



Due
Diligence
Fund


Applied Due Diligence

Lessons learned through the Due Diligence Fund

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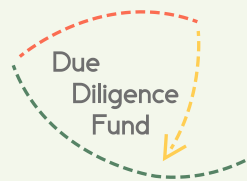
SASI Sustainable
Agricultural
Supply Chains
Initiative



Commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, the Sustainable Agricultural Supply Chains Initiative (SASI) funds pilot initiatives that demonstrate innovation and scalability of Human Rights and Environmental Due Diligence (HREDD) in global supply chains.

Through the Due Diligence Fund (DDF), partnerships between agri-food companies based in Europe and OECD DAC countries in partnerships with public benefit organisations can apply for funding to implement their project ideas.

This report consolidates lessons learned from the first 13 implemented projects.





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The foundational principles as outlined in UNGPs and OECD Guidelines are functional requirements for effectively identifying, preventing, and addressing adverse human rights and environmental impacts in business operations. This report uses operational evidence from 13 pilot projects to demonstrate that the success of HREDD projects can be determined by their application of these guidelines.

The *UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs)* and the *OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct* are the primary resource for HREDD practitioners. Their principles offer a clear theoretical framework for building effective, impactful, and resilient due diligence processes and are the reference points for mandatory due diligence initiatives. Nevertheless, a decade on, many due diligence initiatives struggle to adequately capitalise on the wealth of existing knowledge. Therefore, with the ambition of enhancing corporate strategies and public policy, we have created this report to bridge the gap between theoretical and applied due diligence.

We have consolidated **30 common lessons learned** from the first 13 DDF-funded pilot initiatives, categorized across six critical due diligence themes. By documenting **real-world successes** and the persistent operational **challenges** encountered, this report accelerates learning cycles across the sector. It offers **concrete, actionable guidance** to industry and policymakers, ensuring due diligence measures deliver lasting, positive impacts for rightsholders in agricultural supply chains like small-holder farmers and workers.

Future editions of *Applied Due Diligence* will integrate insights from subsequent DDF funding rounds and SASI's portfolio. We appreciate reader feedback to keep our guidance current, concrete and applicable.





Part I: Thematic Lessons

Chapter 1: Assessment and Prioritisation



Effectiveness is secured through a hybrid approach that combines desk research with on-the-ground verification as to achieve contextual and temporal accuracy. Proactively assessing internal capacities and engaging with independent third parties can address gaps and enhance prevention and mitigation measures. Building trust with rightsholders early ensures accurate identification on risks and secures continued cooperation.

Chapter 2: Development and Implementation of Prevention and Mitigation Measures



Mitigation strategies must be built on iterative designs that maintain contextual relevance and are flexible enough to withstand operational challenges and unexpected shocks. Risk prioritisation and sequential addressing of systemic barriers is critical in tackling complex challenges. Mitigation measures rely on clear communication, transparent incentives, and must strictly adhere to the Do-No-Harm principle.

Chapter 3: Digitalisation and Traceability



The success of digital tools is frequently determined by factors outside the characteristics of the technology itself. Therefore, to ensure long-term buy in, they must adopt a human centric design that establishes a clear business rational for its users, considers local realities, and maintains data security.

Chapter 4: Grievance Mechanisms



An effective mechanism depends on trust and capacity, and requires robust awareness raising. The design must be culturally appropriate, multi-layered, and co-created with local actors to complement rather than undermine existing resolution structures. A grievance mechanism must be embedded in broader prevention strategies, focusing on guaranteed remedial action and grievance management.

Chapter 5: Meaningful Engagement and Collaboration



Success is enabled through collaboration with rightsholders, suppliers, third parties and industry peers. Co-creation of an initiative with the target group is vital for tailoring action plans, fostering ownership, and guaranteeing long-term sustainability. All projects profited from trust-based relationship with suppliers and expertise acquired by independent third parties.

Chapter 6: Women in Due Diligence



Effective HREDD recognises that people experience realities differently based on gender and other intersecting factors and resulting in varying adverse impacts. An inclusive approach is therefore essential. Lasting change requires a genuinely transformative approach that fosters institutional empowerment and actively challenges the root causes of inequality.

Part II: Project Specific Learnings

The second part of *Applied Due Diligence* provides a concise description of the context, approach, and specific learnings of each DDF-funded project. This section divides our 13 projects into groups based on the main topic of engagement, namely:

- Risk Assessment and General Due Diligence,
- Digitalisation and Traceability,
- Grievance Mechanisms,
- Gender and Livelihood.





Context

A new era of accountability has emerged within the global agricultural sector, foundationally built on international standards such as the [UN Guiding Principles \(UNGPs\)](#) (UN OHCHR, 2011) and the [OECD Guidelines](#) (OECD, 2018). These long-standing principles are being strengthened by novel legislative frameworks that compel companies to adopt due diligence processes in their supply chains to address human rights and environmental risks. Combined, these international regulations and standards aim to improve global human rights and environmental conditions by setting clear guidelines for responsible supply chain management – from raw material sourcing to the final product.

In this context, the German government passed the Supply Chain Due Diligence Act (LkSG), which came into effect on January 1, 2023. Further momentum at the EU level, including the EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD), which came into force in July 2024. The CSDDD establishes corporate due diligence duties across a company's chain of activities, covering their own upstream operations, and the operations of their partners, as well as limited downstream operations related to distribution, transport or storage. Aiming to foster sustainability and corporate responsibility in companies' operations, the CSDDD expands the LkSG's scope of sanctions and introduces civil liability⁵. EU Member States are bound to transpose the new Directive into their national laws by 2027. Furthermore, the EU Regulation on Deforestation-Free Products (EUDR), which came into force in June 2023, aims to prevent deforestation and forest degradation.

A persistent concern that has historically delayed HREDD action is the fear that strengthening performance will sacrifice competitiveness, however there is clear evidence to the contrary (UNDP, 2025). While aligning corporate policies with new regulatory frameworks presents administrative burdens and immediate costs, it also provides long-term strategic benefits. By delivering transparency and building stronger supplier relationships, HREDD helps enterprises secure market access, improve efficiency, and ensure resilience against the multi-level supply chain disruptions characteristic of the contemporary context (BCG, 2025). The conversation is no longer about whether businesses can afford to respect HREDD, but rather how strong social and environmental performance can be leveraged for strategic advantage and sustainable competitiveness.

Due Diligence Fund

Through a competitive selection process, the DDF has implemented pilots that demonstrate innovative, adaptable and scalable methods relevant to the broader agri-food sector. By encouraging companies to go beyond their legal obligations and fostering meaningful engagement with rightsholders, the DDF helps unlock the business potential of sustainability while improving the livelihoods of smallholders and plantation workers and strengthening supply chain resilience. This partnership-based approach creates win-win outcomes for both European companies and partners in sourcing countries and aligns with BMZ's [Action Plan on Economic Cooperation and Development](#) (BMZ, 2025).

Beyond supporting supply chain and sector improvements, a core objective of the DDF is to generate and disseminate knowledge gained throughout the pilot projects. These insights are designed to catalyse opportunities to scale and adapt the tested approaches. Each project applied a process-oriented strategy, pursuing systemic impact rather than isolated, commodity-specific results. The funded initiatives have addressed diverse dimensions of corporate due diligence, with a particular focus on deforestation, digitalisation, gender equality, and living income and wages.



More information on the Due Diligence Fund, as well as future calls for proposals, can be found on our [website](#).

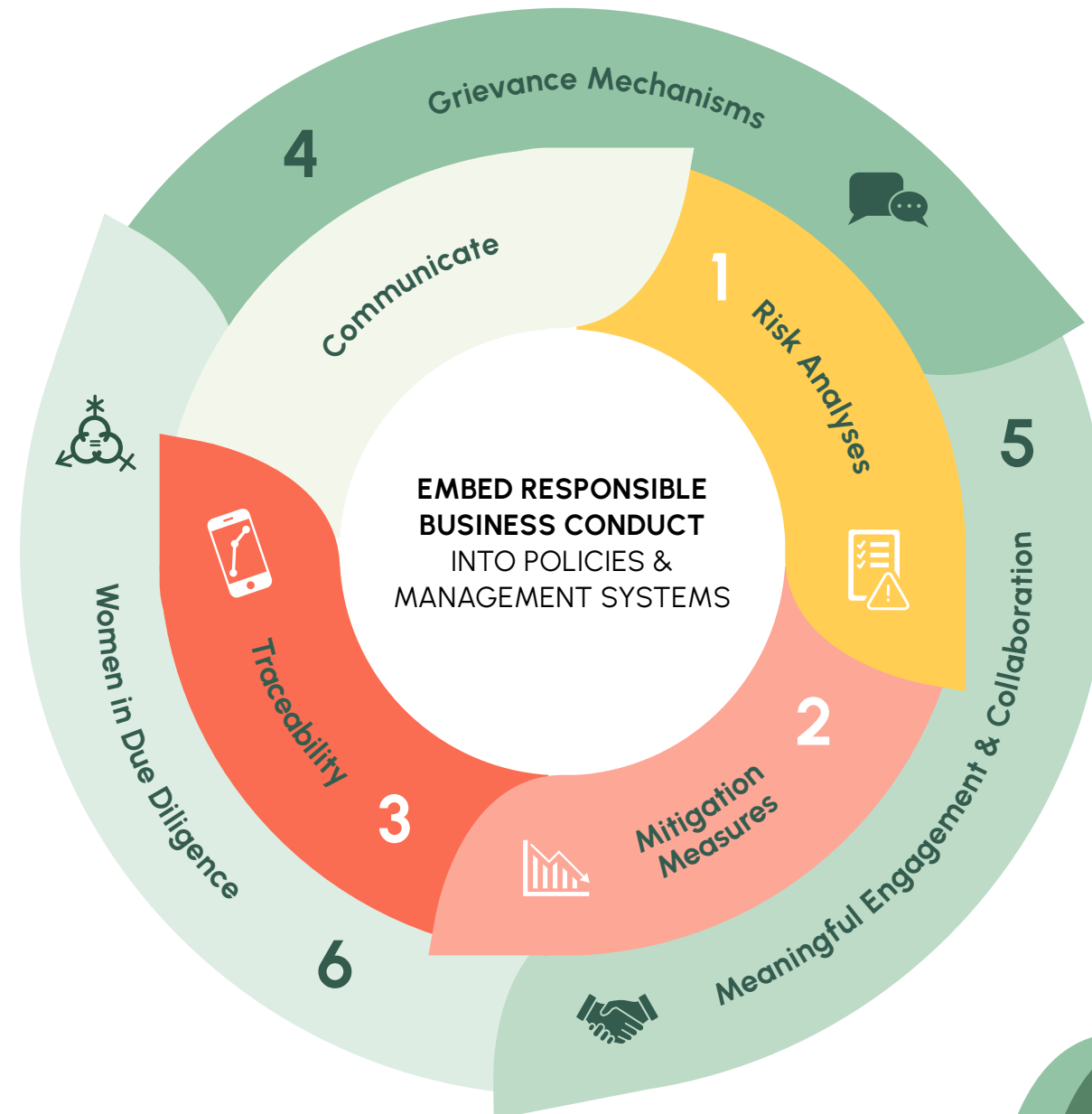


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⁵ The continuation and future of these regulations is subject to change under the Omnibus revisions.

