to foster transparency and respect. Consent to participate and record audio-visual material (audio recording of the interviews and photos of the research site and setting) was obtained voluntarily through verbal agreement. Interlocutors were assured that they could decline to take part or withdraw from the interview at any time without any negative consequences. To protect interlocutors' privacy, identifying information is anonymised and kept confidential.

This research acknowledged the potential discomfort and sensitivity of a topic, as well as the potential external influence (such as the attendance of the host organisation) that interlocutors may have experienced during the interview. During the field visits, I attempted to minimise harm by creating environments where participants could feel safe and comfortable sharing their stories. By adhering to these ethical principles, this study aimed to ensure the dignity and well-being of all interlocutors.

Chapter 5

Context: Understanding the Ghanaian Cocoa Sector

Chapter five delves into the historical and contemporary context of Ghana's cocoa sector. This chapter serves to gain a better understanding of the historical background, empirical context, and wider supply chain details of the Ghanaian cocoa sector in which the younger generation of cocoa farmers is situated and positioned.

The History of the Ghanaian Cocoa Sector

Historically, the introduction of Theobroma Cacao (the cocoa tree) to the African continent is attributed to several (mostly foreign) pioneers. However, the efforts of these pioneers remained experimental. The successful introduction of cocoa is credited to Tetteh Quarshie, a Ghanaian blacksmith. In 1879, Quarshie returned from a voyage to the Spanish colony, the island of Fernando Po (now Bioko, Equatorial Guinea) with cocoa pods and established a farm in Akwapim Mampong, Aburi, Eastern Region. In cooperation with the British colonial administration, cocoa farming spread across the Akwapim Ridge in the Eastern Region of Ghana (Kuusaana et al. 2021; Ludlow, 2012). Throughout the 19th century, large parts of the forest lands of Akym and Asante (southern Ghana) were transformed into agricultural plantations. Due to the lack and low fertility of the land, cocoa replaced other economic commodities, such as palm oil and rubber (Chauveau, 1997). Many farmers migrated to take advantage of these new economic opportunities, and a peasant-operated (cocoa) plantation system became a dominant mode of production in Ghana (Addo-Fening, 2013; Ludlow, 2012).

Cocoa became Ghana's dominant cash crop by the early 20th century. The export of cocoa contributed significantly to the growth of the country's economy. In 1885, the first export shipment of cocoa was documented, and by 1911, Ghana became the world's leading producer of cocoa. In the year 1905, the Gold Coast exported 7,000 tons of cocoa for £187,000. Nearly 20 years later, in 1923, the Gold Coast exported 197,000 tons of cocoa for £6,567,000 (Kuusaana et al. 2021).

The rapid expansion of the cocoa sector extended into nearly every facet of Ghanaian life. The expansion of cocoa production led to the commercialisation and individualisation of land ownership. Moreover, land use patterns transformed because, unlike food crops, which allow for flexible and shifting land use, cocoa cultivation requires more permanent use of

land, which encourages long-term claims and fixed agricultural plots. Furthermore, cocoa impacted socio-cultural life. Cocoa caused domestic movement and cross-border migration in search of new lands for cocoa production and/or income (Kuusaana et al. 2021). In addition, gender roles shifted over time, women's participation in cocoa farming grew, initially providing labour but eventually leading to women gaining more economic power and ownership rights in cocoa farming, particularly in matrilineal inheritance settings. The education sector was also impacted by cocoa through the establishment of research institutions and scholarships funded by cocoa revenues, which contributed to the development of Ghana (Kuusaana et al. 2021).

Alongside changes in the economic and socio-cultural landscape, cocoa played a central role in politics. During the colonial times, the colony (The Gold Coast) was a source of raw material for the European colonisers. In Ghana, cocoa cultivation has historically been a privately managed activity, with individuals securing land and labour. The colonial government's role has primarily focused on purchasing cocoa and implementing policies aimed at disease control and industry regulation (Kuusaana et al. 2021). In 1947, the colonial government established the Cocoa Marketing Board (CMB) to stabilise the commodity price of cocoa and was given a monopoly right to purchase cocoa beans. This monopoly was taken over by a cooperative society in 1961, replacing private traders. Under Kwame Nkrumah's Convention People's Party, favourable market conditions after World War II led to significant cocoa revenues, with rising payments to farmers and a large share through export duties and taxes to the government. After Ghana gained independence from British colonial rule in 1957, the government centralised the control of cocoa marketing and reduced the farmgate price. By 1964, the world cocoa prices collapsed, government revenues ran out, leading to money printing and high inflation (Kolavalli & Vigneri, 2011).

Between the mid-1960s and 1980s, cocoa production dropped to a low due to falling world prices and rising costs, and Ghana lost its leading position as the world's largest cocoa producer. In the subsequent years, the cocoa sector in Ghana experienced a renaissance. The recovery of the sector began with the implementation of the Economic Recovery Program and the Cocoa Rehabilitation Project in 1983, which increased the farmgate price and compensated for the replanting of trees infected with the 'swollen shoot disease' that had been plaguing the sector since the 1940s (Bryant & Mitchell, 2021; Kolavalli & Vigneri, 2011). These reforms led to the rehabilitation of production and productivity and nearly resulted in the doubling of cocoa yield by the mid-1990s. Furthermore, in 1992, the Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD, as the CMB was renamed in 1984) shifted responsibility for domestic cocoa

purchasing to privately licensed buying companies. From 2001 onwards, the cultivation of cocoa expanded due to high world prices and farming improvements, such as the use of fertilisers (Kolavalli & Vigneri, 2011).

Cocoa Production

The production of cocoa is spread across forest areas in six regions in the country, namely Western, Ashanti, Brong-Ahafo (nowadays: Bono, Bono East and Ahafo), Eastern, Central and Volta (nowadays: Volta and Oti) regions (Aidoo et al., 2019; Aning, 2023; GCB, 2023). In Ghana, cocoa farmers are largely referred to as smallholder farmers due to the family-focused motives of the farmers and the tradition of family land ownership, plots are frequently subdivided among large families, reducing the availability of land for an individual farmer (Aidoo et al., 2019). The lives of many of these farmers are shaped by the community, extended family structures, customary land tenure systems, and a strong intergenerational transmission of farming knowledge and labour (Anyidoho et al. 2012).

The majority of the cocoa farmers cultivate cocoa in small-sized farms. Although there is no single and universal definition of farm size, the World Bank Rural Development Strategy (2003) defines smallholding farms as farms "with a low asset base and operating in less than 2 hectares of cropland" (Khalil et al., 2017: 7). The average annual yield of a small-sized farm is about 500 kg per hectare (Aning, 2023). Cocoa is often the main crop cultivated on the farm, but other crops such as palm oil, plantain, cassava, and maize can generate extra income (Kissi & Herzig, 2023; Naydenov, 2022). Furthermore, cocoa production relies on various labour sources, including family labour, hired labour, landowner-caretaker arrangements (for instance, the 'Abunu' and 'Abusa' systems), communal labour support, government-subsidised labour programmes, and private labour (Kissi & Herzig, 2023).

