

**TERMS OF REFERENCE
AND TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS**

I. General information

Assignment name	Technical Assistance in order to Strengthening the Cocoa sector in Costa Rica, in productive processes, partnerships and market access
Beneficiary	Expertise France – Green Transition Project in Costa Rica
Country	Costa Rica
Total estimated	430 days/expert (12 months)

Context and description of the green transition project in Costa Rica

1) Presentation of the French experience

Expertise France is a public agency of France designated as the inter-ministerial actor of international technical cooperation, subsidiary of the group "Agence Française de Développement (AFD group)". It is the second largest government agency in Europe in this sector, designing and implementing projects that sustainably strengthen public policies in developing and emerging countries; intervenes in key areas of development such as governance, health, education and environment and contributes together with its partners to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

2) Project context

Costa Rica is a strategic partner of the European Union in Latin America and the Caribbean, especially within the framework of the implementation of the Global Gateway strategy and to attract new European investments to Central America. As a global leader in decarbonization, conservation, and biodiversity, Costa Rica is an unwavering ally of the European Green Deal and EU climate policies. In this context, the European Union wishes to support Costa Rica's green transition efforts in line with the European Green Deal, to catalyze Costa Rica's progress towards sustainable production and a circular bioeconomy.

In view of the potential commercial benefits and to reduce urban-rural inequality gaps, the Costa Rican government wants to accelerate and expand the transition toward biobased inputs, certification, and organic production, low-carbon value chains and a more circular approach to agriculture. The government is specifically considering the EU's experience in this field to align its practices with *the EU regulatory and trade framework. The EU support will promote fully sustainable practices in line with the goals of the EU's Farm to Fork strategy and circular economy.* Activities in this area are expected to increase trade flows between the EU and the Czech Republic, as well as effective implementation of the EU-Czech Association Agreement and EU trade rules (EDRU, eco-certification...).

3) Project presentation

A pioneer country in the fight against climate change and the preservation of biodiversity, Costa Rica has set itself the goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. Following the recent government change (2026), new priorities have been identified at the national level: renewable energy, electric transport, blue economy and bioeconomy. The AFD Group supports the country in this trajectory and therefore supports the implementation of the "National Decarbonization Plan" as well as the implementation of the strategy "Sustainable Agroindustries". Both topics benefited from a public policy loan by AFD, along with technical assistance to facilitate dialogue with the Costa Rican institutions involved.

The Group's agencies are pursuing other cooperative actions on sustainable mobility (electrification of the transport sector), low-emission agriculture, climate governance and sustainable regional planning (and other issues such as social inclusion, cybersecurity, fighting global threats and organized crime...).

This project aims to support Costa Rica in its green transition towards a sustainable agricultural model and the development of the circular bioeconomy, relying on the mobilization of the local and European private sector, **aligned with the EU Global Gateway strategy**.

The project is structured around three main axes:

- Support small and medium-sized agricultural producers in the implementation of sustainable production models;
- Develop the bio-input sector at the national level;
- Support agricultural sectors prioritized in access to export markets, particularly European ones (compliance with European regulations on combating deforestation organic certification, etc.)

The project offers interesting possibilities of synergies with the already mentioned actions on the topics of decarbonization and "Sustainable Agroindustries", as well as with the Dialogues Country actions implemented by EF in Costa Rica as part of the EUROCLIMA program.

Expertise France has been selected by the European Union Delegation in Costa Rica to carry out the design and implementation of the project.

II. Context and justification of the need

The cocoa sector in Costa Rica has significant potential to foster inclusive business development and sustainable production strategies, in social, economic, and environmental terms. Cocoa is a viable crop under agroforestry schemes; it has cultural and historical roots in the territories and represents a way of life for a significant number of farming families. At the same time, it generates the possibility of creating small-scale business initiatives with links to high-value national and international markets, in which Costa Rican cocoa is considered "fine or aromatic", represents a window of opportunity to access differentiated niches.

The plantation and production of cocoa dates back to colonial times. Around the 17th century, cultivation became one of the country's main export products, however, over the years its importance in exports decreased considerably.

There have been three cocoa producing areas in Costa Rica: the Caribbean Huetar, Northern Huetar and Brunca; for years, its production was mainly oriented to export markets in Europe and the United States. Unfortunately, in the late 1970s, the incidence of the fungus *Monilia* (*Moniliophthora roreri*) affected cocoa plantations considerably. In addition to that, low market prices and the absence of high-

productivity genetic material resistant to this disease led many producers to switch to other non-traditional crops, decreasing the range in hectares and quantity produced.

According to the last National Census of Agriculture (CENAGRO, 2014), there are 3,041 farms with a total area of 3,170 hectares, that is an average of 1.05 hectares per farm. The Caribbean zone recorded 40% of the total hectares with 1,216 hectares, followed by the North zone with 23% of the total (594 hectares) and the third place was for the South zone with 19% (573 hectares). 90% of cocoa production is concentrated in small producers in rural territories.

In 2017, the Executive Secretariat for Planning of the Agricultural Sector (SEPSA) made an adjustment to the data of CENAGRO, eliminating those areas with scattered cocoa plants, determining a number of 1441 farms, representing a planted area of 3,286.6 hectares (where 79% are less than 2 hectares and only 2% exceed 10 ha; of these 2,672.4 hectares, 81% were in production stage).

The National Cocoa Plan, approved by agreement of the National Council of Agriculture No. 03-03-19, dated March 21, 2019, has the vision to increase the competitiveness and sustainability of the national cocoa chain, promote an efficient and equitable distribution of the benefits generated by this activity among all stakeholders involved, through work in five links of the agrochain: inputs and services; production; processing; marketing and consumption in the three main cocoa regions of the country, namely: Huetar Caribe, Huetar Norte and Brunca.