The following sections draw evidence from mandatory narrative reports conducted by all partnerships and notes from learning workshops facilitated during and after the conclusion of each project. We coded common obstacles and success levers, clustered them thematically, and cross-checked the resulting lessons against the original sources, while acknowledging the limits of self-reported data and varying project maturity.

Taken together, the corpus spans 13 DDF-funded projects across various commodities and niche products and diverse geographies, allowing us to compare what worked across very different due-diligence contexts. The analysis that follows distils these patterns into practical guidance and key questions in each chapter.



**Effective due diligence starts with a robust risk assessment.**

The depth and complexity of this process is defined by the likelihood and severity of potential human rights impacts, as well as the specific nature and context of a company's operations. All 13 DDF-funded projects conducted risk assessments, and based on these experiences, we advocate a hybrid approach: starting with a cost-efficient desk-based scoping to identify existing data and internal-capacity gaps within the organisation, followed by context-specific verification and trust-building dialogue with local actors. This ensures information is accurate, up-to-date and actionable – forming a strong foundation for planning targeted action.

Desk-based scoping studies serve as a cost-efficient starting point for HREDD improvements.

As outlined in the OECD Guidelines (OECD, 2018), desk-based studies can efficiently inform risk prioritisation and identify existing information and data on specific risks within a geographic context. This is a useful first step in avoiding duplication.

→ During scoping, avoiding duplication in data collection or activities must be ensured. Participatory fatigue is a serious threat to both risk assessment and any proposed interventions.

Risk assessments must be context- and temporally specific⁶ and up to date.

Achieving these criteria mandates that risk assessments are conducted in collaboration with relevant stakeholders and local rightsholders periodically to ensure information is temporally accurate. This level of dynamic engagement while apparent, is not consistently prioritized in practice.

The necessity for temporal and geographic specificity is driven by the fact that risks are not homogeneous. Regional risks must be verified within the specific supply chain context; a high regional risk does not automatically equate to a high company risk, and conversely, a low regional average may mask acute adverse impacts at the operational level. Therefore, to perform effective due diligence, a company needs to understand the conditions of its own operations and supply chains as opposed to relying on general regional knowledge.

→ Initiatives that relied heavily on desk-based research, without conducting on-the-ground verification frequently encountered challenges that could have been identified prior.

Common challenges included context-inappropriate strategies, unrealistic timelines, and a failure to account for fundamental operational realities such as technological readiness or stakeholder willingness to engage. Therefore, a hybrid approach that combines the efficiency of desk research with the accuracy and depth of local expertise and lived experiences frequently leads to more effective HREDD processes. Further issues arose when initiatives relied on outdated data for risk assessments or stakeholder mapping, which no longer reflected on-the-ground realities. This highlights a key principle: due diligence is a continuous, adaptive process that must evolve alongside changing contexts and emerging risks faced by rightsholders.

Understanding these complexities – both during scoping and when identifying and prioritising risks – can quickly be overwhelming, requiring the support of additional resources and partners. Desk-based research during scoping is effective not only in identifying existing initiatives and activities but also highlighting deficiencies in internal competencies and capacities. This self-assessment of expertise and resources can prevent delays and extra costs down the line.

Acknowledging the limitations of what internal capacities can provide, a key insight is that using external services and partners to support risk assessments is in many cases essential, not optional.

Strong vetting should be conducted when engaging with external service providers to ensure they meet expectations and have adequate technical expertise. After conducting desk-based scoping studies and addressing internal competencies, further verification and data collection, conducted in partnership with local actors (and external experts) is required to validate identified information gaps.

⁶ Context and temporal specificity entail understanding the complexity of the supply chain and the situation on the ground at a specific point in time.



→ Issues with finding adequate external consultants, or having consultants miss deadlines, or providing unsatisfactory work were identified issues amongst DDF initiatives. Therefore, ensure you have multiple candidates to choose from and allocate sufficient time to find the most suitable partner.

Independent risk assessments by third parties, such as NGOs, standards organisations, or membership organisations, are a helpful addition, especially when they have comprehensive networks of (local) experts at their disposal. This can be particularly beneficial in the absence of context-specific information on a supply chain or when expanding business activities to new regions or sectors. It should be noted, however, that third-party engagement is most effective when implemented supplementally to an enterprise's own internal structures and risk assessment, as opposed to replacing them. This is critical because ultimate responsibility always remains with the enterprise for performing due diligence effectively, and retaining internal ownership provides several strategic benefits (OECD, 2018):

- **Building capacity:** while external audits provide a snapshot, internal staff must learn how to assess dynamic risks themselves. Relying solely on third parties hinders the development of the necessary institutional knowledge and expertise to embed responsible business conduct into internal systems.
- **Links to internal systems:** Internal ownership and proprietary information ensure that risks can be immediately linked to other corporate systems, such as procurement, legal compliance, and risk management.

When working with external partners, it is useful to disaggregate objectives into components to create a shared understanding of the initiative's ambition through a well-defined roadmap for action and establish a shared communications channel for efficient coordination.

Projects benefited from early direct collaboration and dialogue with rightsholders. These collaborations were not only essential for successful risk assessments and establishing a deeper understanding of on-the-ground realities, but they also revealed the underlying root causes and systemic connections between issues that would otherwise have been invisible to external observers. Finally, these early engagements served as an initial point for trust building, an enabling condition for all aspects of due diligence.

Building Trust Early.

Trust is essential at every stage of HREDD. Experience from DDF initiatives shows that stakeholders must believe in the reliability of partners and the credibility of planned interventions. Early trust-building creates confidence, mutual understanding, and willingness to collaborate. It is needed not only between companies and rightsholders, but also among actors across the supply chain. Trust enables openness and accurate risk identification – without it, stakeholders may be unwilling to speak out, fear repercussions. Only once initial risks are assessed, and meaningful engagement has taken place can effective intervention strategies be jointly developed.

→ Initiatives learned that regular structured meetings and workshops can be a driver for successful collaboration and trust building. These check-in meetings enable continuous assessment and project adjustments to remain aligned with beneficiaries' needs and goals.

TO KEEP IN MIND:

- ☞ **Is the risk assessment based on a hybrid approach?** Has it combined desk-based scoping with on-the-ground verification and stakeholder engagement to ensure the information is accurate and comprehensive?
- ☞ **Are interventions being planned sequentially?** Have strategies been developed only after the initial risk assessment and meaningful engagement are complete, and have internal capacity gaps and external partner needs been identified?
- ☞ **Is the due diligence process dynamic and continuous?** Is the system designed to continuously adapt to evolving risks and context (e.g., shifts in regulation or new business relationships) rather than treating the process as a static report?
- ☞ **Is early engagement fostering trust and transparency?** Is dialogue being conducted consistently to build confidence, promote openness in risk identification, and ensure a deeper understanding of local realities?



The overall success of an intervention depends on effective planning, which in turn requires a rigorous risk assessment.

Initiatives often faced major hurdles when interventions – based on inadequate assessments – proved unfit for purpose or failed to reflect on-the-ground realities and genuine community needs. Interventions must be considered desirable from the target group's perspective, and the best way to ensure consent and demand is through the design of the intervention itself. Risk assessment and project design should not be viewed as a linear process. Instead, initiatives benefit from iterative approaches that can integrate learnings and remain adaptable. This holistic understanding is essential for preventing reductionism (e.g., reliance on a single-cause solution), especially as many communities face multiple, complex challenges at once.

→ Mitigating or preventative measures in one context may be inadequate in another. Any proposed interventions to address risks must consider local suitability and desirability. Likewise, compounding challenges require a sequential, intervention-based approach to risk prioritisation before addressing the underlying drivers of the challenge.

While this notion is not new, initiatives often underestimate its significance. A strong example of successful risk prioritisation was the cashew project in Côte d'Ivoire (see Project 11), which aimed to promote women's empowerment through training and strengthening cooperatives. Before trainings could begin, an underlying barrier needed to be addressed: water collection. By first constructing water wells, the project applied a practical risk-triage approach that freed up time and capacity for women to participate fully in training. By removing this immediate obstacle, the project could then meaningfully focus on the enabling factors of empowerment.

The HREDD process is not static but ongoing, responsive, and iterative, and it depends on dynamic project planning.

As mandated by both the UNGPs and the OECD Guidance, enterprises should progressively improve their systems and processes to avoid and address adverse impacts. This cyclic approach enables them to respond effectively to changes in its risk profile, such as regulatory shifts, emerging sector risks, or new business relationships.

→ Initiatives learned that working in cyclic sprints – through periodic workshops, and structured check-ins – was key to successful implementation and collaboration. This ensured that planned interventions remained relevant and were continuously aligned with on-the-ground needs and goals of the project participants.

The concept of iteration applies to implementation; it ensures interventions remain responsive and evolve to the needs of rights holders.

Stakeholder engagement during implementation is key to monitoring the effectiveness and desirability of an intervention. This feedback may show that planned activities need to be revised to ensure that stakeholders are adequately equipped with the tools, knowledge, and capacity to continue beyond the pilot phase.

→ Initiatives that maintained flexibility during the implementation of the intervention strategy and encouraged continuous feedback, often achieved greater improvements for rightsholders and adapted more effectively to external shocks.

Though ideally identified during risk assessment, new challenges can emerge, especially given the general susceptibility of vulnerable communities to hazards and risks. These risks may fundamentally impact a proposed interventions suitability and feedback may indicate project measures should be delayed or even cancelled.

Proposed interventions must be cross validated against the risk assessment to ensure it is operationally, financially, and logistically feasible.

This process also helps to verify that the proposed interventions will not cause unintended adverse impacts or create counterproductive incentives, in line with the do-no-harm principle. These aspects highlight the importance of conducting a comprehensive situational risk assessment of the intervention context.

→ Initiatives experienced significant delays and budget overruns when predictable factors, such as inflationary effects, procurement costs, procurement delays, commodity price volatility, or even whether and climatic conditions were not adequately anticipated.





Seemingly minor omissions of details, such as seasonal weather patterns, have had significant impacts on initiatives, delaying data collection or remediation efforts. Therefore, the intervention strategy should build in greater flexibility for budgets and timelines and ensure early procurement processes.

Ultimately, successful interventions depend on understanding the target group's own motivations and interests.

It is crucial to remember that their primary goal is not to help one's intervention succeed, but to improve their own situation.

→ Initiatives with unclear incentives for participation, either in immediate reward or long-term prospects, sometimes led to non-responsiveness or drop out.