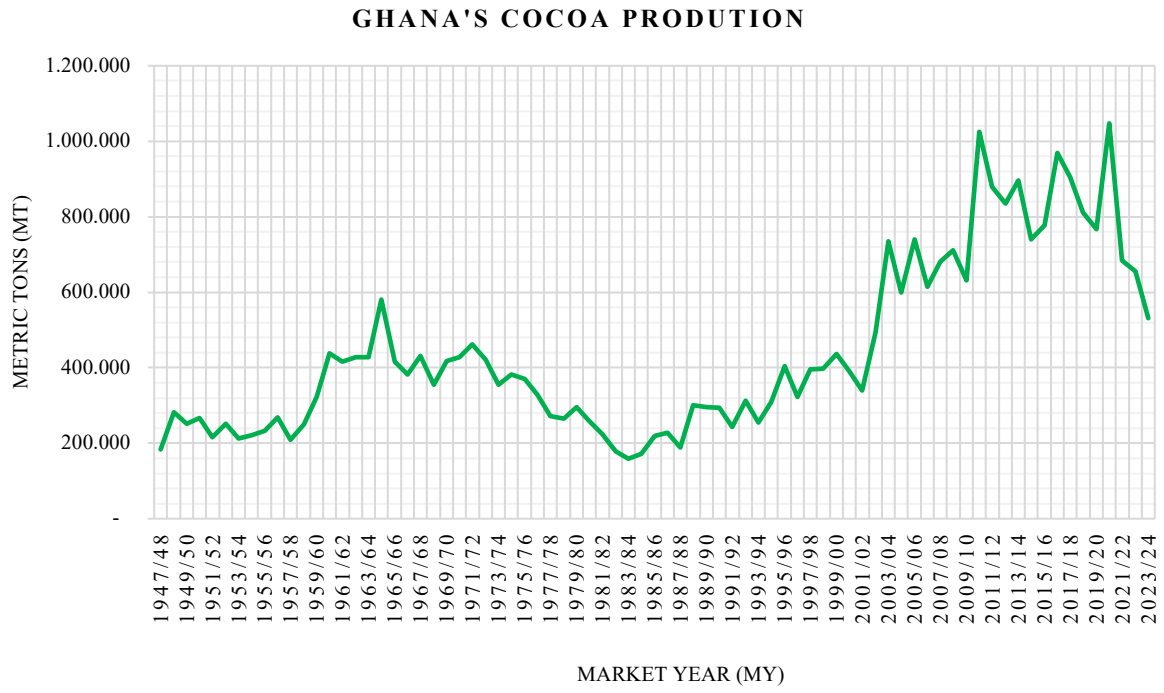
Cocoa is cultivated in two seasons throughout the year. The main cropping season is from September/October to March, and the mid-cropping season is from May to August. A cocoa tree reaches maturity and begins to yield between three and five years. With the right environmental conditions, proper care and agricultural inputs, the production peak can persist for another five to ten years. During the harvest period, the cocoa pods are manually removed from the trees and cut open to take out the 20-50 beans. The beans are covered with banana leaves or mats, left to ferment and dry under the sun for another week (GCB, 2023).

Since the record-setting 2020/2021 marketing year (see Figure 4 below), Ghana's cocoa production has declined, falling to nearly half of the previous level over the three consecutive seasons. The 2023/2024 season marks the country's lowest cocoa bean output in

the last 15 years (USDA Foreign Agricultural Service, 2025). The decline in recent cocoa production is attributed to the adverse effects of El Niño, informal cross border trade, cocoa tree/pod disease and infections, illegal gold mining activities (locally known as Galamsey), ineffective pruning exercises, and a cutback in government-supplied farm inputs, such as insecticides and fertilisers (COCOBOD, 2024a; USDA Agricultural Service, 2025).

Figure 4

Ghana's historical annual breakdown of the volumes of cocoa purchased by the COCOBOD.



Source: COCOBOD (n.d.), USDA FAS Accra Office Research (2025).

Note: These numbers reflect the formally registered volumes of the cocoa bean production of Ghana over the years.

Cocoa Sector Supply Chain

The supply chain of the cocoa sector encompasses many facets and stakeholders that transform a cocoa bean into a chocolate bar (or a different cocoa product). The activities within the supply chain take place within and outside of Ghana. The supply chain starts with the most important stakeholders, the cocoa farmers. The cocoa farmers cultivate and take care of the cocoa trees. After the harvest and drying of the cocoa beans, the beans are bagged and sold to buyers (Licensed Buying Companies). The next bodies involved in the supply chain are the COCOBOD, collection and transport companies or hauliers, and quality control and

certification bodies of the COCOBOD. Thereafter, the cocoa is sold to domestic or international buyers (GCB, 2023). The following stakeholders are the processors and manufacturers (for example, chocolatiers), distributors and retailers, and customers. Furthermore, support and enabling institutions, for example, the Government of Ghana, NGOs, financial institutions, etc., play a role in various stages of the cocoa supply chain (GCB, 2023).

To regulate the Ghanaian cocoa industry, the COCOBOD is responsible for cocoa production, marketing and research on the national level. The COCOBOD is a Ghanaian government-controlled monopoly institution that regulates the internal and external marketing of cocoa. Unlike other Sub-Saharan African economies, such as Côte d'Ivoire, the cocoa market sector in Ghana did not go through a complete liberalisation process (Naydenov et al., 2022: 8, 10). The COCOBOD sets an annual producer price (farmgate price) for cocoa, maintains quality control and certification to ensure international standards, ensures fair compensation for farmers, industry stability, input supply subsidies, welfare-oriented programmes, and secures international trade arrangements (GCB, 2023; Ghana Cocoa Board, n.d.; Naydenov et al., 2022). Furthermore, certification to promote sustainable and ethical practices is done by various stakeholders (GCB, 2023).

The Ghanaian cocoa supply chain revolves around the international trade of cocoa beans and cocoa products. Annually, approximately 60-70% of the produced cocoa beans are exported in raw form, while 30-40% are domestically processed into products such as paste, powder, butter, and liquor, as well as confectioneries like chocolate (Aning, 2023). Ten major cocoa processing companies operate within Ghana, comprising six foreign-owned firms and four Ghanaian-owned companies. The main challenges to increasing the domestic processing capacity are the business environment in Ghana, the availability of utilities, unreliable and costly electricity, high credit costs, and the significant capital requirement to manage market and price volatility. Additionally, processors experience a shortage of locally available beans and reportedly have to import light crop cocoa beans from Côte d'Ivoire to meet their production needs. Furthermore, international factors such as rules and regulations, and distance from major chocolate manufacturers, argue against the advantages of local processing (Naydenov et al., 2022).

Chapter 6

Findings and Discussion: Insights from the Field

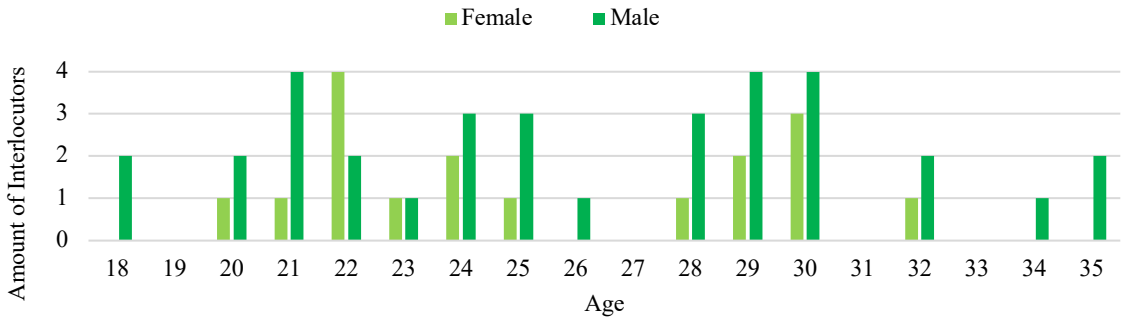
Chapter six presents and discusses the findings from the fieldwork, foregrounding the voices of the cocoa farmers and situating their experiences within the wider academic debate and the analytical framework of this thesis. The chapter begins with an overview of the interlocutors participating in this study. Thereafter, the key findings of the fieldwork are presented and grouped in three dimensions, starting with the perception and the pathway of the interlocutors, followed by the livelihood setting of the cocoa farmers, and closing with the aspirations of young cocoa farmers.

The Cocoa Farmer

After ten weeks of interviews, field visits, and observations, the fieldwork of this research lead to deeper insights into the realities of cocoa farming. Through a thematic analysis of the research findings, several key themes emerged regarding the livelihoods and aspirations of young cocoa farmers in Ghana. The figures below present insight into the demographics of the sample of interlocutors who participated in this research. Furthermore, the background of the cocoa farmers is outlined to illustrate an image of the sample of interlocutors.

