



## Eight farmer cooperatives join the Upcocoa Project

**Yaounde, Cameroon, 1 March, 2007-** Today eight farmer organisations of cacao farmers in Cameroon – all registered cooperatives or cooperatives in formation – have joined the Upcocoa Project. They signed a cooperation agreement in the presence of his Excellency Mr Luc Magloire MBARGA ATANGANA, Cameroon's Minister of Trade.

The Upcocoa Project aims at creating a professional, market-oriented and sustainable cocoa business for a considerable number of farmers. This involves addressing problems in areas such as marketing, institutional and social capacities, quality management, productivity and sustainable cultivation methods. The project will work with the eight cooperatives, now comprising app. 1600 farmers with a view to realising considerable growth in members and tons of cocoa involved.

According to Mr Atangana Mbarga, there has been no lack of good ideas about cocoa marketing but what fails is convincing practice. The Upcocoa Project is strongly market-oriented. As Minister of Trade he finds this highly appreciable. This is exactly what the farmers and the country need.

The Upcocoa Project is a multi-stakeholder project representing different links in the international cocoa supply chain. The project is financed by a subsidy from the Cocoa Buffer Fund of the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture (LNV) and by in-kind contributions of ADM Cocoa B.V., Masterfoods B.V./Mars Inc. and IITA/STCP. The project is managed by the Institute of Sustainable Commodities (ISCOM), a Dutch NGO working on sustainable chain management in different African countries. Main adviser is RIAS, a consultancy organisation within the Dutch-based Rabobank.

The cooperatives (in formation) signing the cooperation agreement are: GROUPEX (Ayo), SOCACEN (Ombessa), SOCAMAK (Ngoumou), SOCOAP- LN (Okola), SOCOCAMA (Mfou), SOCOPA (Nyep, par Akoeman), SOCOPLAUCOM (Mengang), SOCOPROCAON (Ngomedzap).

These farmer organisations constitute the Upcocoa Consortium of Cooperatives in Cameroon (the UCCC). Two representatives of the UCCC will be members of the project's Management Steering Committee (MSC).

The Upcocoa Project sets out to upgrade all eight cooperatives (in formation) into sustainable business organisations. As most of the cooperatives (in formation) are at a very beginning stage of development, this will require substantial change before comprising a viable business case. However, the four-year project is run by a strong international partnership of dedicated organisations with a strong focus on market requirements. This makes the project a promising endeavour and a sign of hope, especially for the small-scale farmers in the Cameroonian cocoa sector.

The sales under the umbrella of the project will be done by a central sales organisations which is owned by the participating cooperatives. Financing is an essential part of this. A financing pilot is envisaged to take place in the course of 2007.

Further benefits deriving from the Upcocoa Project are capacity building especially by training, improved cultivation and logistics, improved health & safety procedures and last but not least improved financial income for the individual farmer.

For more information on the UPCOCO project: [www.iscom.nl/upcocoa](http://www.iscom.nl/upcocoa)