Therefore, the link between the participants' self-interest and the initiative's goals must be made explicit. As one project showed, mandating and shifting training to daytime rather than evening sessions significantly improved participants' attitudes towards sessions. Assessing risks and planning an intervention are highly intertwined processes, with risk assessment forming the essential foundation for all subsequent planning. This ensures that interventions are relevant, desirable, and adaptable to local realities and stakeholder needs. The overall impact and outcome of HREDD interventions are fundamentally dependent on the quality of this initial risk assessment.

The potential for interventions to create new harm is not an abstract concept; it is a legitimate concern.

It is central to the UNGPs and OECD Guidance; implementers must ensure that initiatives do not provide counterproductive incentives or undermine existing functional social structures. Deficiencies in risk assessment or inadequate consultations with rights holders are key triggers of unintended adverse effects. While it is not possible to provide an exhaustive list of how risks can emerge through interventions, some general themes are relevant to discuss:

- **Exposure to novel hazards or risks:** Interventions promoting unfamiliar commodities or new production techniques may expose individuals to risks they would not otherwise face.
- **Increased vulnerability to external shocks:** Encouraging alternative cash crops can unintentionally increase dependency on volatile or trade-exposed markets.
- **Exacerbating social tensions:** Even well-intentioned interventions can sow division within communities or between already competitive cooperatives when they are perceived to favour specific individuals or groups.

- **Creating confusion or information fatigue:** Interventions introducing new information, processes, or technologies that conflict with existing local knowledge or practices can lead to confusion and information fatigue. This is intensified when multiple external actors are present or when new systems (such as grievance mechanisms) are perceived as redundant or overly complex compared to traditional methods.

It is the responsibility of the implementers to ensure initiatives do not provide counterproductive incentives or undermine existing functional social structures. Consistent, meaningful consultations throughout the due diligence cycle can prevent these challenges from emerging or deteriorating.

TO KEEP IN MIND:

- **Is the intervention locally desirable and suitable?** Have rightsholders and local actors confirmed that the planned measures reflect their needs and are appropriately formulated to gain consent?
- **Does the plan consider multiple causes?** Does it avoid simplistic solutions? Where relevant, does it address complex challenges through a sequential prioritisation approach?
- **Is the design based on clear self-interest?** Does the plan clearly articulate the immediate or long-term benefits to the target group, ensuring incentives (or consequences) are explicit to motivate and sustain participation?
- **Have operational barriers been anticipated?** Does the plan ensure flexibility and account for practical issues like budget changes, procurement delays, and seasonal conditions?
- **Does the intervention risk creating new harm?** Has a situational risk assessment verified that the intervention does not expose people to novel hazards or exacerbate social tensions?





Digitalisation, and in particular digital traceability (hereafter referred to as traceability), have become essentially mandatory for effective HREDD. Their implementation has become a core priority for companies around the globe as a response to increasing regulatory requirements and consumer demand for responsibly sourced goods and services. While digitalisation and traceability are distinct activities, the experiences and lessons learned frequently overlap.

Digitalisation serves as the primary mechanism for achieving effective traceability at scale. Therefore, the experiences and lessons learned across these two types of interventions are frequently overlapping.

Traceability is the systematic capability to map and verify the origin and flow of commodities through all stages of the supply chain. This capability enables several strategic outcomes, including proof of regulatory compliance, counterfeit prevention, the transparency needed to establish trust between consumers and business partners, and the ability to identify and track social and environmental performance. Crucially, traceability is transformative in due diligence efforts: it shifts the focus from addressing general regional risks to identifying specific, verifiable risk points, allowing for companies to isolate and address risks through targeted mitigation efforts.

In the context of traceability, digitalisation means the application of technology (e.g., data platforms, mobile apps, or communications services) to automate, accelerate, and simplify data collection. Despite the clear business case for developing these systems, implementing novel technological solutions is often a complex undertaking, as supply chains can span various geographic scales, involve numerous stakeholders, or require significant preparatory processes.

The success of digitalisation and traceability initiatives is often determined by factors beyond the technology itself.

Our traceability initiatives have shown that adopting a human-centric approach is an effective delivery principle for digital tools. This requires that all processes—including data collection strategies—be guided by an initial risk assessment, and that novel tools or technology are designed *with* and *for* the end-user in mind. Options to achieve this include, for example, prioritising trust-building through engagement, adjusting technological requirements to accommodate on-the-ground realities, and adapting communication channels to local ones.

→ Initiatives implementing digitalisation and traceability encountered challenges when a fundamental understanding of the local context and on the ground, realities were not adequately understood.

Issues often correlate with lack of understanding about the diversity of participants and how commodities move in the supply chain. Recognizing the complexity of commingling and mapping the diversity of supply chain participants through risk assessment can actively prevent potential data contamination. A key learning is the importance of actively involving intermediaries, who often represent critical control points. Utilizing these intermediaries reduces the risk of traceability failures and provides downstream actors with greater capacity for due diligence, mitigating the risk of interference that can undermine an intervention's internal validity.

Challenges such as limited phone access, low call response rates, lack of required software, or fear of data autonomy highlight a disconnect between planned digital solutions and the realities of their potential users.

These issues highlight that technological requirements and potential barriers must be identified before implementation begins.

Beyond technical requirements, a human-centric approach that prioritises trust-building and relationships will secure greater stakeholder buy-in than simply deploying a technical tool. This approach can help address common stakeholder hesitations regarding data autonomy, privacy, and general scepticism, ensuring smoother uptake.





For instance, one project found that initial stakeholder reservations about a traceability application were resolved upon demonstration that the tool could simplify their workflow by reducing overall documentation. Furthermore, gathering continuous feedback on the tool's functionality, including verification call timing and language selection, proved essential for securing user adoption. Similarly, maintaining momentum requires recognising that adopting new administrative tasks requires a shift in routine. Therefore, monitoring uptake, for example, through regular meetings with field facilitators and targeted reminders, is necessary to maintain high engagement.





→ Initiatives that built a clear business case for end users, outlined realistic expectations, and managed timelines experienced better buy-in from stakeholders.

This lesson learned, though reiterating points from the *Development and Implementation of Prevention and Mitigation Measures* chapter, remains highly relevant in the context of digitalisation and traceability, as the immediate benefits to rightsholders may not always be apparent. Understanding participants' motives is a core component of human-centric digitalisation, especially given the latency between implementation and the realisation of benefits.

Outlining the future importance of traceability and digitalisation in the absence of direct incentives can ensure participation.

While some benefits, such as improved decision-making based on data (e.g., farm size and soil requirements), may be realised quickly, more complex outcomes can take longer. For example, a verifiable price premium reaching the farmer often depends on the buy-in of the entire supply chain. One project found that involving the local cooperative directly to oversee the establishment of new technology and its use, while explaining the reasons for delays, was key to maintaining trust and managing expectations. Ultimately, it is important to establish realistic timelines for project goals with stakeholders, outlining that the transformative impact of digitalisation services is often best measured over the long term.

TO KEEP IN MIND:

-  **Have technological barriers** (e.g., limited phone access, required software, or fear of data autonomy) **been identified and accommodated to match the reality of the potential users?**
-  **Is the design truly human-centric?** Has the system been designed to accommodate fluid commodity movements and complex social negotiations? Are the digital tools and processes explicitly designed with and for the user? Are local communications channels utilised?
-  **Is buy-in prioritised over technical deployment?** Has the approach focused on trust-building and strong relationships to secure greater stakeholder buy-in and address common hesitations regarding data autonomy and scepticism?
-  **Is the business case clear and realistic for the stakeholders?** Have immediate or future benefits, along with realistic timelines, been articulated to manage the latency associated with complex outcomes?





An essential pillar of the UNGPs and the HREDD cycle is remedy provision. A pre-requisite for this is an accessible channel through which workers, affected rightsholders and their representatives can make themselves heard. Businesses, in turn, can monitor the impacts of their activities on individuals and communities. Through analysing patterns in complaints, companies can efficiently identify systemic problems and adapt their practices to prevent the escalation of future harm. The UNGPs (UN OHCHR, 2011) categorise grievance mechanisms into State-based and non-State-based systems. The scope of our work primarily centred on the latter, focusing on two distinct types: non-State-based collaborative mechanisms and operational-level grievance mechanisms.

- Non-State-based Collaborative Mechanisms are those jointly designed and implemented by one or more business enterprises and external stakeholders (e.g., civil society organisations, trade unions, or affected communities). Through this approach, our initiatives highlighted the significant benefit and importance of pre-competitive cooperation in multi-stakeholder partnerships with regionally established and recognised partners.
- Non-State-based Operational-level Grievance Mechanisms are established and operated by the business enterprise itself to receive and address grievances from individuals and communities affected by its direct operations and business relationships.

Grievance mechanisms have become an indispensable instrument for effective remediation and have also gained significant attention in regulatory compliance. Our recent projects in Brazil's coffee sector and Côte d'Ivoire's cocoa sector illustrate how design choices affect uptake and credibility.

Perceptions of risks are not universal.

Therefore, creating a common understanding of what constitutes risk is a critical consideration, as a grievance mechanism's effectiveness depends entirely on the capacity, knowledge, and trust of the proposed users. Companies may need to ensure that rightsholders have a clear understanding of what constitutes a grievance and what the mechanism is designed to achieve. For this purpose, the company should plan in sufficient time and resources. In Brazil, despite full technical rollout, **no grievances were submitted** – underscoring gaps in awareness and possible fear of reprisals among seasonal and plantation workers and smallholders; follow-on plans sensibly focus on rights awareness and due-diligence literacy with local organisations.

Similarly, in Côte d'Ivoire, a rightsholder-centered risk analysis conducted at the feasibility study's outset revealed pesticide use as a top rightsholder concern. This risk was largely overlooked by downstream companies and had not been prioritized *ex ante*. The finding underscores why early, participatory risk analysis is essential to align company assumptions with lived realities and ensure that mechanisms are designed to accommodate actual user needs.

→ **Grievance mechanisms are only effective when users trust the system and understand its purpose; achieving this is reliant on capacity building, co-creation with stakeholders and alignment with local structures.**

Capacity-building and consultation activities can be a valuable means of initiating trust in a novel system. Trust, while relevant across all aspects of due diligence, is particularly pertinent in the context of grievance mechanisms, as perceived legitimacy is often the most determining factor of use. Initiatives relying on newly established grievance mechanisms without adequate capacity-building or sufficient consultation with the target group struggled to receive meaningful claims.

The goal of a non-state-based grievance mechanism should be to supplement existing local channels and, where necessary, formalise their structure.

This can be achieved by addressing weaknesses and providing accessible alternatives for those who are not able or willing to use existing structures. In addition to providing information through training and awareness raising, on a mechanism purpose and use, the final process to be implemented must be fit-for-purpose. The only efficient way to achieve this is through meaningful engagement, consultation, and co-creation of the platform. Vitrally, collaboration not only ensures ownership and buy-in but also prevents duplication and undermines existing legal, social, or traditional resolution structures. Intentionally integrating mechanisms in mutualism within existing community structures can ensure their effectiveness and long-term continuity as opposed to a disconnected project-specific system. This is one reason why the model in Côte d'Ivoire intentionally links village focal points and cooperative committees with company channels, while an **independent organisation** is destined to monitor case handling for impartiality.