Figure 5

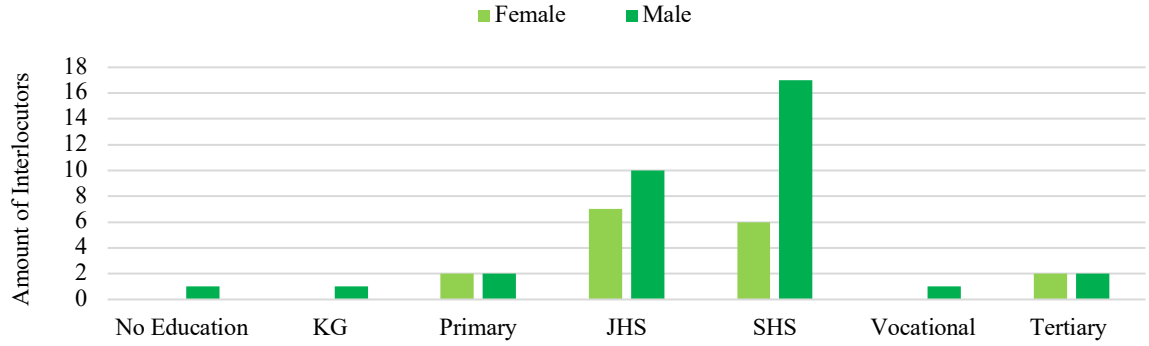
Age and gender composition of the cocoa farmers engaged in this study.



Note: The study of 51 (17 female, 34 male) cocoa farmers. This figure includes the representative of the cocoa cooperative, but excludes the COCOBOD extension officer.

Figure 6

Gender composition and the educational background (highest level of education attained) of the cocoa farmers engaged in this study.



Note: The study of 51 (17 female, 34 male) cocoa farmers. This figure includes the representative of the cocoa cooperative, but excludes the COCOBOD extension officer. The educational system in Ghana follows a 6-3-3-4 structure: early childhood education (Kindergarten (KG) (4 to 6 year olds), six years of primary education (6 to 11 year olds), three years of middle (Junior High School (JHS) (12 to 15 year olds), three years of secondary education (Senior High School (SHS) (15 to 17/18 year olds), three years of technical/vocational education and training (TVET) (16 to 18 year olds), and/or commonly four years of tertiary education (Higher National Diploma, University Bachelor's Degree) (Ministry of Education, 2016).

All the interlocutors were actively engaged in cocoa farming, with experience ranging from as little as six months to more than ten years. Most of the interviewed farmers owned cocoa farms. However, in many cases, the land on which their plantation was established belonged to others. Land ownership was predominantly arranged through kinship ties, such as parents or grandparents, though in some cases, the land was held by a non-related landowner. In the latter example, contracted labour, a sharecropping, or credit-based arrangement was at play, typically involving a 50/50 division of yields between the landowner and farmer (responsible for all the aspects of cocoa production). The interviews also revealed variation in farm size, reflecting the diversity of farming conditions and arrangements among the interlocutors. Overall, most interlocutors could be referred to as smallholder farmers, cultivating cocoa on small-sized land plots ranging between one and ten acres[3].

[3] 1 acres (ac) ≈ 0,4 hectare (ha). Smallholding farms encompass fewer than 2 hectares (≈ 4.94 acres) of farmland (Khalil et al., 2017).

Perception – The Pathway of a Cocoa Farmer

Cocoa is the mainstay of Ghana's economy, the lifeline that sustains thousands of households, and a symbol of national pride and cultural identity. The significance of cocoa has a central place in Ghanaian daily life. From its visible celebration on the cedi (national currency), where cocoa pods are engraved on coins and depicted on banknotes, to the green sachets of MILO (a chocolate and malt powder that produces a beverage) hanging on every corner of little roadside stalls. In seeking to capture the essence of this lived reality, I found myself wondering about the actuality of the perceptions of young Ghanaians toward cocoa farming. When asked to describe their perception of cocoa farming, many of the cocoa farmers emphasised that they perceived cocoa farming as a worthwhile enterprise to venture into. One interlocutor explained the meaning of cocoa:

> "It's a lifetime business for most of the farmers." (cocoa farmer (Male, 28), Boanim, personal communication, February 6, 2025).

During the interview, we discussed the incentive to engage in or establish a cocoa farm. The interviews revealed various reasons that led the interlocutors into cocoa farming. Many of the interlocutors did not enter cocoa farming as an entirely new venture but rather as an inherited livelihood pathway. The majority grew up on a cocoa farm belonging to their parents and/or extended family. By growing up in a cocoa community/farm, many of the interlocutors had been involved in farm work before starting their own cocoa farm. One farmer reflected:

> "I grew up on a cocoa farm."
> When asked whether she worked on the farm. She replied:
> "Yes, I was helping my parents." (cocoa farmer (Female, 24), Kona, personal communication, February 7, 2025).

Similarly, another interlocutor explained:

> "My dad was already a cocoa farmer, so I was assisting my dad." (cocoa farmer (Male, 20), Mamtwense, personal communication, February 12, 2025).

These narratives point to the exposure of the interlocutors to (daily) agricultural activities and early engagement in cocoa farming. With the socialisation into agrarian life, helping on the

farm of parents and/or relatives, many of the interlocutors acquired farming skills and familiarised themselves with the technical dimensions of cocoa production. Participation in planting, tree care, and harvesting was learned through practice on the job. In conversation with the interlocutors regarding their source of training to acquire the skills to undertake farm practices, the majority pointed out their parents or relatives as tutors. One farmer responded:

> "My grandparents taught me that. So, they taught me how to weed around the cocoa plants, how to prune, how to control weeds on the cocoa plant." (cocoa farmer (Male, 21), Bipoa, personal communication, February 11, 2025).

In contrast, some interlocutors mentioned other sources of training they received in addition to their parents and/or extended family. One of the farmers replied:

> "I received training from an extension officer. He taught me how to raise cocoa seedlings, how to prune cocoa, how to apply fertilisers and other chemicals." (cocoa farmer (Male, 25), Kona, personal communication, February 7, 2025).

In this response, the interlocutor refers to an extension officer of the COCOBOD. The extension officer of the COCOBOD Mampong District, who assisted this research in the field, describes his role as:

> "I'm an intermediary between the researcher and then the farmer. That is, I take information from the researchers and then educate my farmers with it. So, whatever new technology or new ideas which come about, I take them to my farmers and then educate my farmers for them to adapt for higher productivity." (Cocoa extension officers (Male), Mampong-Ashanti, personal communication, February 18, 2025).

The participation and familiarity with cocoa farming contribute to the shaping of the perception that cocoa farming is both an accessible and legitimate way to make a living. During the period of socialisation, the interlocutors went through different life phases as they transitioned from helpers to more independent farm owners. This observation relates to the literature by Amon-Armah et al. (2022) and Honwana (2012), describing the stages of youthhood, the transition, and the establishment of an independent livelihood. The becoming of an adult comes with different responsibilities to sustain a livelihood, such as marriage, a

household, and offspring. The responsibilities of sustaining a household leave less room to aspire or choose another livelihood. This study complements this observation and questions the agency of young cocoa farmers to drastically change their daily survival strategies and livelihood approach.

