

MASTERCLASS

*"Cocoa Under Shade: Agroforestry as a Lever for Sustainability,
of Quality and Resilience for Cocoa Farmers"*

I. MASTERCLASS REPORT

1.1 Introduction & Context

This Masterclass opens with a global perspective on the cocoa sector: an industry worth over USD 130 billion, in which Côte d'Ivoire alone accounts for approximately 40% of world production. This paradoxical leadership comes with significant vulnerabilities: accelerating deforestation, soil depletion, exposure to climate change, and dependence on volatile commodity prices.

In response to these pressures, agroforestry — long sidelined in favour of intensive monocultures — is returning to the centre of scientific and industrial debate as a systemic response to sustainability challenges.

1.2 Part I — Understanding Cocoa Agroforestry

Cocoa agroforestry encompasses several system typologies: multi-strata, wooded parkland, or forest corridor systems. A historical overview highlighted that the cocoa tree is, by nature, an understory species: its cultivation in full sunlight is a recent deviation, not an agronomic norm.

Existing models in Latin America (Peru, Ecuador), Indonesia, and West Africa were compared. The choice of associated species — fruit trees (avocado, banana), nitrogen-fixing legumes, and precious timber species — directly determines the agronomic and economic performance of the system.

1.3 Part II — Agronomic and Environmental Benefits

Four major benefits were documented during the Masterclass:

- Thermal and water regulation: shade reduces canopy floor temperatures by 3 to 5°C, limiting water stress in cocoa trees during drought periods.
- Soil fertility improvement: litter from associated trees enriches organic matter, reducing chemical fertiliser needs by 30 to 50% in some of the systems studied.
- Functional biodiversity: the presence of pollinators and natural predators of major cocoa pests is significantly increased under tree cover.

- Carbon sequestration: cocoa-based agroforestry systems can store between 40 and 80 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent per hectare, making them eligible for REDD+ markets and voluntary carbon credit mechanisms.

1.4 Part III — Impact on Cocoa Quality

The slow ripening of pods in the shade promotes the accumulation of aromatic precursors in the beans. Studies presented show enriched sensory profiles — more pronounced floral, fruity, and acidic notes — in shade-grown cocoa compared to full-sun varieties.

Premium chocolatiers and specialty bean buyers shared their experiences: the enhanced traceability of agroforestry systems — due to strengthened plot-level monitoring — represents a differentiating commercial argument in high-end markets. Fermentation and drying also benefit from greater microclimate stability.

1.5 Part IV — Economic and Social Challenges

The agroforestry transition represents a cost and a relearning period of 3 to 5 years for producers. Income diversification (sale of fruits, timber, and legumes) improves household financial resilience but requires structured technical and financial support.

Certifications (Rainforest Alliance, Organic Agriculture) provide access to price premiums of 10 to 30%, but involve audit costs that smallholder farmers cannot bear alone. The role of cooperatives — as facilitators of certification access and cost-sharing — and of governments — in terms of land policy and transition subsidies — emerged as decisive.

II. TARGET PARTICIPANTS FOR THE MASTERCLASS

The Masterclass aims to bring together a multidisciplinary panel of cocoa sector stakeholders whose expertise and interests converge around issues of sustainability, quality, and economic resilience.

Profile	Description / Examples
Researchers & Scientists	Agronomists, ecologists, and climatologists specialised in cocoa and agroforestry
Producers & Cooperatives	Ivorian cocoa farmers, farmer groups, cooperative unions (e.g. ECOOKIM, CAYAT)
Industry Players & Processors	Representatives from Barry Callebaut, Cargill, Olam, and premium chocolate makers
Premium Buyers & Chocolatiers	Artisan chocolatiers, bean-to-bar brands, specialty bean buyers
NGOs & Donors	IDH, WWF, GIZ, World Bank, AFD — sustainable finance stakeholders
Certification Bodies	Rainforest Alliance, FLO-Cert, Ecocert — label and traceability experts

Profile	Description / Examples
Government Representatives	Ministries of Agriculture (Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Ecuador, Indonesia), ANADER, CCC
Carbon Market Experts	REDD+ specialists, carbon credits, agricultural green finance
Media & Communications	Journalists specialised in agriculture/sustainable development, sector influencers

III. KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE MASTERCLASS

The exchanges and presentations will yield nine key structural takeaways for cocoa sector stakeholders.

Agroforestry Improves Climate Resilience

The combination of shade trees and cocoa plants protects against thermal extremes, reduces evapotranspiration, and stabilises yields in the face of climate variability.

A Living Soil, Fewer Chemical Inputs

Functional biodiversity under tree cover naturally enriches the soil, reducing reliance on synthetic fertilisers and pesticides — with direct cost savings for the farmer.

Superior Organoleptic Quality

Slow ripening in the shade enriches the aromatic profiles of the beans. Premium chocolatiers report greater flavour complexity and improved fermentability.

Diversification Generates New Income

Associated species (fruits, timber, legumes) create complementary income streams, providing financial security for farming households in the event of cocoa price shocks.

Certifications Open Up Profitable Markets

Rainforest Alliance, Organic Agriculture, and origin labels provide access to significant price premiums. The enhanced traceability enabled by agroforestry is a major asset in these certification processes.

Stored Carbon Has Market Value

Agroforestry systems are eligible for REDD+ markets and voluntary carbon credits. This complementary financial lever remains underutilised by Ivorian cooperatives.