**Grievance mechanisms are only fit-for-purpose when they are designed to be inclusive and accessible.**

This allows them to accommodate the diverse realities of rural communities. A single grievance channel is often insufficient, as it fails to account for factors such as illiteracy, geographic remoteness, or traditions related to trust and community authority. Having multiple complementary channels can ensure accessibility. For example, allowing for grievances to be communicated verbally to a committee member provides avenues for those who cannot read or write. While preventing contradictions with existing local structures is vital, providing alternative options for individuals facing bias or inefficiencies must also be considered.

Grievance mechanisms must have transparent processes.

When establishing a grievance mechanism, one must clearly communicate procedures, establish timelines, and set realistic expectations on the types of remedial action available within one's remit or power to redress. Transparency is a core component of maintaining confidence in a mechanism, which, in turn, ensures its longevity.

Grievance mechanisms must safely demonstrate effectiveness and cannot come at the expense of risk prevention.

The long-term efficacy of a mechanism depends on its perceived ability to provide lasting responses. To demonstrate its value in tangible ways, a mechanism must address grievance claims through appropriate remediation measures. Equally important is ensuring the confidentiality of the grievant and preventing repercussions. Stakeholders in Côte d'Ivoire agreed that grievance handling must sit alongside prevention and livelihood support: mechanisms alone cannot resolve systemic risks like child labour or deforestation. In Brazil, close collaboration with local organisations and, where appropriate, government bodies have been planned to reduce fear of reprisals, navigate sensitivities, and enable enforceable remedies.

Case Study: Designing a Socio-Culturally Appropriate Grievance Mechanism for Côte d'Ivoire's Cocoa Sector**CONTEXT:**

A feasibility study co-financed through the DDF and the private sector was conducted on behalf of the German Initiative on Sustainable Cocoa (GISCO). Accompanied by a multi-stakeholder Steering Committee it explored how a sector-wide grievance mechanism could improve access to remedy for farmers and workers in the cocoa sector. Alongside assessing the technical and institutional feasibility of a cross-company grievance mechanism, the study also generated valuable methodological and process learnings on steering complex, multi-stakeholder initiatives in global supply chains.

PROJECT SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES AND LEARNINGS:

Despite the fact that each company has established its own due diligence monitoring process, this project's innovation lay in creating a common, shared, cross-company mechanism designed to reduce duplication, lower operational costs, and increase collective leverage in addressing systemic supply chain risks. A key learning was that the mechanism must be additional to, rather than replace, the country's existing traditional and or national/regional conflict-resolution systems. Its success depends on a socio-culturally appropriate, gradual, and decentralised approach that relies on the legitimacy of existing governance structures as the cornerstone of local-level resolution. This led to a proposed three-tiered system:

- 1. Village Level:** Focus on amicable settlement by Village Chiefs, supported by trained Focal Points who register grievances. This level incorporates multiple accessible channels, including direct digital reporting.
- 2. Sub-Prefecture Level:** Grievances that are not settled or appealed are escalated to the Sub-Prefecture Grievance Committee.
- 3. National Level:** Complex or systemic issues are escalated to a National Grievance Committee for industry-level intervention and remediation.



To overcome barriers such as illiteracy and geographical remoteness, the mechanism emphasises accessibility through multiple channels, including Focal Points, Sub-Prefecture staff, and digital reporting options. Ultimately, adoption depends on generating trust and predictability, achieved through strict adherence to clear timeframes for response and remediation, and a robust information and awareness-raising strategy to educate communities about its existence and purpose. In addition to lessons on establishing mechanisms, we also derived valuable insights on coordination and facilitation.

Aligning expectations among diverse actors is complex and crucial.

Balancing the interests and methodological understanding of different stakeholders with sometimes varying core objectives can be challenging. Misalignments in ambitions must be identified early, as they can lead to inefficiencies or reduce the effectiveness of a proposed measure. Achieving common understanding through clear communication of objectives, well-defined roles and responsibilities, and methods is therefore essential.

Maintaining balanced commitment among companies requires active facilitation.






Maintaining momentum when engaging in a multi-stakeholder consortium demands continuous commitment from all participants. Having a neutral intermediary or sector-level partner can greatly improve the coordination of inputs, reinforce accountability, and provide the sustained facilitation necessary to prevent drift. Incorporating a neutral intermediary into governance structures also improves trust in dialogue spaces between involved parties, as they can ensure transparency in decision making, and equal representation amongst stakeholder interests. Finally, momentum is also heavily reliant on the individual initiative and persistence of key actors who are willing to advocate for the initiative's objectives, mediate between positions, and evoke the necessary buy-in.

Institutional continuity between phases is essential to sustain momentum.

The DDF phase catalyzed the formation of a coalition of eight companies, who successfully submitted a joint develoPPP proposal and will commence implementation in early 2026. The transition from feasibility study to proposal preparation and further elaboration of the project contract documents was made possible by ongoing coordination of involved stakeholders supported by intermediaries, in this case, the GISCO Secretariat and GIZ.

For more information: [*Feasibility study for a cross-company grievance mechanism in the cocoa sector in Côte d'Ivoire* \(SASI, 2024\).](#)

TO KEEP IN MIND:

-  **Is the mechanism built on legitimacy and trust?** Has the process developed through meaningful engagement and co-creation with rightsholders to build trust, align with local structures, and ensure its effectiveness and long-term continuity?
-  **Is there a common understanding of the mechanism's purpose?** Have key challenges been addressed, and has capacity building ensured that all users understand what a grievance is and what the mechanism is meant to achieve?
-  **Is the mechanism fit-for-purpose and accessible?** Is the design inclusive and multi-layered to accommodate diverse realities, such as illiteracy, remoteness, or cultural factors, while also providing alternative options for individuals who face bias in existing structures?
-  **Is the mechanism integrated into the existing ecosystem?** Does the mechanism supplement and formalise existing social, traditional, or legal channels, preventing duplication and the intentional or unintentional undermining of structures already in place?
-  **Are processes transparent, and does the mechanism ensure safety?** Are procedures, timelines, and expectations for remedial action clearly communicated, and does the mechanism ensure the grievant's confidentiality and protection from retaliation?



Adverse impacts are inherently complex, meaning no single actor can mitigate them alone. Our 13 projects have instead demonstrated that meaningful engagement and collaboration with those affected, and actively engaging with suppliers and third parties is a cornerstone for effective HREDD activities.

Engaging with rightsholders—such as workers, smallholder farmers, and local communities – is crucial to establishing legitimate and effective due diligence as those affected by adverse impacts understand the root causes and potential solutions better than an outsider. Engagement is most effective when it occurs at multiple levels and in different settings, from individuals or small groups to farms, cooperatives, and whole communities. Initiatives showed that establishing common goals and fostering dialogue between communities or competing cooperatives promotes greater cooperation and ensures broader buy-in. Respecting the authority of community leaders and including them, as well as engaging with family units when suitable, has proven to be an effective approach. Engaging meaningfully with rightsholders enhances the quality of risk analysis, the effectiveness of preventive measures, the provision of remediation and the transparency of reporting.

To achieve “meaningful” engagements, the OECD (2018) outlines several core characteristics:

- **Two-way Communication:** Engagement must be based on good faith and mutual understanding, ensuring both the enterprise and stakeholders can freely express opinions and listen to alternative viewpoints.
- **Responsive:** Stakeholders must be consulted prior to any decision that may affect them, ensuring their input directly informs decision-making.
- **Ongoing:** Engagement must be sustained throughout the lifecycle of the operation or activity, not treated as a one-off event.
- **Accessible and Inclusive:** The process must be designed to be accessible to all, ensuring that vulnerable groups can participate without fear of retribution.

Given that adverse impacts demand context-specific solutions, engaging with rightsholders is essential to co-design action plans that are accurately tailored to local needs. Our project monitoring confirms that this high level of engagement translates directly into higher participation rates (e.g., training sessions) and ensures the long-term sustainability of infrastructure, traceability, and grievance mechanism initiatives.

Public-benefit organisations—such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), standard-setting systems, and membership organisations (e.g., sectoral multi-actor platforms)—provide independent perspectives and context-sensitive expertise. Membership organisations, like the Union for Ethical Biobased Trade (UEBT), offer valuable databases, allowing companies to benefit from collective assessments, pool resources, and enhance quality through mutual learning.

Independent third parties, e.g., certification bodies, can use their networks of local experts to provide reliable, first-hand information, which is especially useful when entering new contexts or commodities. When tracing a raw material to its origin is not possible, or when a single company cannot mitigate adverse impacts, sectoral actions can become particularly relevant. Third parties play a crucial role in facilitating pre-competitive cooperation.

Maintaining a decent, trust-based relationship with direct and indirect suppliers is crucial to successful HREDD.

Downstream companies⁷ depend on suppliers to receive credible on-the-ground information and to identify possible adverse impacts in the specific context. Every actor in a supply chain shares responsibility for minimising adverse impacts, and upstream suppliers⁸ should receive support from their downstream partners to implement context-based solutions. The majority of the DDF initiatives stated that without trusting, long-term relationships with their suppliers, the implementation of their interventions would not have been successful.

TO KEEP IN MIND

- Are planned engagements meaningful and rights-respecting? Are dialogues two-way, ongoing, and accessible? Are rightsholders consulted before decisions and vulnerable groups able to participate safely?
- Are solutions co-designed and localised? Has engagement been conducted across individual, cooperative, community levels to secure local knowledge, respect community leadership, and co-design action plans that are contextualised and sustainable?
- Is the systemic advantage of partnership being leveraged? Are public-benefit organisations or third-party experts used to access databases, share assessments, and enable pre-competitive cooperation where risks exceed the capacity of a single actor?
- Is the supplier relationship built on trust and mutual support? Is the downstream company providing needed support and maintaining long-term, trust-based cooperation to ensure credible, on-the-ground information for effective HREDD?

⁷ The enterprise closer to the end consumer, such as a retailer or brand.

⁸ those closer to the source, such as farms or raw material processors





Making up around 37 percent of workforce in the agricultural sector, women are the foundation of many supply chains. Nevertheless, they frequently face disproportionate adverse impacts, ranging from land rights insecurity and economic exploitation to heightened risks of gender-based violence. Women typically work less productive land in poorer working conditions (FAO, 2023) while earning significantly less than men (FAO, 2024). They own less than 15 % of agricultural land worldwide and more often lack social security and representation in decision making. (OECD-FAO, 2021). Therefore, reducing gender disparities offers a huge potential in increasing agricultural productivity, efficiency, and profitability. HREDD initiatives, when implemented with an intersectional focus, can be a strong mechanism through which these structural challenges can be addressed.

Effective due diligence is gender responsive.