The reason for engagement in cocoa farming varied among the interlocutors. A recurring theme among the interviewed young farmers was the incentive for engagement in cocoa farming that followed from generational and/or family-oriented experiences. Many of the interlocutors grew up in cocoa-farming households, worked on a plantation, and/or were socialised in cocoa communities. These experiences shaped their aspiration to venture into cocoa farming themselves. In the field of economics, this observation, where young people choose a similar career path as their parents because of internalised familiarity, is referred to as path dependency. Path dependency describes the idea that technologies and social patterns, once established, become locked in solutions. Diversion from a trajectory is difficult due to the history of the system, social norms, and costs of change. This inability to detach from the past could hinder innovative path creation (Chhetri et al., 2010). Chhetri et al. (2010) illustrate path dependency in agriculture through the continued use of chemicals and pesticides as the dominant method of pest management, even though there is knowledge on the negative consequences of these chemicals and alternative crop protection strategies available (Chhetri et al., 2010). This concept aligns with the study by Amon Armah et al. (2022), arguing that young people's outlook on cocoa farming is often influenced by adult farmers within the household and/or community. Similarly, the research of Kodom et al. (2022) emphasises the role of successful role models in reinforcing a positive perception of cocoa farming. The responses of the interviewed cocoa farmers complement these insights, demonstrating how intergenerational transfer of skills, values, and experiences creates pathways into cocoa farming. One interlocutor explained:

> "My parents were into cocoa farming, and I saw the benefit that they were gaining. So, when I also ventured into cocoa farming, I also gained numerous benefits." (cocoa farmer (Male, 29), Boanim, personal communication, February 6, 2025).

For several interlocutors, the decision to engage in cocoa farming was strongly influenced by observing the profitability achieved by their relatives. They interpreted cocoa as a viable and legitimate livelihood provider, with its financial output enabling education, sustaining

household needs, and supporting material-related investments. One of the interlocutors illustrated this process of observation as:

> "Because of the income, my father used some of the income to take me to school. So, through the income, I was able to go to school." (cocoa farmer (Male, 20), Kona, personal communication, February 7, 2025).

Next to the economic well-being factor, having a successful role model motivates the younger generation to engage in cocoa farming. Previous research by Kodom et al. (2022) highlights the absence of successful cocoa farmers who serve as role models in cocoa communities to motivate youth engagement. In contrast, the findings of this research document how interlocutors were inspired to engage in cocoa farming by examples of successful cocoa farmers in their communities. This indicates that the presence of role models may vary across communities, depending on the visibility and the distribution of farming success. The following interlocutor reflects the importance of role models:

> "I want to be like the people who started earlier, how they have got to, I want to be like them. So, each and every time, I will try my best to work hard so that I can get to where they are right now, as in life." (cocoa farmer (Male, 25), Bipoa, personal communication, February 11, 2025).

For other interlocutors, relatives' narratives of cocoa farming as a livelihood that secured economic well-being over generations further reinforced the aspiration to engage in cocoa farming:

> "I decided to engage in cocoa farming because my grandparents used it to establish themselves, like they have about five different houses that they have built through the cocoa farm, and also they have taken good care of their children as well." (cocoa farmer (Male, 29), Yonso, personal communication, February 13, 2025).

As presented in this thesis's analytical framework, the concept of aspiration implies an orientation towards desired futures, shaped by the attitude, motivation, and action of an actor embedded in the social and cultural context (Appadurai, 2004; Tieken & San Antonio, 2016). The testimonies above express how young farmers translate observed outcomes into

aspirational goals. The profit gained by parents, grandparents, and/or relatives provides a living for their families and enables them to accumulate material investments such as property and housing. Observing these assets leads the interlocutors to perceive cocoa farming as a legitimised, secure, and rewarding career. The decision to venture into cocoa farming suggests economic well-being based on the visible profitability of successful role models, while echoing the responsibility to aspire to securing livelihoods. However, the variability across contexts where promising role models are absent, as Kodom et al. (2022) note, indicates the dependency on intergenerational influence and might discourage entry for young people without relatives in cocoa farming. Places where successful examples are visible highlight the importance of the locally present influencing drivers shaping the aspirations of young people in cocoa farming.

For some of the interlocutors, engagement in cocoa farming was not primarily a matter of aspiration, but rather of necessity. These interlocutors described how personal circumstances, such as economic hardship, lack of educational opportunity, or the death of family members, pressured them to take up cocoa farming. In these cases, farming emerged less as a deliberate livelihood choice and more as a survival strategy in response to limited options. One farmer explicitly mentioned the link between his entry into cocoa farming and the limitation of access to education:

> "It's because I wasn't able to further up my education." (cocoa farmer (Male, 30), Mpobi, personal communication, February 18, 2025).

The statement resonates with the research of Anyidoho et al. (2012), who describe the perception towards cocoa farming in relation to educational background. Individuals with little to no formal education are more likely to view cocoa farming as a potential pathway to a better future and a fallback option in the case of insufficient educational attainment.

Other interlocutors reflected on how life events directly shifted their pathway. For instance, one farmer described how the loss of his parents and the unsustainability of alternative work led him into cocoa farming:

> "I decided to engage in cocoa farming because after completing JHS, my parents passed away, and I had no support. I further went on to learn construction work, of which the daily income wasn't good for me. So, I decided to stop the construction

> work and then go and start with the cocoa farming." (cocoa farmer (Male, 28), Yonso, personal communication, February 13, 2025).

Similarly, other interlocutors inherited the responsibility of maintaining the continuity of their families' farms following the death of relatives. These narratives highlight the role of family responsibility in shaping decisions. One interlocutor noted:

> "I decided to engage [in cocoa farming] because my grandmum died. We didn't let the cocoa plantation to die, so I had to take over from my grandparents."
> When asked if she would have liked to do something else. She replied:
> "Yes, I would like to do other things, like business in support of the cocoa farm."
> (cocoa farmer (Female, 30), Yonso, personal communication, February 13, 2025).

Taken together, these responses show that the engagement in cocoa farming is often not driven by abstract factors only, but influenced by intergenerational family legacy, the upbringing in an agrarian lifestyle, and access to inherited land and/or knowledge systems. The perception of these young cocoa farmers reflects how observations and experience translate into aspirations and actions to create a sustainable livelihood.

Livelihood – The Setting of a Cocoa Farmer

As presented in the literature review, young people involved in cocoa farming face various possibilities and challenges regarding their livelihood characteristics and environment. Following the element of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) by Natarajan et al. (2022), presented in the analytical framework, the sustainability of livelihoods is influenced by the context and landscape of a livelihood (livelihood characteristics), livelihood environment dynamics (climate and environmental context, assets, and relational power), and the fluctuating pathway of making a livelihood (Natarajan et al., 2022). A livelihood in cocoa farming strongly depends on resources. The first and foremost necessity is financial capital. During the interviews, all interlocutors mentioned the dependency on financial assets to be able to access farmland, an important physical asset. Moreover, the farmers described the need for economic capital to acquire, establish, and maintain the cocoa farm to generate yield and eventually a living income. One interlocutor reflected:

> "Most of the farmers, because it's where they also get their income and other stuff from, so if there is inadequate land, access to land, land degradation, you don't have enough capital to start. It affects their income, which also affects their livelihoods as well." (cocoa farmer (Male, 28), Boanim, personal communication, February 6, 2025).

In addition, as White (2012) describes, access to farmland is complicated due to relational power. One of the interlocutors shared that he has a cocoa plantation on a piece of land that does not belong to him and/or his relatives. He describes how family members of the landowner disturbed him because they are not in agreement with their relative that this cocoa farmer is working on the piece of land that belongs to their family. The cocoa farmer has to give the people disturbing him money to ease the situation. He explained:

> "Access to land is a challenge, because getting the land to start your cocoa plantation is an issue in this community. Because when they [referring to the family members of the landowner] come to Ghana or Africa, the land will belong to their family, so there will be an issue for them giving it out to different people to work on it, even though the land is fertile for the cocoa plantation. The family members wouldn't come into agreement to give it to a specific person to work on it. (cocoa farmer (Male, 26), Mpobi, personal communication, February 18, 2025).

Another aspect of the relational power influence mentioned in the SLF refers to gender. As discussed in the study of Addaney et al. (2022), women are often disadvantaged in access to land for farming activities. Although this pattern was not discussed during the interviews with the cocoa farmers, the representative of the cooperative commented on the land tenure regimes and women's access to secure land for cocoa cultivation. He explained:

> "In our society, there's this gender stereotype that women are for the kitchen. So even some families, when they are giving out land to siblings, they don't consider women. So, they will be like, you will go and marry, and you will leave the family. So, there's no need for them giving you the land. So that prevents a lot of women from going into agriculture. In fact, that has been the biggest challenge to women in agriculture. Because they don't have access to land as compared to men, to also start their farming. […]. That has been a hindrance to women's participation in agriculture. […]. They

have this patrilineal inheritance in most of the families." (cooperative representative and cocoa farmer (Male, 28), Abenabo, personal communication, March 25, 2025).

