Can dynamic agroforestry lead to a decent income for cocoa farmers in Ghana?

Farmers' experiences in the early years of DAF

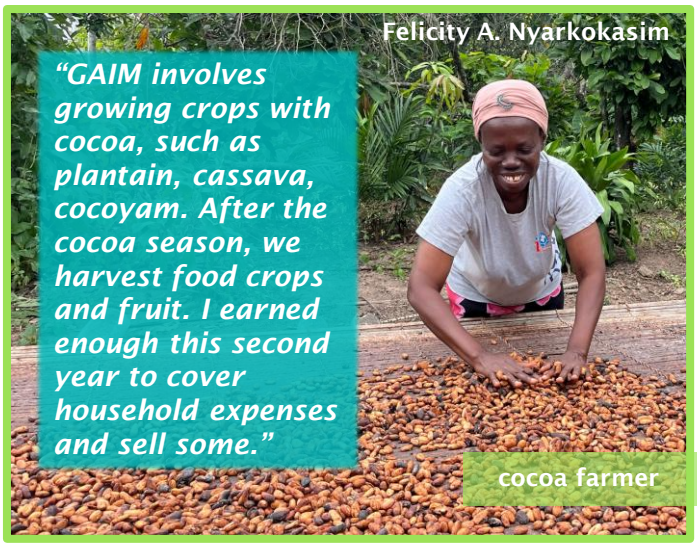
Dynamic agroforestry (DAF) is promoted as a way of creating more resilient cocoa farming systems. In Ghana, through projects like GAIM and Sankofa, Fairtrade cooperatives support cacao farmers to adopt and implement DAF via stakeholder involvement, technical support and social and financial inclusion. The living income benchmark for rural households is estimated at around 3 euros per person per day, highlighting the income gap many cocoa farmers face.



Motivations and first "benefits"

Farmers describe DAF as building on familiar practices while improving how they work the land. They are interested in learning how to diversify crops, plant trees and improve soil management. For many, DAF responds to concerns about food, income stability, health, climate and the future of their farms and families.

From the outset, farmers know, and are made aware, that DAF does not generate immediate cocoa income. In the first 1-3 years, food production is the most immediate benefit. Crops are mainly used for household consumption, reducing the need to buy food when cash is scarce. Some farmers sell crops to cover basic expenses or bridge difficult periods between cocoa seasons.



Economic reality in the first years

Establishing a DAF plot requires time, labour and initial investment. Labour demands are high, especially for installation and regular weeding.

At the same time, cocoa trees do not yet generate income. Farmers must balance work on DAF plots with other work, often under conditions of limited cash-flow and competing labour needs. This creates trade-offs: how to pay for labour, how to maintain new plots alongside existing fields and how to cope with seasonal and climate pressures.

To ease these constraints, subsidised development projects, through the cooperatives, provides free planting material, technical support and labour assistance during installation. This reduces risks and allows farmers to start.

Indicative cost of DAF installation (1 ha)	
Land clearing	500€
Inputs	960€
Planting material	200€
Estimated total:	1,660€

Source: GAIM, 2025

On average, a starting DAF farmer sells the equivalent of 30 euros' worth of diversified crops per acre in year one

Source: GAIM, harvest study, 2025

What farmers expect for the future

Farmers see DAF as a long-term investment. Over time, they expect DAF to provide food from their land and generate income from cocoa and other crops.

Trees are seen as future assets. Improved soils and shade are expected to support productivity and reduce exposure to climate risks. Skills and knowledge are also considered a form of "gain".

When does DAF lead to income?

DAF can improve income over time, but only when farmers are able to stay engaged long enough for benefits to materialise. This depends on how well labour, land access, support and timing align with farmers' realities across seasons.

DAF works when farmers can move forward without having to risk everything at once

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