Businesses must recognise that human rights violations may threaten women, girls, and people with diverse gender identities in distinct ways than men and boys. Consequently, interventions to mitigate and prevent these risks must take these different realities into account. Evidence from our DDF projects show that an intervention approach that overlook these differences are not only prone to be less effective but may even cause unintended negative effects. A company cannot achieve effective due diligence without applying a gender lens to every HREDD step; it is a foundational element necessary to strengthen the entire process.

Being gender-responsive avoids reproducing data and capacity gaps.

As outlined in the [Risk Assessments](#) chapter, proactively assessing internal competencies early is essential. This is particularly true for gender-specific expertise, as it has caused delays in the implementation of some DDF initiatives. Internal capacities are not the only determining consideration; equally important is the recognition of women's contributions and challenges through contextual, temporally accurate, and disaggregated gender data. Considerations must also be made, as the acquisition of this underlying data requires additional precautionary measures, as gender-related topics are frequently highly contentious. One initiative highlighted that deficiencies in gender-specific information prevented the establishment of key metrics and hampered the implementation of meaningful, targeted interventions.

Interventions must be explicitly adjusted to meet the needs of those who face structural barriers.

Failure to do so can lead to a fundamental disconnect between planned interventions and users' realities. Our initiatives highlighted that initial segregation can be effective in addressing barriers to participation. In many cultural contexts, women may feel more comfortable, confident, and willing to speak or participate in a woman-only setting. This can help build a foundational level of knowledge and skill without the power dynamics that may be present in a mixed-gender group. Furthermore, engaging with women in the family setting was found to be particularly impactful.

The inclusion of women and girls had several positive effects: for example, they encouraged their families to participate in the trainings and helped disperse information within their networks. By maximising participation across intersectional lines from the outset, women acted as change agents, actively spreading knowledge and influencing their communities. However, this approach is not complete until fully integrated sessions are conducted. After foundational skills and confidence have been built in separate groups, integrating mixed trainings provides a powerful platform for empowerment. In these spaces, women move from being initial participants to active advocates and peer educators. They apply their unique knowledge and experiences to influence the wider community and help ensure that information dissemination is culturally relevant and broadly sustained.

Moving beyond training towards institutional empowerment, projects underscored the importance of formalising women's groups, such as through the official status granted to picker associations in the cashew project in Côte d'Ivoire, can fundamentally strengthen women's ability to advocate for their rights, gain community legitimacy, and participate actively in local decision-making processes. These gender considerations should not be standalone activities; they must be integrated into core policies and sourcing decisions (e.g., Ethical Sourcing Policy) to ensure gender equity is a systematic consideration rather than an isolated effort.









Temporality is a risk that undermines the legitimacy of an initiative.

It is important to note that while inclusion is the first step in a transformative approach, women's participation in an initiative does not equate to empowerment and does not guarantee the longevity of the measures. When conducting project planning, caution must be taken to ensure project impacts are not temporally restricted. Ensuring a transformative approach that actively challenges the root cause of inequality enhances the capacity for prolonged change. This involves transforming harmful norms, roles, and power relations that perpetuate unequal outcomes. Transformation requires specific interventions that go beyond inclusion, and claims of success must be verified through specific indicators that measure impact.

Effective HREDD mandates the use of an intersectional lens, as gender is only one of many diversity factors influencing how individuals experience adverse impacts. This requires moving beyond single characteristics to account for multiple, overlapping discriminatory criteria such as religion, age, disabilities, and ethnicity when identifying potentially affected people. This underscores once again the imperative of detailed knowledge of the local context and the demographics of the target group for accurately recognising how compounded disadvantages influence risk and vulnerability.

TO KEEP IN MIND:

-  **Is a sufficiently granular and inclusive gender lens applied to the risk assessment?** Does the formulated process utilise an intersectional lens that accounts for multiple, overlapping discriminatory criteria (age, ethnicity, disability, etc.) and accurately map how compounded disadvantages influence risk and vulnerability?
-  **Are mitigation measures tailored and accessible?** Are interventions, including training and communication, tailored to the specific needs of women and girls (e.g., through initial segregated sessions) to overcome structural barriers, build confidence, and ensure they can participate safely as advocates?
-  **How are capacity and data gaps being proactively addressed?** Is the enterprise assessing its internal capacity for gender expertise, and does it prioritise acquiring contextual, temporally accurate, and disaggregated gender data, including taking necessary precautionary measures when dealing with highly contentious topics?
-  **Do initiatives guarantee long-term, transformative change?** Does the approach move beyond inclusion to achieve institutional empowerment and actively challenge the root causes of inequality and unequal power relations, ensuring impacts are not temporally restricted?





BOTANICALS

Brazil, Cameroon, China, Egypt, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Madagascar, Mexico, Morocco, Peru, South Africa, Tanzania, Vietnam

- [Project 1](#)
- [Project 2](#)
- [Project 3](#)



CASHEW

Côte d'Ivoire
→ [Project 11](#)



COCOA

Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone
→ [Project 6](#)
→ [Project 7](#)
→ [Project 13](#)



COFFEE

Brazil, Colombia, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone
→ [Project 6](#)
→ [Project 8](#)
→ [Project 10](#)



COTTON

India, Pakistan
→ [Project 4](#)
→ [Project 5](#)



GUM ARABIC

Uganda
→ [Project 9](#)



GROUNDNUTS

Malawi
→ [Project 12](#)



COMMODITY: Botanicals (incl. herbs and spices)

REGION: Global (11 countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia)

TARGET GROUP: Smallholder farmers and collectors

FUNDING: EUR 80,000

PROJECT PERIOD: 01/23 – 07/23

PARTNERS: Mast-Jägermeister SE is a liquor manufacturer from Germany. Union for Ethical Biotrade (UEBT) is a non-profit organisation that promotes sourcing with respect for people and biodiversity in botanical resources.



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PROJECT CONTEXT & OBJECTIVE:

Field level information on potential risks associated with niche botanical ingredients such as herbs and spices is limited, largely due to the often-complex nature of the supply chains and the small volumes typically produced and sourced. This project was designed to address that information gap.

INTERVENTION APPROACH:

To identify adverse impacts on human rights and the environment in the sourcing areas of botanical ingredients used by Jägermeister and to derive follow-up risk mitigation measures from the findings, Jägermeister partnered with UEBT to develop a risk database. This database is part of a larger due diligence platform that UEBT has established. It includes general country risks as well as specific risks related to cultivation, wild collection and local processing of botanical ingredients. This initiative used Jägermeister's due diligence efforts in its own supply chains to generate data to feed into the platform.

OUTCOME:

Risk assessments were carried out for 18 Jägermeister botanical supply chains in 11 different countries. The generated information has been integrated into UEBT's risk database and is now readily accessible to all UEBT member companies in the beauty, food & beverage, natural pharmaceutical and herbs and spices sector on a supply chain, country and sectoral level. In addition, Jägermeister also used the UEBT due diligence platform and assessed all supply chains within the project's scope to determine necessary actions with its suppliers.

LESSONS LEARNED:

The project demonstrated the significant advantages of collaboration in due diligence processes. By tapping into UEBT's extensive network of professionals, Jägermeister has enhanced the quality of its risk assessments with localized and context-specific expertise. By comparing external risk profiles with internal supplier self-assessments, Jägermeister was able to cross validate potential risks. This process supported risk prioritization and the development of targeted action plans with suppliers. It also revealed discrepancies between how suppliers and local experts perceive certain risks and underscores the need for all actors collaborate to create a common understanding of the triggers of risk. Based on this and a fortunate budget surplus, Jägermeister and UEBT conducted two verification assessments to provide insights into on the ground realities and helped the company understand the level of detail required to effectively mitigate risks. This has led to a commitment to subject all high-risk supply chains to future verification.

See more projects on botanicals:

→ [Project 2](#)

→ [Project 3](#)





PROJECT 2: Promoting Responsible Purchasing Practices of Natural Fragrance Supply Chains

APPLIED
DUE DILIGENCE



CONTENT

PART I

PART II

COMMODITY: Botanicals (Flowers, Jasmine, Mint)

REGION: Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh, India, and Faiyum, Beni Suef and Minya Governorate, Egypt

TARGET GROUP: ~2,000 farmers & farm workers (mainly women) in jasmine, mint & other

FUNDING: EUR 254,000

PROJECT PERIOD: 09/23 – 08/24

PARTNERS: Symrise AG, a German supplier of fragrances, flavourings, cosmetic active and functioning ingredients & raw materials. Union for Ethical Biobased Trade (UEBT), a non-profit organisation promoting responsible sourcing for people and biodiversity in botanical resources.



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PROJECT CONTEXT & OBJECTIVE:

Due diligence in botanical ingredients, including herbs and spices can be a challenge, given the high number of ingredients and oftentimes small operational scale and product volumes involved. At the same time, human rights and environmental risks exist in many botanical supply chains. Addressing them in an inclusive and participatory manner is essential, particularly as botanical ingredients tend to be a key source of livelihood for small-scale farmers and collectors. While previous risk analysis of the partners points to the various challenges, an in-depth understanding of the potential risks and their root causes was needed to define effective mitigation strategies.

INTERVENTION APPROACH:

Participatory risk assessment workshops with a range of local business, governmental and civil society stakeholders in India and Egypt were chosen as the method to jointly identify sourcing risks, their origins and underlying dynamics. Out of the findings the partners aimed to create three risk briefs to share among their network to promote individual company and sector-wide mitigation strategies for responsible sourcing.

OUTCOME:

Based on the participatory risk assessments, the partnership developed and published three risk briefs with key sourcing risks and mitigation recommendations for jasmine, mint and other botanicals. The risk profiles are publicly available on UEBT's website ([Jasmine Egypt](#), [Jasmine India](#), [Mint India](#)), containing both humanitarian and environmental risks. These learnings were disseminated among German beauty and personal care industries, as well as broader UEBT and IFRA network, reaching around 350 companies. The project increased sector-wide awareness and spiked an ongoing conversation around responsible sourcing risks, different stakeholders' responsibility in due diligence, and the importance of collaboration.

LESSONS LEARNED:

The partners highlighted a participatory approach to risk assessments as a highly effective method to identify not only responsible sourcing risks in the context of due diligence, but also to understand their root causes and the most meaningful approaches to addressing those risks. In preparation of the workshops, the mapping of relevant stakeholders at a sectoral level proved relevant to identify underlying dynamics. Specifically adopting engagement strategies to consider local knowledge, sensitivities, and power relations improves understanding, ensures trust, and fosters open dialogue. Trust is essential to enable open, constructive discussions on sensitive issues and to avoid general assurances that there are no problems. Collaborating with local experts was key to the creation of a trust-based, open setting within the workshops. Logistical challenges, such as harvest seasons and public holidays underscored the need for flexible timelines, especially when implementing a project in multiple places at the same time. Moreover, it is important to recognise that local companies, often constrained by limited capacity and resources, may need ongoing support to build and implement robust due diligence systems, emphasizing the importance of continued stakeholder collaboration to foster sustainable practices.