This reflection resonates with an observation made during the fieldwork. A female cocoa farmer who cultivated a 10.5-acre cocoa farm on land belonging to her father was interviewed. Later, her younger brother, who, combining all five of his cocoa plantations, farmed between 40 and 50 acres of land, was also interviewed. Likewise, this land is also owned by their father. When asked whether the land will eventually be divided equally, he acknowledged that this is a possible scenario. However, the extension officer commented: "You are the man. You are the man of the house." (Kona, personal communication, February 7, 2025). Complementing the study by Addaney et al. (2022), this remark underscores the gendered dynamics of inheritance, suggesting that male farmers may be privileged over their female siblings in the transfer of family land.

Moreover, according to the SLF, the context and landscape of the livelihood of cocoa farmers is dynamic and influenced by transformative structures and processes encompassing policies/norms and institutions/social groups (both formal and informal) in public and private dimensions (Natarajan et al., 2022). Apart from these more structural factors, Natarajan et al. (2022) argues that the pathway of making a livelihood is also continually shaped by short-term conditions, such as fluctuations in pricing. During the majority of the interviews, the farmgate price emerged as a disputed matter. Despite the recent price increase, the interviewed cocoa farmers and professionals perceive this price as rather low in comparison to the financial and physical assets that farmers invest in cultivating the cocoa. Especially, learning that the international market price that the government receives is four times the amount that farmers receive for their (the same) bag of cocoa. One farmer reflected:

"The price is GH₵ 3,100[4]. Yes. It's not enough for us, the farmers."
When asked how much the price should be. He replied:
"Oh, at least if right now they are buying cocoa for GH₵ 7,000, 6,000 per bag. I think we, the farmers, will be happy. Because even nowadays, the increment, maybe at first,

[4] On average (the exchange rate fluctuates constantly) 1 GH₵ ≈ 0.065 EUR. One bag of cocoa is 3,100 GH₵ ≈ 200 EU. On the 8th of November 2024, the COCOBOD announced an increase in Producer Price (farmgate price), from GH₵48,000.00 per tonne (GH₵3,000.00 per bag of 64kg) (2023/2024) to GH₵49,600.00 per tonne (GH₵3,100 per bag of 64kg) (2024/2025) (COCOBOD, 2024b).

> we, the farmers, don't know the price of the cocoa in the world market. But right now, because of the training [provided by the cooperative] and the internet, if I just take my phone. So, you can find out that it's GH¢ 12,000 now." (cocoa farmer (Male, 29), Abenabo, personal communication, March 25, 2025).

For a substantial number of the cocoa farmers, the current pricing of cocoa remains insufficient to secure a living income. As noted before, the government-controlled COCOBOD has the mandate to regulate the marketing of cocoa in Ghana (Naydenov et al., 2022). The representative of the cocoa cooperative in Suhum, who is also a cocoa farmer himself, reflected on the political economy of cocoa in Ghana. He explained:

> "I don't know when it will change, but I think it should change. Because it is not in the best interest of the farmers. [However], then capitalism comes into play, of course, and that can also destroy quite a lot because the differences can be very big. Very big. That is also part of one challenge of it. But I think it's a win-win situation. When farmers get that opportunity, they can sell their cocoa at a higher price. At that of the market price. And that will help them a lot. Because looking or hearing the news that this is the market price and this is what the government is buying from us, is a very concerning or pitiful thought that comes to people's minds. That they are cheating us. So most of the farmers that we have engaged would prefer the Ivory Coast approach. Because they realise that in Ivory Coast, the buyers come directly to the farmers. But sometimes it can also affect that you have to buy, because I know that that's a problem in Ivory Coast, is that people buy products at a very low price." (cooperative representative and cocoa farmer (Male, 28), Abenabo, personal communication, March 25, 2025).

The observations of the cooperative representative bring a double-sided perspective on the regulations of state and market privatisation or liberalisation in the cocoa sector to the fore. On the one hand, the representative describes the COCOBOD's marketing strategy as providing stability by setting a fixed annual farmgate price and protecting farmers from the global market. On the other hand, he underscores the perceptions among farmers that the state monopoly defeats the profit earnings and deprives them of the global price fluctuations. As the representative describes, the discussion on the reforming liberalisation of the domestic market exposes both opportunity and risk. In comparison to the model of Côte d'Ivoire, he

notes that a liberalisation of the market could empower farmers to negotiate higher prices and improve their economic well-being. However, he also mentions the vulnerability of farmers. The absence of state protection could expose farmers to market instability and unequal power dynamics with buyers offering unfairly low prices. This testimony complements the report by Naydenov et al. (2022), stating that to this day, there is a substantial debate on the experience of marketing boards and the liberalisation and privatisation of the agricultural sector in Sub-Saharan Africa. The report specifies that too often both forms of agricultural political economy are criticised for inefficient investments in agricultural infrastructure and extension services, which are crucial to increasing the productivity of cocoa farmers (Naydenov et al., 2022). In light of this, the call of the representative and other cocoa farmers he is referring to, can be understood not only as a demand for higher prices, but also for a more equitable system.

Another essential physical asset for sustaining a livelihood, according to the SLF, is the availability of farm inputs and equipment required to carry out farming activities. Due to the lack of financial capital, these material instruments are not available to many farmers. Occasionally, the COCOBOD and/or cooperatives provide farmers with materials. However, during the interviews, farmers explained that the terms and conditions for getting access and receiving these materials are not transparent and trustworthy. One farmer reviewed:

> "We need equipment that we use on the farm. Because of that equipment, we are not getting it. We struggle to weed." (cocoa farmer (Male, 34), Jato, personal communication, March 24, 2025).

The representative of the cooperative attested to this demand and explained the offer of the cooperative:

> "When we realise that these farmers need inputs, because we normally do this assessment, what the farmers need. And sometimes it will turn out that they need inputs like fertilisers, machinery, and all those things." (cooperative representative and cocoa farmer (Male, 28), Abenabo, personal communication, March 25, 2025).

Across the interviews, farmers described cocoa farming as tedious. The labour-intensive character of the work was highlighted both in terms of day-to-day tasks and the challenge of sustaining production, facing a broader problem of labour shortages and high costs of labour.

The observation of labour scarcity and high labour costs in cocoa cultivation is in line with the research of Agyapong et al. (2024). One farmer explained:

> "Working on the cocoa farm, looking at the activities, is very difficult. And sometimes there is no labour available to help them, and that becomes very difficult." (cocoa farmer (Female, 22), Jato, personal communication, March 24, 2025).

One farmer emphasised the challenges of the cultivation process:

> "It is hard, but if you try, you can pass through."
> When asked what is hard about cocoa farming. He responded:
> "For the starting, when you are planting, it's not easy. You plant it, then like some will collapse, some will die in it. You have to replant it, so if you don't get time for it, you can't. And out it has good and it's sowing, some pest and parasite they destroy it if you don't get money to buy medicine to spray that, you can't." (cocoa farmer (Male, 24), Abenabo, personal communication, March 25, 2025).

The study of Agyapong et al. (2024) also noted that the role of labour is crucial in maintaining the product quality, as the shortage of labour heightens the vulnerability to external factors, such as weather variability and risk of pest infections. Taken together, physical effort ties in with financial capacity. These reflections complement the studies, illustrating how physical labour, financial constraints, agricultural inputs, and ecological vulnerability make cocoa farming an interdependent, time-consuming, and demanding enterprise (Anyidoho et al., 2012; Kodom et al., 2022; White, 2012).