The Transition Requires Structured Support

The conversion to agroforestry requires 3 to 5 years of investment and training. The role of cooperatives, governments, and donors is decisive in covering transition costs.

Research Must Be Locally Contextualised

Latin American and Indonesian models cannot be directly transposed. R&D programmes tailored to West African ecology and practices are essential.

Consumer Communication Is a Lever for Change

Promoting agroforestry cocoa to end consumers creates upstream demand that pulls the entire supply chain towards more sustainable practices.



MR. FOUSSENI DIAKITÉ

A man of vision, a tireless builder, and a major actor in Ivorian economic development, Fousseni Diakité embodies a new generation of committed African leaders, deeply rooted in the values of hard work, ethics, and shared progress.

Coming from the entrepreneurial world, he has established himself with rigour and determination in the strategic sectors of agriculture, agro-industry, and local processing — most notably in the cocoa and

coffee supply chains. An accomplished industrialist, he heads two cocoa processing plants and one coffee processing plant, contributing significantly to the local value addition of raw materials.

His first cocoa plant, located in Abidjan, Abobo PK18, has a processing capacity of 15,000 tonnes per year. The second, established in Divo, boasts an industrial capacity of 80,000 tonnes of processed cocoa per year, making it one of the major hubs for local transformation. Also in Divo, he operates a coffee processing plant with an annual capacity of 5,000 tonnes.

Convinced that Africa's sustainable development rests on local industrialisation, value creation, and youth employment, Fousseni Diakité has spent several years building high-performing, inclusive, and job-creating enterprises. His entrepreneurial vision is rooted in a logic of economic sovereignty and African competitiveness on international markets.

In a dynamic of strategic diversification, he has recently expanded into the transport sector, acquiring several new coaches operating the Divo–Abidjan–Divo route, thereby contributing to population mobility and economic connectivity.

His footprint extends beyond Ivorian borders. He is also present in Guinea, in Zérékoré, through a company specialised in cocoa. Furthermore, he is active in the fields of import-export of goods, mining, and bauxite, affirming his status as a pan-African economic operator.

His career is marked by numerous national and international distinctions, reflecting the real impact of his actions on the economy, the agricultural industry, and community development. These many recognitions consecrate a leadership built on performance, innovation, good governance, and civic commitment.

A respected leader, a man of action and conviction, Fousseni Diakité continues to build — with faith and determination — an Africa that transforms its wealth, creates value locally, and offers lasting prospects to its youth.



ALAHASSANE DIAKITÉ

Mr. Alahassane DIAKITÉ, an Ivorian entrepreneur and leading figure in the field of cocoa processing, was born in the 1990s in Côte d'Ivoire, specifically in the city of Divo. Coming from a family of cocoa farmers, he had the opportunity at a very young age to familiarise himself with cocoa cultivation, which would later become a true passion.

Recognising the importance of education, he pursued a rigorous academic path, beginning at EPP Dioulabougou 2 primary school in Divo between 1998 and 2004. In 2004, he enrolled at the Lycée Moderne Adama Sanogo in Dokui, where he obtained his BEPC (Junior Secondary Certificate) and his Baccalauréat. As a committed cocoa enthusiast, he chose to dedicate himself further to the sector after graduating. Alongside this, he earned a BT (Technical Certificate) in Business Management in 2012, followed by a Bachelor's degree in Strategic Management from HEC Abidjan in 2022.

To gain hands-on experience, he started from the ground up: first as a pisteur (a field collector sourcing cocoa from farmers), then as a truck convoy operator at the port in the 2010s, and in 2013 as a sales representative at ICOWA. In 2014, he became a cooperative administrator, enabling him to join the Inter-Regional Union of Coffee-Cocoa Cooperatives of Côte d'Ivoire (U.INTER.CC-CI).

In 2014, driven by his entrepreneurial spirit, he co-founded ECAMOI, a company specialised in the export of coffee and cocoa. He gradually rose through the ranks and took the helm of U.INTER.CC-CI. Today, Mr. Alahassane DIAKITÉ serves as Chairman of the Board of Directors of U.INTER.CC-CI, Managing Partner of DIAKITE COCOA PRODUCTS SARL, and General Administrator of CACAO S.A., a large-scale cocoa processing company.

As both an administrator and a visionary, he launched DIAKITE COCOA PRODUCTS in 2016, producing an average of 15,000 tonnes of cocoa butter, cocoa mass, and cocoa cake per year, with a European subsidiary: DIAKITE COCOA PRODUCTS LUXEMBOURG. To further realise his vision, he also launched DIAKING CHOCOLAT, aimed at both local and international markets.

His commitment to made-in-Côte d'Ivoire products, youth entrepreneurship, and the long-term sustainability of Ivorian cocoa has led him, together with his twin brother and business partner, to champion the National Forum of Young Cocoa Farmers. This forum now brings together more than 3,450 young people and key figures to raise awareness of the challenges across the cocoa value chain.

Well beyond the world of business, Mr. DIAKITÉ is a passionate philanthropist. Through the Jeunesse Unie de Divo (United Youth of Divo) association, of which he is president, he leads numerous charitable and social initiatives.

For this exemplary career and his outstanding leadership, he has been awarded more than ten prizes and distinctions. In recognition of his merits, he was inducted as a Knight of the Order of Ivorian Merit on 5 August 2022 by the Grand Chancellery of Côte d'Ivoire