See more projects on botanicals:

→ [Project 1](#)

→ [Project 3](#)



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PROJECT 3: Developing a Scalable Risk Analysis Tool to Prevent and Remedy Risks, especially for Women

APPLIED
DUE DILIGENCE



CONTENT

PART I

PART II

COMMODITY: Herbs and Spices

REGION: Cairo, Fayoum, and Aswan in Egypt

TARGET GROUP: 50 factory workers, 250 smallholder farmers and their family members

TOTAL FUNDING: EUR 249,000

PROJECT PERIOD: 11/23 – 09/24

PARTNERS: Worlée NaturProdukte GmbH is a German company that supplies plant-based natural raw materials for the food, beverage and animal feed industry; CARE Egypt Foundation is an Egyptian NGO dedicated to improving livelihoods.



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PROJECT CONTEXT & OBJECTIVE:

A risk and in-depth gender analysis conducted by Worlée identified challenges in rural Egypt like occupational safety, child labor, and gender inequality. To be able to contribute to minimizing these challenges, Worlée identified the lack of a tool for context-specific, participatory on-site assessments to use with its suppliers that capture the multifactorial context that often leads to the identified adverse impacts.

INTERVENTION APPROACH:

The project aimed to develop and test a scalable risk assessment methodology and corresponding tools for agricultural supply chains, focusing on (female) workers' rights. This should assist companies in assessing their suppliers' adherence to workers' rights and gender equality standards.

OUTCOME:

Using an iterative approach, the *WECareAgri* audit standard was developed through desk research, site visits, and interviews and focus group discussions with supplier management, employees, and farmers. It consists of a handbook and templates supporting audit implementation, including data collection, evaluation, and action-plan development. All materials are public and free for second-party supplier audits in the agrifood sector, usable for selecting new suppliers or monitoring labour standards of existing ones. Findings also informed remedial measures to improve worker wellbeing during heat waves, including installing fans, air-conditioning units, and comfortable resting areas.

LESSONS LEARNED:

The project showed that translating Worlée's code of conduct into concrete and easy-to-use indicators was an effective way to make social principles actionable for staff and suppliers. Although the tool was initially designed for CSR teams, early involvement of purchasing staff, managers, and supplier representatives is essential for real uptake. When stakeholders understand how the tool supports their day-to-day work – clarifying risks, improving supplier communication, and making expectations more predictable – they become active drivers of the process.

Experience from the project highlighted that the standard worked best when incorporated into existing operational processes, including risk-based supplier selection and the coordination of supplier visits with purchasing. It also became clear that sufficient resources must be provided, not only for the first audit, but particularly for follow-up monitoring and continuous improvement efforts. In addition, establishing and maintaining a positive, trust-based relationship with suppliers proved essential for running audits in a voluntary and participatory manner; this required ongoing communication.

A practical challenge was identifying reliable interpreters, especially when first conducting worker interviews, especially with women. This showed the need for careful preparation and adaptability when transferring the audit process to new contexts.

See more projects on botanicals:

→ [Project 1](#)

→ [Project 2](#)



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COMMODITY: Cotton

REGION: Punjab and Sindh, Pakistan

TARGET GROUP: 495,000 cotton farmers, 10 commission agents, 40 intermediaries, 20 ginner, all brokers cooperating with the pilot gins, as well as up to 77 spinners

FUNDING: EUR 200,000

PROJECT PERIOD: 10/22 – 03/24

PARTNERS: adidas AG is a Germany-based global sporting goods industry. The Better Cotton Initiative is a leading cotton programme with the aim of promoting sustainable production methods.



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PROJECT CONTEXT & OBJECTIVE:

Pakistan's cotton supply chain is characterised by informal upstream flows: cotton often moves from farm to gin through middlemen, with limited documentation. This lack of visibility makes it difficult for downstream companies to perform due diligence. The project, set out to engage informal actors at the first mile and to pilot a bale tagging system that would improve traceability from ginner to spinner.

INTERVENTION APPROACH:

The Better Cotton Initiative and adidas co-created a cotton bale tagging system in partnership with informal supply chain actors. The intervention followed a phased approach: project design and stakeholder engagement, development of communications materials, training of stakeholders, proof of concept, and a scaled pilot during the harvest season. Governance meetings and workshops provided continuous opportunities for feedback and adjustment. Recognizing the limited digital readiness of some actors, the team also tested paper-based transaction tools alongside mobile applications, ensuring inclusivity and usability.

OUTCOME:

The project exceeded its engagement targets: over 80% of targeted middlemen participated, and 75% of all pilot participants reported operational efficiencies from using the new tagging and recording systems. Farmers and intermediaries (middlemen) highlighted improved transparency in transactions, and spinners reported faster and more reliable record-keeping. Importantly, intermediaries – long considered a blind spot in the system – were formally recognised and integrated into Better Cotton's system, while ginner provided positive feedback on the feasibility of bale tagging. The pilot also generated unplanned benefits, such as better market access for smallholders through improved visibility.

LESSONS LEARNED:

The project showed that actors in informal supply chains are willing to adopt new tools when clear benefits exist. Middlemen were open to formalising their role once operational efficiencies became evident, though a stronger business case is needed for sustained engagement. The pilot highlighted the dynamic nature of the first mile, making timely stakeholder mapping essential. Adaptive project management proved critical: the team adjusted timelines due to an early harvest and staffing shortages and provided trainings when participants requested clarification. Testing bale tagging demonstrated that labelling is feasible, but automation and simplified distribution will be required for scale. Paper-based systems remain useful transitional tools for actors with limited digital access. Gender barriers in Pakistan restricted women's participation, indicating a need for approaches to ensure their inclusion in training and decision-making.

Intermediaries remain engaged only when traceability is linked to clear incentives and benefits. Building this business case is key to making due diligence workable across cotton-growing contexts. To support this, BCI is strengthening its First Mile Traceability approach with the BCI Farm Trace app⁵, which integrates intermediaries into a system and boosts visibility of farmers and opportunities, strengthening business case. Project

⁵ Funded through the ISEAL Innovations Fund, SECO (CH) and UK International Development.

See more projects on cotton:

→ [Project 5](#)





PROJECT 5: Paving the Way to Better Cotton Traceability

APPLIED
DUE DILIGENCE



CONTENT

PART I

PART II

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COMMODITY: Cotton

REGION: Maharashtra and Gujarat, India

TARGET GROUP: 810 smallholder farmers across Maharashtra and Gujarat, 6 ginners and 6 intermediaries in Maharashtra, 6 ginners and 6 intermediaries in Gujarat

FUNDING: EUR 200,000

PROJECT PERIOD: 09/23 – 08/24

PARTNERS: C&A AG is a global fashion retailer. The Better Cotton Initiative is a leading cotton programme with the aim of promoting sustainable production methods.



CONTEXT & OBJECTIVE:

India's cotton supply chain is highly complex, with raw cotton often passing through multiple intermediaries before reaching the gin. This informal system creates a lack of visibility, making it difficult for downstream companies to fulfil due diligence requirements. India is also considered a high-risk region for labour practices, which further underlined the need for a transparent system. The project aimed to enhance corporate due diligence by piloting first-mile traceability, from farm to gin, as a foundation for Better Cotton's new global traceability solution. The long-term goal was to de-risk supply chains and enable companies to reward farmers for stronger social and environmental practices.

INTERVENTION APPROACH:

The project piloted a digital system to track cotton movements between farms and gins. Activities included farmer trainings, intermediary engagement, and onboarding of ginners and suppliers onto the Better Cotton Platform (BCP). A governance group was set up to guide the pilot, and verification calls with farmers tested data integrity. While challenges emerged – such as low response rates to automated calls and limited data entry from ginners – the pilot allowed for rapid iteration and adaptation.

OUTCOME:

First-mile traceability was successfully piloted in Gujarat and Maharashtra with over 800 farmers, 12 intermediaries, and 6 ginners. Training and engagement targets were exceeded, laying the groundwork for future scaling. At the downstream level, 213 C&A suppliers were trained on the new Chain of Custody standard, with nearly half starting to trade Better Cotton through the new platform. The pilot thus contributed both to enhanced transparency in India and to the roll-out of Better Cotton's global traceability system.

LESSONS LEARNED:

The project showed that inclusive engagement and tailored communication can make complex traceability systems workable. Stronger pre-pilot outreach and clearer guidance would further improve farmer responsiveness. Intermediaries and ginners engaged well, but sustaining their participation will require a clearer, long-term business case. Technical lessons underscored the need for stronger data systems, as testing revealed weaknesses in paper-based processes and annual authorised volume codes. In response, Better Cotton introduced farmer ID cards and improved data collection to support more accurate yield estimates.⁶ These measures address the data quality and verification challenges identified in the TRAWAY pilot, strengthening traceability, farmer validation, and overall system robustness. Gender-segregated trainings increased women's participation, while evening sessions maximised attendance. Staffing and consultancy constraints were managed through adaptive approaches, highlighting the importance of flexibility in delivery. Overall, the pilot demonstrated that first-mile traceability is feasible even in highly informal systems when projects use participatory design, iterative testing, and adapt methods to local realities. The findings offer a strong basis for scaling future traceability initiatives across diverse cotton-growing regions.

⁶ ID cards and better data collection were made possible by an ISEAL Innovations Fund grant from SECO and UK International Development.

See more projects on cotton:

→ [Project 4](#)





PROJECT 6: A Farmer-Centric Approach to Due Diligence: Improving Data Management Across International Value Chains



COMMODITY: Cocoa, Avocado, Coffee

REGION: Sierra Leone and Ethiopia

TARGET GROUP: 16,279 cocoa farmers, 5,910 coffee farmers

TOTAL FUNDING: EUR 246,000

PROJECT PERIOD: 08/23 – 08/24

PARTNERS: Tradin Organic Agriculture B.V., specializes in sustainably sourced ingredients, Fairfood is a Dutch foundation with the goal of accelerating the change towards sustainable food systems.



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PROJECT CONTEXT & OBJECTIVE:

Through previous collaboration the project partners have identified the issue of inadequate data management in supply chains, frequently characterized by poor quality, reliability and ownership of origin data and systems operating independently with little collaboration or cross compatibility. This hinders effective risk identification, may lead to duplication of data collection efforts or even avoidance of certain origins. To address these issues, the project aimed to create an interoperable data integration tool and dashboard with a primary focus on EUDR and Living Income.

INTERVENTION APPROACH:

The project developed and deployed a public, open-source data integration tool and dashboard to enable EU-based clients to meet due diligence requirements. The tool was equipped with themes for deforestation-free production and living income using verified methodologies (EUDR, Fairtrade, Rainforest Alliance standards). At the same time the partners intended to promote a system that incentivized and rewarded farmers for sharing high-quality data. The project also aimed to use data analysis to inform a new, integrated Gender Policy to promote equity throughout Tradin Organic's supply chains.

OUTCOME:

As a result, 22,392 coffee and cocoa farmers from Sierra Leone and Ethiopia were digitally connected to markets through the dashboard. Stakeholder interviews confirmed strong interest for the usage of the tool by EU-buyers, particularly among sustainability frontrunners. The dashboard also provides a single platform to view sustainability data, streamlining due diligence readiness and support long-term ESG goals for companies. The tool's code is openly accessible on Atlassian and GitHub and the partners aim to deploy it for further regions.