The SLF also emphasised the ecological dimension, encompassing the climate and environmental context of a livelihood. Recent studies highlight that changing climate patterns, which are expected to intensify, pose severe challenges for agriculture in the future. For example, Asante et al. (2025) question the long-term sustainability of cocoa farming given the risk of unpredictable alterations in the ecological conditions necessary for cocoa cultivation. One main concern in their work, and echoed in the interviews, is the increasing variability of weather patterns. One interlocutor noticed the irregularity of rainfall:

> "We are getting or heading closer to the major rainy season of 2025, but there is no rainfall, so at this moment we should have experienced rainfall to signify that we are

> getting closer to the major cropping season of 2025." (cocoa farmer (Male, 30), Mpobi, personal communication, February 18, 2025).

Other farmers observed how the leaves of the cocoa trees are affected by prolonged heat and drought. One cocoa farmer illustrated:

> "Sometimes the weather changes. Because sometimes you see that the cocoa leaves how it starts coming. It's not good, and that will not help the cocoa tree to be strong. That means the weather has changed." (cocoa farmer (Male, 24), Abenabo, personal communication, March 25, 2025).

These observations highlight how climate variability is shaping the environmental context of cocoa farming. Erratic rainfall undermines irrigation possibilities and leaves trees vulnerable to pests and other crop diseases. Such ecological pressure not only reduces yields but also affects the farmer's income, eventually challenging the capital required to reinvest in input and maintenance to sustain the farm. These experiences demonstrate how the livelihoods of cocoa farmers are embedded within broader environmental structures and processes (Natarajan et al., 2022). The vulnerability of cocoa production due to climate change underscores the impact of ecological contexts on rural livelihoods. The struggles that these cocoa farmers experience on the local level can be situated within the wider dynamics of global environmental change.

Aspiration – The Future of a Young Cocoa Farmer

The engagement of young people in cocoa farming is contradictory. On the one hand, cocoa farming sustains livelihoods, is perceived as a pathway to economic survival, and has potential for development. On the other hand, cocoa farming is frequently framed as an unattractive and low-status occupation, often associated with an ageing population and rural marginality. This tension reflects how young people's aspirations are not only shaped by economic and material opportunities but also by social perceptions of farming. As the representative of the cocoa cooperative remarked:

> "Farmers, especially farmers in rural areas, are not being given the needed accord, you know. They are always being looked down upon. They don't, especially those in the

> urban city, they don't respect them." (cooperative representative and cocoa farmer (Male, 28), Abenabo, personal communication, March 25, 2025).

This statement highlights the stigma of farming as an occupation, particularly in relation to an urban-rural dimension. While cocoa remains significant to Ghana's economy and a pathway to create a livelihood, the perception of farming is marked by limited opportunities and a lack of social recognition. The social devaluation creates a barrier to the engagement of young people in cocoa farming, as the social perception of the occupation fails to align with the desired aspirations of status, dignity, and mobility for a viable future (Anyidoho et al., 2012). Despite this framing, the interlocutors participating in this research reflected positively on their social status. Some did critically point out that their social status was respected among cocoa communities, instead of on a broader level. Furthermore, most interlocutors identified a link between economic well-being and the attainment of a higher social status. As previously highlighted, this notion of economic well-being is tied to social recognition and the presence of successful role models. One cocoa farmer pointed this out:

> "How you protect your farm, how you make your farm, it also brings other people to see. If people are passionate, they see how you manage your farm. It also raises your status. They will say, for example, go and see Sisters [name left out for privacy protection] farm. The farm is very nice." (cocoa farmer (Female, 24), Kona, personal communication, February 7, 2025).

Furthermore, economic well-being is closely connected to the long-term sustainability of farming. In line with the research of Amon-Armah et al. (2022), who define success in cocoa farming in terms of stability and intergenerational continuity, two interlocutors illustrated the value of owning a cocoa plantation, the generation of an income, and its potential to provide financially for both family and future generations:

> "For the annual crops like maize, if you plant maize, you harvest. At the end of the day, you have to go and grow new ones again. But as for the cocoa, when you grow it for this year, it will be there till 20 or 30 years." (cocoa farmer (Male, 22), Mamtwense, personal communication, February 12, 2025).

> "What my parents used to take care of, growing up, I have realised that when I engage myself in cocoa, I can be able to also take care of my children." (cocoa farmer (Male, 34), Jato, personal communication, March 24, 2025).

Another cocoa farmer translated the stability of cocoa farming, in comparison with his previous occupation as a trader. He explained:

> "I was selling shoes in Kumasi. But it was frustrating. Because as you get to a time, they [referring to authorities] will come and take your shoes. Like, they want to seize it or something of that sort. So, you have to be very careful. So, I decided to come back and settle in my hometown and start with the cocoa farming." (cocoa farmer (Male, 29), Yonso, personal communication, February 13, 2025).

Despite these accounts of livelihood sustainability and economic well-being, investing in the establishment of a cocoa farm is both demanding and risky; success is not guaranteed, as the development and maintenance of cocoa trees require significant time, resources, and intensive care to secure a harvest. According to multiple interlocutors, young people are more interested in jobs that provide a high short-term income. A quickly rising example in Ghana is illegal small-scale mining activities (locally known as Galamsey). One interlocutor pointed out:

> "The reasons why young people don't want to be interested in the cocoa farm is, it is just once in a year before the cocoa comes. Someone there [referring to the Galamsey] wants money quickly, every month. So, she or he can't wait until the year the cocoa comes." (cocoa farmer (Female, 23), Abenabo, personal communication, March 25, 2025).

The main consequence of illegal mining is that cocoa farmers are selling their farmland to illegal miners, resulting in a decline in the number of trees that produce cocoa. Other effects of the Galamsey are labour shortage, water pollution, land degradation, and ultimately reduced output of the cocoa farm (Osman et al., 2022).

Notwithstanding the discouraging factors that could shape young people's aspirations away from cocoa farming, none of the young farmers interviewed in this study expressed an active intention to abandon cocoa farming. Some noted that only a catastrophic event, such as a bushfire, a complete drought, or disease outbreaks, that destroys their plantation, would

compel them to consider venturing into an alternative occupation. On the contrary, others explained that even such events would motivate them to start over and re-establish their farms. This positive framing of their livelihood in cocoa farming highlights a sense of resilience, which is central to a sustainable livelihood and adhering to aspirations when facing a challenge (Bennike et al., 2020; Natarajan et al., 2022; Tieken & San Antonio, 2016). It also illustrates how livelihood, aspirations, and future prosperity are embedded in commitment to land, family, community, and identity. In response, I asked the interlocutors how young people should be encouraged to engage in cocoa farming. Most of the interlocutors emphasised the need for capital as a precondition for successful engagement in cocoa farming. This capital was described as ranging from financial resources to land access, farming equipment, and technical knowledge. Because young people often lack these inputs, the government was frequently appointed as a potential actor responsible for providing support. One cocoa farmer explained:

> "The government should ensure that it gets some start-up capital for the youth in order to support them with other equipment like the spraying machines, weedicides, and insecticides. That will aid them in their farming practices." (cocoa farmer (Male, 24), Mamtwense, personal communication, February 12, 2025).

The appeal to the government underscores expectations that the state should act to enable and provide young people with the necessities to sustain livelihoods in cocoa farming. In line with the argument of Appadurai (2004), the aspirations of young people are closely tied to external resources and structures that support their realisation. The call for governmental support highlights how the sustainability of cocoa farming is not just the agency of an individual actor, but also a collective and political responsibility. As pointed out in existing literature, throughout the history of cocoa in Ghana, the government plays an active role in the engagement of young people in cocoa farming. An example is the youth-centred training programme researched by Kodom et al. (2022), as well as the support of the farm input and equipment some cocoa farmers receive, as some interlocutors mentioned in the interviews. Despite the governmental support and recent cocoa price increment, most of the interviewed cocoa farmers expressed the desire to receive more or additional support to mitigate the challenges they experience. The representative of the cooperative gave voice to this observation by stating:

> "Without us, there is no cocoa. If farmers decide not to farm again, where are you going to get cocoa? You will not get cocoa. So, issues about farmers should be of utmost priority to the government and COCOBOD. But that is not what we are seeing, and for me, I think something must be done about it. When we meet them, we tell them factually that we need to do something about it. Because farmers are down there suffering, going through challenges. A lot of challenges." (cooperative representative and cocoa farmer (Male, 28), Abenabo, personal communication, March 25, 2025).