LESSONS LEARNED:

While the initial focus was on EUDR compliance, stakeholder engagement and evolving regulatory needs required a broader approach, underscoring the importance of flexibility in project implementation. The "Navigate" dashboard showed strong potential to centralize fragmented ESG data and support both compliance and longer-term sustainability objectives. Several unforeseen challenges emerged, offering valuable lessons. Limited survey responses indicated that direct stakeholder consultation from the outset is a more effective starting point. The project also did not achieve its aim of providing direct financial incentives to farmers. This was partly due to unexpected cocoa-market volatility and limited logistical readiness: the technology needed to ensure that data premiums could be paid directly and verifiably to individual farmers was not yet available. As payments are currently made only at the cooperative level, a system is required to demonstrate that funds reach farmers, making it difficult to monetise data and create incentives. On gender, a key insight was the significant data gap regarding women's roles in farming communities, which limits the ability to design targeted interventions. Collecting disaggregated data is therefore essential. In response, Tradin Organic integrated a gender component into broader frameworks such as its Ethical Sourcing Policy.

See more projects on cocoa / coffee:

cocoa → [Project 7](#) → [Project 13](#)

coffee → [Project 8](#) → [Project 10](#)



COMMODITY: Cocoa

REGION: Côte d'Ivoire

TARGET GROUP: 0.8 – 1.3 million smallholder cocoa farming households and workers, especially women and children

TOTAL FUNDING: EUR 285,000

PROJECT PERIOD: 11/22 – 12/26

PARTNERS: Nestlé Deutschland AG, Mondelēz Europe GmbH & Ferrero Deutschland, non-profit representor for the chocolate industry, Stiftung der Deutschen Kakao- und Schokoladenwirtschaft; Inkota-Netzwerk, Rainforest Alliance, Fairtrade Deutschland e.V. & Hamburger Stiftung für Wirtschaftsethik.



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PROJECT CONTEXT & OBJECTIVE:

The UAG Human Rights Working Group identified several human rights and environmental risks prevalent in cocoa value chains. While individual grievance mechanisms exist, they often fail to reach smallholder cocoa farmers, who are the most vulnerable population. Additionally, individuals were forced to report the same grievance multiple times due to a lack of a single, coordinated system. The project objective was to develop an easily accessible, co-created and company cross-compatible grievance mechanism for the cocoa sector in Côte d'Ivoire.

INTERVENTION APPROACH:

A feasibility study was conducted with partner organisations and local stakeholders in Côte d'Ivoire. This included field research, community workshops, and interviews with farmers, cooperatives, women's groups, local authorities, and traditional leaders. Based on these findings, criteria were developed for a grievance mechanism that complements existing local and cooperative-level structures while being sector-wide and cross-company. Cocoa farmers actively participated through interviews and workshops. Special attention was given to involving village chiefs, who play a central role in local conflict resolution, and to exploring how women and youth could be better included in grievance processes.

OUTCOME:

The study confirmed that a cross-company grievance mechanism is both relevant and feasible. It recommends phased implementation, starting with a pilot before national scale-up. The system would forward complaints directly to companies while using existing village and cooperative structures. An independent organization would monitor grievance handling to ensure impartiality and transparency. The design offers multiple reporting channels – village focal points, phone, and digital platforms – with anonymity options. Importantly, the study convened a critical mass of cocoa-sector companies, including traders, to refine the concept and plan implementation, marking a key step in sector-wide collaboration.

LESSONS LEARNED:

The project showed that grievance mechanisms must be culturally appropriate and context-specific. Village leaders remain central to local conflict resolution, and any new mechanism must integrate with, rather than undermine, these structures. Awareness-raising, trust-building, and capacity development are prerequisites for effective use. Transparency, confidentiality, and clear timelines were identified as key for credibility. A major insight was that grievance mechanisms cannot address systemic risks like child labour or deforestation alone; they must be embedded in broader prevention strategies and livelihood support. Facilitation by GIZ and GISCO proved crucial to steer the process and align interests. Above all, trust-based and open dialogue among stakeholders is essential for meaningful sector-wide due diligence.

See more projects on cocoa:

→ [Project 6](#)→ [Project 13](#)

PROJECT 8: Recommendations for a Joint Grievance Mechanism in the Brazilian Coffee Supply Chain



COMMODITY: Coffee

REGION: Alta Mogiana in São Paulo (Jeriquara and Pedregulho), and Minas Gerais (Claraval, Ibiraci), Brazil (comprising approx. 5.000 coffee farms)

TARGET GROUP: Stakeholders involved in coffee cultivation, including smallholder farming households, entrepreneurs, seasonal and farm workers

TOTAL FUNDING: EUR 200,000

PROJECT PERIOD: 02/23 – 12/24

PARTNERS: Melitta Group, Jacobs Douwe Egberts DE, Nestlé Deutschland, Olam Food Ingredients (ofi)/ Olam Deutschland GmbH, Solidaridad Deutschland e.V. (& Brazil) and the German Coffee Association.



PROJECT CONTEXT & OBJECTIVE:

While Brazil has a strong legislative framework to protect labour rights, informality persists – particularly in the form of temporary labour arrangements in rural regions. These workers remain highly vulnerable to human rights violations. The objective of the project was therefore to develop and adapt a baseline grievance mechanism (*Ear4U*) to the specific local context in Brazil, making it accessible and responsive for at-risk groups like smallholder farmers and seasonal workers. Secondly, the project aimed to test a collaborative, “pre-competitive” approach where companies jointly manage grievances and design preventive measures. By working collectively, the partners sought to avoid duplication, increase legitimacy, and build sector-wide ownership of due diligence responsibilities.

INTERVENTION APPROACH:

The projects partners conducted a field study to assess compliance with human rights-related and environmental risks as per LkSG. In total, 80 interviews were conducted, encompassing 35 producers and 45 rural workers. This sample included 12 small properties (>40 hectares), 6 medium-sized properties (40 to 70 hectares), and 17 large properties (<70 hectares). Based on empirical results and consultations with key stakeholders, they developed recommendations to adapt the grievance procedure to the needs of vulnerable groups. A joint committee of multiple private sector partners was established to test new ways of managing grievances and designing remedial actions.

OUTCOME:

The establishment of a Technical Group in Brazil with representatives from the local coffee sector was a key success factor, as it helped to validate the project’s methodology and data. Notably, no grievances were reported through the pilot mechanism, revealing the complexities and barriers to getting complaints identified and reported, which in turn helped to build a foundation for future efforts of mitigating those issues. A Portuguese-language video course was designed to offer information on the new requirements of German and European Due Diligence regulations, their relevance for Brazilian coffee producers and their relationship to Brazilian laws. The course is available on the online platform *Produtor Informado*.

LESSONS LEARNED:

The project demonstrated that strong awareness-raising is essential for grievance mechanisms to function. It also showed that methods, materials, and tools must be carefully designed in line with national or regional standards and local traditions to ensure acceptance and understanding among targeted stakeholders. To achieve this, the project partners collaborated with the Brazilian Coffee Exporters Council Cecafé and the Global Coffee Platform Brazil to jointly develop suitable awareness-raising materials. Producer and rights-holder acceptance – based on a clear understanding of the tool’s purpose – is a prerequisite for successful implementation. The experience highlighted that without basic knowledge of their rights, the aim of due diligence, or the functioning of complaint systems, trust in such mechanisms remains low and uptake limited.

The project further revealed that effective grievance mechanisms cannot operate in isolation. Building trust and credibility requires a strong local presence and close cooperation with local organizations and government bodies. These partners are essential for navigating political and social sensitivities and ensuring that remediation measures can be implemented successfully. The project also found that continuous improvement, informed by regular assessments and stakeholder feedback, is key to maintaining the mechanism’s relevance and effectiveness.

See more projects on coffee:

→ [Project 6](#) → [Project 10](#)





PROJECT 9: Generating New income Opportunities for Women through Gum Arabic Harvesting



COMMODITY: Gum Arabic

REGION: Karamoja, Uganda

TARGET GROUP: 750 – 1,000 Women

TOTAL FUNDING: EUR 285,000 EUR

PROJECT PERIOD: 12/22 – 05/23

PARTNERS: Norevo GmbH is an international natural-raw-materials trader and processor from Hamburg. Native Seeds Moyo is a Northern Uganda community organisation working to reduce poverty and improve living standards.



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PROJECT CONTEXT & OBJECTIVE:

Uganda's Karamoja region faces high levels of food insecurity and malnutrition, driven by conflict, drought, price shocks, and disease. Norevo identified Gum Arabic, harvested from *Acacia Senegal*, as a neglected but potentially valuable source of income. However, local monopsony power suppressed prices, poor harvesting techniques damaged trees, and insecurity made collection dangerous. Against this backdrop, Norevo and Native Seeds Moyo aimed to build a sustainable Gum Arabic value chain that could generate fair incomes for women while introducing responsible harvesting and processing practices.

INTERVENTION APPROACH:

The partners piloted the establishment of a formalized Gum Arabic chain in Karamoja. Activities included training over 1,000 participants (two-thirds women) on tree selection, sustainable tapping, and post-harvest processing. Trainers were first capacitated by gum experts from Sudan, then cascaded knowledge through village-level groups. The project also tested remuneration models and built basic infrastructure: a drying and cleaning shed, a transport link to collection hubs, and quality control mechanisms. A grievance and complaint system was initiated by linking with NGOs and women's associations, providing contacts and WhatsApp numbers to report unfair practices.

OUTCOME:

The project achieved important first steps: trained groups supplied higher-quality gum that fetched prices up to five times higher than before. Women reported significant income gains, often exchanged for sorghum to secure food and seeds at fairer rates. The project also improved awareness of pricing structures and rights through collaboration with local women's organisations. A complaint network was initiated with partners like Kara-Tunga and the Karamoja Women's Umbrella Organization, though no formal cases were recorded yet. Security concerns limited volumes harvested and prevented larger-scale procurement for export, highlighting that economic activities remain vulnerable to external risks.

LESSONS LEARNED:

The project demonstrated the value of adapting early missteps into workable solutions. The initial group-based payment model created frustration, as effort and benefits were unevenly shared. By switching to individual payments and introducing sorghum as an alternative to cash, the project turned a design flaw into a system better aligned with women's needs and food security priorities.

Similarly, the plan to provide safety vests was abandoned after local advice warned of risks. Instead, the team responded by moving collection points closer to villages and piloting tree planting near homesteads, reducing exposure to insecurity while keeping women engaged in the value chain.

The complaint system, co-designed with local NGOs and women's associations, did not generate cases during the pilot but helped establish trusted contact points for future reporting. Training on responsible harvesting improved gum quality and conservation of *Acacia Senegal* trees. These course corrections show that adaptive management can turn setbacks into building blocks for more credible due diligence.



**COMMODITY:** Coffee**REGION:** Huila, Colombia**TARGET GROUP:** 2,450 coffee farmers, around 10.000 indirect beneficiaries (e.g. family members)**TOTAL FUNDING:** EUR 284,000**FUNDING PERIOD:** 09/23 – 09/24**INVOLVED PARTIES:** SKN Caribecafé exports Colombian green coffee; ALDI is a leading international retailer; the German-Colombian Chamber of Commerce promotes German foreign trade.**PROJECT CONTEXT & OBJECTIVE:**

A prior risk assessment identified that gender inequality remains a persistent issue in Colombia, often manifesting subtly within coffee-growing families. Children frequently participate in coffee tasks that may compromise their education and wellbeing, while limited access to social security and labor protections leaves farm workers vulnerable. Community health is also affected by the consumption of contaminated water, impacting productivity and schooling. The project therefore sought to strengthen community networks with a focus on women's leadership, prevent child labor, and improve occupational health and safety. At the same time, it aimed to anchor due diligence practices in local realities and support long-term market access for Colombian coffee.

INTERVENTION APPROACH:

Building on a prior risk assessment, the partners (SKN Caribecafé, the German-Colombian Chamber of Commerce, and ALDI Nord) implemented targeted measures. These included training on human rights and labor law for women's groups, psycho-educational activities with schools and families, and workshops on parenting and gender roles. Practical interventions complemented the social component: water purification filters were installed in schools and households, hazard signage and protective equipment were delivered, and soil analysis and fertilizers supported farm productivity. A key innovation was a family-system methodology that engaged multiple generations together, applying a gender-inclusive lens.

OUTCOME:

The project reached over 300 women coffee producers, 70 family groups, and 20 schools, significantly surpassing its original targets. More than 2,700 students and 1,500 parents participated in school-based activities on child rights and positive parenting, while women's groups gained technical, administrative, and financial skills. Families reported improved recognition of women's contributions to coffee production and increased awareness of child labor risks. Safe drinking water was secured for schools and households, reducing illness and absenteeism. The initiative also fostered associativity among women, enabling them to access inputs and training collectively and to strengthen their voice in the coffee chain.

LESSONS LEARNED:

The project demonstrated that due diligence cannot be imposed through rigid models. Flexibility in training schedules, communication modes, and topics was essential; for example, shifting workshops to evenings enabled greater participation by women. Listening to community priorities – such as addressing gender violence or suicide prevention – expanded trust and ensured interventions remained relevant. The family-system approach proved especially effective, as it reached children, parents, and grandparents simultaneously, creating shared responsibility for change. Importantly, the project confirmed that building a comprehensive due diligence strategy is a gradual process: only when baseline realities are understood and rightsholders are engaged can measures on gender equality, child protection, and occupational safety become both credible and sustainable.

See more projects on coffee:

→ [Project 6](#) → [Project 8](#)



PROJECT 11: Human Rights Due Diligence in the Cashew Sector

APPLIED
DUE DILIGENCE



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COMMODITY: **Cashew**

REGION: **Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire**

TARGET GROUP: **200 smallholder farmers and members of their households; including 300 women and girls**

TOTAL FUNDING: **EUR 54,000**

PROJECT PERIOD: **09/23 – 04/24**

PARTNERS: **Nutwork Handelsgesellschaft mbH, a German supplier of nuts and dried fruits. The Ivorian supplier and processor of organic cashews Cashew Cost/Cajooma, and the French/Ivorian non-profit organization Nitidæ.**



PROJECT CONTEXT & OBJECTIVE:

A prior risk assessment and gender analysis conducted by Cashew Coast and Nutwork identified two main adverse impacts: the marginalization of women, who generally receive no pay for picking cashew nuts and lack cooperative representation, and a high probability of child labour. The cooperative itself lacked the capacity, skills, and physical facility to organize and address these issues. The project's objective was to empower a cashew cooperative and women's association in Côte d'Ivoire to become agents for human rights due diligence, with a specific focus on female empowerment and child labour.

INTERVENTION APPROACH:

The project sought to train 23 cashew cooperative on human rights due diligence and to support women in creating female pickers' associations. The project aimed to address the identified risks by combining capacity-building initiatives with targeted infrastructure improvements. The infrastructure measures were designed to ease daily burdens, making the training programs more effective and sustainable.

OUTCOME:

Building on this approach, the partnership refurbished two warehouses to improve cashew storage and provide meeting spaces for cooperative members. Two hand-operated water wells were also repaired, reducing the time burden on women caused by long walks for water. The renovated warehouses hosted awareness trainings on labor, social, and children's rights. To strengthen women's economic participation, training supported the formalization of savings and loan groups in four villages and the creation of women-led subgroups within cooperatives. Community-wide awareness sessions further challenged traditional gender roles and promoted equity in local communities.

LESSONS LEARNED:

Rather than relying on fragmented solutions, this project emphasized the need for an integrated interventions which can address multiple issues simultaneously. Providing material support, like repairing water wells, not only eased daily burdens but also served as a catalyst for engagement and motivation towards trainings. These commitments were strengthened by clear communication of incentives and benefits – presenting human rights due diligence as a concept for empowerment rather than just a compliance requirement helped foster acceptance of existing demands. The formalization of existing informal women's savings and loan groups (AVEC) strengthened their decision-making power and economic independence. Choosing context-adapted training contents and engaging men and landowners into female empowerment trainings ensured broad community acceptance and highlighted the benefits for the community as a whole. The partners underlined the importance of strong, direct and long-term partnerships and a hands-on presence in the field to conduct effective due diligence.





COMMODITY: **Groundnuts**

REGION: **Milala, Lilongwe, Malawi**

TARGET GROUP: **100 smallholder farmer households**

FUNDING: **EUR 250,000**

PROJECT PERIOD: **09/23 – 08/24**

PARTNERS: **Midsona Deutschland GmbH** is one of Germany's organic food manufacturers. **Stichting Grown Farm Incubator**, a Dutch foundation which supports small-scale farmers to become more profitable and sustainable.



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PROJECT CONTEXT & OBJECTIVE:

Before the project, Malawi lacked a certified organic groundnut value chain and a transparent supply system. This limited importers' ability to conduct due diligence and farmers' access to higher-value markets. Midsona, which had previously relied on opaque, multi-tier supply chains for groundnuts, faced challenges in identifying risks and ensuring compliance with the German Supply Chain Due Diligence Act (LkSG). The project therefore aimed to establish a fully transparent single-tier supply chain from Malawi, allowing Midsona to directly monitor farming practices, trace volumes, and document compliance with organic and social standards. At the same time, it sought to empower 100 smallholder farmers – at least half women – by providing fairer market access, higher incomes, and training in sustainable agriculture.

INTERVENTION APPROACH:

Using the "Grown Farm Incubator" model, the project provided smallholder farmers with a complete package of pre-financed inputs, irrigation technology, and training on organic and business practices. A digital platform was implemented to ensure supply chain transparency and compliance. The project also included a participatory learning process, with specific training on women's empowerment and financial literacy to support female farmers and foster gender equity.

OUTCOME:

While a severe dry season and pest infestation prevented the project from reaching its income growth target, the project successfully delivered educational benefits, with 100 smallholder farmers, 60 of whom were women, provided extensive training in organic farming, financial literacy, and gender empowerment. The project also successfully initiated the organic certification process and established an Internal Control System to maintain compliance.

LESSONS LEARNED:

A key success was the empowerment of women. Female farmers were elected as cooperative leaders, acted as trainers in meetings, and increasingly spoke up in decision-making processes. Training in financial literacy and organic inputs gave women confidence and new skills, and men reported recognising their contributions more strongly. This demonstrates that gender-sensitive methods can generate tangible change when embedded into project design.

At the same time, the project highlighted the limits of overly holistic planning. Originally designed around three crop cycles, the project could only manage one due to drought, pests, and equipment delays. Focusing on fewer, realistic objectives would have improved clarity while still enabling crop diversification and resilience.

For due diligence, the project showed that field-level risk analysis provides a more complete picture than desk research alone. Digital monitoring created transparency but had to be complemented by low-tech solutions such as lead farmer reporting, given low literacy and limited phone access.

Finally, external shocks and shifting land rights underscored the importance of contingency planning. Flexible timelines, early procurement, and insurance mechanisms are essential for resilience and scalability.





COMMODITY: Cocoa

REGION: Kono District, Sierra Leone

TARGET GROUP: 6,915 smallholder farmers (1,750 female);
and indirectly 34,000 family and community members

TOTAL FUNDING: EUR 241,000

PROJECT PERIOD: 09/23 – 10/24

PARTNERS: dm is Germany's largest drugstore chain;
Maestrani produces Swiss chocolate; Fairtrade Deutschland and
Fairtrade Africa represent the Fairtrade system in Germany and Africa.



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PROJECT CONTEXT & OBJECTIVE:

Through multiple risk and needs assessments in their cocoa supply chain from Sierra Leone, the project partners identified several human rights and environmental risks, including low income, labour rights and conditions, women's and children's rights and deforestation. Inflation, currency depreciation as well as high levels of food insecurity and corruption continue to exacerbate these challenges. Taking on a holistic approach, the project aimed to minimize these risks by contributing to a corporate HREDD mechanism by dm and Maestrani.

INTERVENTION APPROACH:

The project included a variety of on the ground measures, including the set-up of community-based grievance mechanisms, capacity building for two cooperatives and income enhancing activities especially for women, youth and people with disabilities.

OUTCOME:

The project trained farmers on HREDD topics including child protection, forced labour, discrimination, and environmental risks such as deforestation. Anti-corruption sessions helped farmers understand their role in reporting wrongdoing, while local authorities gained clarity on responsibilities and collaboration with buyers. With Fairtrade's support, two cooperatives conducted EUDR campaigns with community outreach, radio discussions, and geodata mapping to ensure data sovereignty. Ten community grievance committees, led by respected local figures, are now operational and backed by authorities. Farmers also received targeted support for livelihood diversification, farm rehabilitation, and improved yields through solar dryers.

LESSONS LEARNED:

The newly set-up community-based grievance mechanisms brought unexpectedly good results: "We have never imagined that the formation of grievance mechanism committees in clustered communities would be a tool to redress challenging issues in the whole community". This component is helping in solving individual, organisations', and community problems within the two cooperatives' operational areas and contributes to minimizing theft and other crimes. A key element to make the mechanism work was the support of traditional leaders like chiefs. Their support provided easy project entrance into the communities. Key enablers of the overall project's success was continuous stakeholder engagement, realized through a participatory, community-based approach. Engaging with two competing cooperatives improved cohesion among members of the two cooperatives in the same communities. Unexpected challenges, including difficulties with procurement and cost forecasting, rainy seasons and peak harvest periods underscored the need for flexibility and a contingency budget for unforeseen price increases. Maintaining transparency about delays helped sustain trust with the target communities.

See more projects on cocoa:

→ [Project 6](#)

→ [Project 7](#)



**For further information and guidance,
please consult the following resources:**

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