Furthermore, a cocoa farmer also highlighted the benefits of cocoa for the government in terms of the development of the country. She mentioned:

> "It helps the economy in many ways. The government gains a lot of money from the cocoa production when they transport it. It helps in infrastructure development, building of roads and construction of hospitals." (cocoa farmer (Female, 24), Boanim, personal communication, February 6, 2025).

In addition to the role of the state and its institutions, other stakeholders engaged in the cocoa farming sector could also fulfil a (bigger) role in supporting farmers' livelihoods. During the field visits in the Eastern Region, I interviewed young cocoa farmers affiliated with the Asetenepa Cooperative in Suhum. This cooperative partners with Fairtrade-driven stakeholders and is integrated into an international value chain. The members produce Fairtrade-certified cocoa and, in addition to the farmgate price, receive both a Fairtrade premium and a living income premium (Living Income Reference Price set by Fairtrade) paid by Tony's Chocolonely. These premiums are intended to enable cocoa farmers to earn a living income from the cocoa they sell, invest in productivity-enhancing resources, and tackle elements of exploitation of both people and land (Tony's Chocolonely, 2025). The cooperative representative explained how these premiums function in practice:

> "So, what informed the payment in July was that during that period, there is no cocoa on the trees, and there is a little hardship in the system. So, by giving them that additional money at that period, will help them solve a whole lot of issues."
> […]
> "The cooperative deducts the need and then allocates the rest of the premium to the farmers."

> When asked whether he thinks the premiums are sufficient for farmers. He replied: "Yes, because after what the farmer receives as cash bonus, which comes directly to them, we have indirect benefits. That through what the cooperative takes, they also take it back to them. Like training, for instance. Input, for instance. So, these are all indirect benefits that come to the farmers. But most of the farmers don't know about that." (cooperative representative and cocoa farmer (Male, 28), Abenabo, personal communication, March 25, 2025).

A comparison between the interviews from the two different regions in Ghana revealed a difference in perception of income. In the Ashanti Region, the challenge or dissatisfaction with income was expressed more often during the conversation, whereas in the Eastern Region, more farmers expressed slight contentment, despite still hoping for higher prices. This contrast may reflect the benefits of a cooperative membership, which contribute to the economic well-being and perceived sustainability of livelihoods. From the perspective of the SLF, the premiums enhance the financial capital of cocoa farmers. Furthermore, the cooperative membership provides the farmers with physical and social benefits, such as training, resources, and strengthening the social union of farmers, improving their capacity to mitigate stress and shock (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Natarajan et al., 2022). These findings illustrate the importance of creating a beneficial environment and how external factors can reinforce sustainability of the landscape of cocoa livelihoods. On the contrary, engagement in international value chain processes, such as Fairtrade certification, comes with certain requirements that farmers must adhere to. For small farmer enterprises and wage labourers, these standards are hard to meet due to financial aspects (for example, high certification fees) and/or material and symbolic resources (for instance, social connections and level of literacy) (Sen & Majumder, 2011). Participation in a direct supply chain or certification scheme thus also has pitfalls and produces selection based on in- and excluding factors.

During the interviews, several interlocutors expressed aspirations extending beyond cocoa farming. These aspirations were primarily framed as a means of diversifying income and securing financial assets to sustain a livelihood in cocoa farming. A striking observation was that none of the interlocutor would abandon their farm for another occupation, since their farm is already established and thus too valuable to give up. The interlocutors named various non-agricultural and agriculturally related activities they practice or aspired to engage in. The most frequently mentioned strategy was mixed cropping, where the farmer cultivates additional agricultural commodities, such as plantain, cassava, cocoyams, and other

vegetables, alongside cocoa (Kolavalli & Vigneri, 2011). Beyond agriculture, other interlocutors reported engagement in additional jobs, including construction work, (vegetable) trading, seamstressing or tailoring, mechanic, and football playing. Others spoke of aspirations to pursue further education or occupations such as teaching, policing, business ownership, or serving as a cocoa extension officer. These accounts highlight the aspiration and desire of young people for future-oriented subsistence of survival, social mobility, and economic well-being (Anyidoho et al., 2012).

In the end, even with all the challenges that cocoa farmers are facing, most of the interlocutors perceived their future livelihood in cocoa as optimistic. Most interlocutors spoke proudly about their pathway in cocoa farming, perceived themselves to be (almost) successful farmers, and noted their wishes for development in the future. The success of a cocoa farmer was mostly translated into economic well-being and the establishment of property, housing, and material features. Some farmers reflected:

> "If the income gained from the cocoa farm is being used to build houses and then buy or acquire a lot of properties, and also even if you get the money, you can use it to travel outside your country to different places." (cocoa farmer (Female, 30), Kwamang, personal communication, February 11, 2025).

> "When the person uses the income gain to cater for his or her siblings, like we take good care of them in schools, in tertiaries, and then others start using it to build and do other stuff." (cocoa farmer (Female, 25), Boanim, personal communication, February 6, 2025).

> "I am also successful because that is what I am using to cater for my family and taking care of. Even though I am not big, the income is quite manageable." (cocoa farmer (Male, 35), Yonso, personal communication, February 13, 2025).

Taken together, all these perspectives highlight that success in cocoa farming is a process of becoming, emphasising long-term investment, intergenerational benefits, social recognition, and building resilience over time (Tieken & San Antonio, 2016). Whereas some cocoa farmers do not yet see themselves as successful, this illustrates how aspirations are constantly negotiated within the flux of livelihood conditions (Natarajan et al., 2022). Moreover, it suggests that success is not only defined by individual effort but shaped by broader structural

factors, such as access to land, capital, and support, that determine whether aspirations can be realised.

Chapter 7
Conclusion and Reflections

This final chapter concludes with the key findings of this study. Thereafter, the limitations, the researcher's positionality, and recommendations for further research are presented.

Conclusion

This study investigated the question of how Ghana's younger generation of cocoa farmers perceives their role in the future of cocoa farming, and the key factors that influence their decision to pursue cocoa farming as a livelihood. The findings revealed that the cocoa farmers interviewed generally perceive cocoa farming as a rewarding career with promising long-term future prospects. While existing literature often highlights a gap between young people's aspirations and the realities of agribusiness employment, many interlocutors framed cocoa farming as an investment for the future, touching upon the business aspect of cocoa. With proper maintenance, the cocoa can last for multiple generations. However, this study also revealed the entanglement of the cocoa farmers between opportunities and vulnerabilities in light of the livelihood landscape of cocoa farming.

Furthermore, this study showed that the engagement of the young cocoa farmers is strongly shaped by intergenerational influences and the presence of successful role models. For many interlocutors, venturing into cocoa farming was considered a sustainable livelihood pathway. The familiarity and/or socialisation into an agrarian lifestyle suggests that cocoa farming is less a matter of individual choice and more a default outcome. Although most of the interlocutors did not explicitly mention alternative trajectories, several expressed aspirations beyond or related to cocoa farming. This suggests that if they had not been raised in a cocoa community or had not been exposed to successful role models, their occupational choice to engage in cocoa farming might have been different. These observations imply that the agency of the young cocoa farmers appears constrained by dependency and commitment to land, family, community, and identity.

Another key finding evolved around the aspect of financial assets. Economic well-being emerged as the primary driver of young cocoa farmers' motivation to engage in and pursue cocoa farming. The income that cocoa generates enables them to provide for their household and future generations. While economic well-being grounds their livelihood, the lived experiences of a lack of financial assets contradict the dynamics of a livelihood. The

challenges of access to land, labour, and farm inputs are primarily bound by financial capital. These constraints are not only individual but embedded in the structures of the social system, including national policies, institutional arrangements, and international market dynamics, but also sites of social conditioning that guide the behaviour and interpretation of the world. Such structures can enable young cocoa farmers to act out of agency but also restrict this agency by organising rules and resources that legitimate actions (Block, 2013; Van Rooyen, 2013). These financial limitations hinder the adoption of more inclusive and climate-smart farming practices that could increase productivity and sustainability of livelihood dynamics.

To promote engagement of young people in agribusiness and secure the future of cocoa in Ghana, it is essential to address these structural barriers. Policy interventions that create an enabling socio-economic environment, through access to financial capital, land, and agricultural inputs, are necessary. To this effect, the sustainability of cocoa farming as a livelihood will be strengthened, ensuring the well-being of the younger generation of cocoa farmers in Ghana. To do so, (invisible) cocoa farmers should be acknowledged, transparency in resources allocated and a living income should be ensured, and young people should be incorporated in decision-making. Over and above, the voices of young cocoa farmers should be heard. To end, as the bright note from the cooperative representative and cocoa farmer says (Abenabo, personal communication, March 25, 2025):

> "Because young people, we are the engine of growth and development. Because very soon, these old folks will pass away. We will take the affairs of the world."

Limitations of this Study

Certain limitations of this study must be considered when interpreting the findings. The time span of both the fieldwork period and the course of this thesis was restricted. While navigating the time frame, the number of observations that could be conducted was limited. In addition, the study focused on young people currently engaged in cocoa farming, therefore, the participating research population represents a homogeneous group in comparison to Ghana's diverse population. This choice narrowed the scope of perspectives and limited the findings to a specific group in agriculture. This study did not include interviews with young people who had left the sector or who aspired to pursue alternative occupations, this may have excluded valuable insights into the aspirations and challenges of this group.

Furthermore, the characteristics of the findings are somewhat similar, and thus do not capture the heterogeneity of young cocoa farmers and the voices of other actors of the sector,

such as the older generations, farmers abandoning cocoa, and policymakers, whose decisions may significantly shape the aspirations and livelihoods of young people. Furthermore, the selection of the population sample was done with the help of the COCOBOD field officers and the cocoa cooperative. This restricted the ability to randomly select interlocutors, which may have impacted the knowledge received from the chosen interlocutors.

Moreover, the selected scope of geographical locations included in this study limits the generalisation of the findings and the application to a wider population. The aspirations and livelihood of cocoa farmers must be seen as bound to different contexts and characteristics shaping their daily living conditions, in terms of economic, social, political, cultural, and ecological aspects. The lived experiences shared by the interlocutors involved in this study might not reflect the realities of other young cocoa farmers in Ghana and beyond.

Lastly, to my regret, I was not able to conduct the research in the preferred local languages of the interlocutors; therefore, different social desirability biases might have obscured the research findings. First, the engagement of a translator was needed to navigate the language barriers. The translation into English was done in real time, which may have resulted in a non-full conveyance of the original message when translated into another language. In this process, some of the meaning, nuance, or context of words might have gotten lost in translation and interpretation. In addition, the inability to speak the preferred language during an in-depth interview also disadvantaged my intention to hold a space to develop a connection with the interlocutor. Furthermore, the presence of the translator might have introduced biases and the translator's interpretation to provide the research with a satisfactory answer, confounding the research. Similarly, the presence of the extension officer, representative of the cocoa cooperative, and/or other actors in the near environment where the interviews took place, and who embodied an authority role in respect to the cocoa farmers, might have affected interlocutors' responses, limiting their freedom to speak openly, potentially leading to more tailored answers to what the interlocutor thought we (the stakeholders and researcher) wished to hear.

Reflections on Positionality

My positionality as a non-African, Dutch, white, young, female researcher may have influenced the fieldwork research and the interpretation of this study. During my stay in Ghana, specifically in the more rural areas, I experienced that my appearance and the interaction I had with some people were influenced by preconceived ideas about me. My identity and the way others perceived me made it challenging at times to navigate interactions

and cultural dynamics during my stay in Ghana. In my experience, my gender and solitude especially intensified the draw of attention to my presence. These experiences prompted critical reflexivity regarding myself and the way in which I was viewed by others.

Entering cocoa farming communities as an outsider, a foreign researcher, affected how I was perceived. The participating interlocutors approached me in different ways; some interlocutors approached me with curiosity, others were more reserved, and others saw me as a bigger entity representing my background and respective ethnicity. These perspectives created both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, being an outsider offered insights that might be taken for granted by a researcher with a different background and/or identity more closely related to the field of interest. On the other hand, my positionality as an outsider might have limited the openness of interlocutors and heightened the alternation in responses to present a more toned-down answer to not air one's dirty linen to an international audience. In my experience, I came across both scenarios. During some of the interviews, the interlocutor shared insights and/or perspectives I was not familiar with, and during other interviews, I had the idea that the interlocutor tailored the answers to my questions in the way they thought the perception of cocoa farming should be presented to me and my audience.

In terms of the written study, as the researcher, I actively made decisions regarding selection, observation, and interpretation. My positionality is part of the research process and product. The knowledge presented in this research is mediated, and realities are socially constructed. Therefore, this study should be viewed as a possible way to present the gained knowledge, as an example that is bound by context, space, and time. As an outsider to the respective local context and landscape, I might have overlooked certain aspects, misinterpreted experiences shared by the interlocutors, and selected themes and quotes relevant to my project of knowledge construction. I have followed and adhered to the fundamentals, principles, and rules on how to conduct academic research to the best of my knowledge, with the awareness that the knowledge produced in this thesis is co-constructed by myself and the farmers who shared their stories.

Recommendations for Future Research

The limitations of this study present possibilities for improvement and future research. To begin with, the scale and scope of this research could be broadened in future research to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Future research could benefit from alternation in the methodology and research design. A longitudinal research design could be beneficial to capture the flux of aspirations and livelihoods of young cocoa farmers over time.

Furthermore, engagement with specific interlocutors for a longer time span could allow the researcher and interlocutor to develop a relationship, allowing them to build trust and reach a more equal power dimension to co-construct the knowledge for the research.

In addition, future research could integrate a change of the narrative by implementing a multi-actor approach by engaging various parties of stakeholders or actors with different backgrounds, to gain knowledge from a more heterogeneous population on how trajectories of young people shape aspirations and livelihoods across different fields. For example, examining the perception of young people abandoning cocoa farming. Another possibility is to explore gender dynamics more in-depth to gain a better understanding of how young female cocoa farmers navigate the cultural and structural barriers and shape their aspirations in a particularly male-dominated space. Moreover, future research could investigate a comparative cross-sectoral study to explore the aspirations of young people in other agricultural or non-agricultural sectors, to examine the alternative aspirational contexts and landscapes of livelihoods. Furthermore, the assessment of government initiatives and efforts of cooperatives aimed at engaging young people in cocoa farming is underrepresented in this study, therefore, examining the impact of policies and services could provide a deeper understanding of the role of the broader structures of society.

Next, broadening or narrowing the geographical scope by including additional cocoa-growing areas or focusing on a specific area or community could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the livelihood landscape and characteristics of cocoa farming in Ghana at the intended level of research interest. Extended research or a comparative study, for example, across West African cocoa-producing countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, Nigeria, Cameroon), could identify similarities and differences in the factors influencing engagement of young people in cocoa farming. These insights could be of use for policymaking and/or marketing strategies.

To strengthen the validity and triangulate the findings of this research, incorporating complementary methods, such as ethnographic surveys and follow-up interviews, is recommended to deepen the information and provide room for clarification.

I hope that the research presented in this thesis can serve as a stepping stone for further studies to deepen the insight into the factors that shape whether younger generations in Ghana choose to pursue a livelihood in cocoa farming or not. In light of cocoa's role in the Ghanaian society, its future ultimately rests on the engagement of younger generations; without them, there will be no cocoa.

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