This consultancy seeks to contribute to this national sectoral plan, supporting processes already initiated by MAG (Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería) that involve the participation of producers, associations, private companies and academic institutions, organized through regional coordination platforms in the northern regions of Huetar and the Caribbean of Huetar and seeking to structure a new platform in the region of Brunca, with most farms located in the cantons of Golfito, Corredores, Coto Brus and Osa; Piedras Blancas, San Vito, Ciudad Neily, Puerto Jimenez. At the level of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, there are officials responsible for providing support in the cocoa sector.

Coordination platforms for the cocoa sector in Costa Rica

The Caribbean Huetar region is the first in cocoa production in Costa Rica with farms located in the cantons of Limón, Talamanca, Cahuita, Matina and Siquirres, followed by the Northern Huetar region, which includes small farms in the cantons of Upala, Guatuso and finally Los Chiles.

These platforms, convened to achieve some strategic results, such as:

- 1) Organize small farmers around cocoa production.
- 2) Improve the productivity of plantations and promote value added to cocoa production.
- 3) Improve market access, based on the quality of Costa Rican cocoa.
- 4) Strengthening local farmers' associations.
- 5) Promote access to sources of finance
- 6) Seek innovative technologies to improve post-harvest processes for cocoa production, technology transfer and even achieve consolidated business strategies to access new markets.

Based on this experience, cocoa coordination platforms allow horizontal relationship, participation and knowledge exchange between farmers and traders, fostering a collaborative environment and public-private dynamics. Promote self-governance by participants who define how to work, addressing common problems and obstacles.

These, are governance strategies for the sector, converging producers, academia, collectors and marketers; it meets once a month, led by producers and the academic sector specialized in cocoa, the

ITCR (Costa Rica Technological Institute) guides as "ad honorem" facilitator, continuing this work actively. The agenda of these platforms, deals with issues of transfer of agronomic technology related to the management of cocoa cultivation; if producers need updated information on marketing issues, they meet at UNED or at the AEA in UPALA. In Guatuso they meet at the Municipality of Guatuso or the domicile of any farmer who has availability. Platforms focused on the primary production process, to market in "baba" (mucilage).

As for the number of farmers, the Caribbean Huetar region has 827 producers; Northern Huetar has 443 and Brunca region 244, distributed dispersedly and most of them, combining different crops and livestock (most of them raising small animals), within family production systems.

Among the main challenges, cocoa production in Costa Rica faces similar problems to improve quality and yields, such as:

- To plant new and better genetic varieties, resistant to pests and diseases but meeting the quality needs of markets that need access.
- Increase density per hectare in plantations (which has a direct impact on yields)
- Best agricultural practices (soil enrichment and fertilization, pest/fungal control, pruning, shading, etc.), fertilizer management based on the production of the plantation, incorporating bioinputs as a strategy for constant improvement of production processes, helping to increase the efficiency of planting, without relying solely on chemical inputs.
- Post-harvest processes (fermentation, drying, storage, packaging)
- Added value: cocoa bean processing, by-products, biomass utilization, etc.
- Access to common agricultural and agro-industrial development services (e.g. processing centers, training programs, certified cocoa nurseries, etc.)
- Access to credit and financing services.
- Better productive/entrepreneurial articulation between farmers and along the value chain.

III. Objectives and desired results

General objective

Support the strengthening of the cocoa sector in Costa Rica by providing technical assistance to consolidate regional coordination platforms, strengthen the capacities of key stakeholders, and facilitate the identification of opportunities for sustainable production and improved access to European markets.

To achieve this objective, the Contractor shall:

- Provide technical assistance and capacity-building to the existing regional coordination platforms in the Huetar Caribe and Huetar Norte regions;
- Support the establishment and operationalization of a regional coordination platform in the Brunca region;
- Facilitate participatory processes to strengthen the technical, organizational and coordination capacities of strategic stakeholders across the cocoa value chain, including primary production, post-harvest management, processing, marketing, and access to European markets.

Expected results

Result 1: A comprehensive diagnosis of the cocoa sector has been completed and validated (existing platforms in both Huetar regions have an initial diagnostic, but Brunca region has disperse information).

Result 2: Regional Cocoa coordination platforms have updated strategic and operational plans (Northern Huetar and Caribbean Huetar).

Result 3: A new coordination platform has been established and is operational in the Brunca region.

Result 4: Producer organizations in the three regions have been trained and supported.

Result 5: Technical guidance materials and action plans on sustainability standards and EU market requirements have been developed and disseminated.

Result 6: A portfolio of commercial opportunities and strategic partnerships have been identified and presented to sector stakeholders.

IV. Description of the assignment

1) Planned activities

The service provider shall hold inception meetings with MAG and Expertise France as well as read and analyze existing information in order to perform the following activities:

Perimeter of the activities for all the phases: the mission will mainly focus on the “Brunca”, “Northern Huetar”, and “Caribbean Huetar Regions”, with some activities in San José and at national level.

Phase 0 – Inception and Planning

The contractor shall:

- Review existing documentation related to the cocoa sector.
- Hold inception meetings with Expertise France, MAG and key stakeholders.
- Contact each platform's responsible and present the mission.
- Develop a detailed implementation methodology.
- Prepare the inception report and work plan.
- Propose an adjusted calendar of the mission

Phase I – Cocoa Sector Assessment for the 3 regions (mentioned above)

The contractor shall:

- Conduct a comprehensive mapping of cocoa stakeholders, taking advance of existing information and field visits to the cocoa-producing regions.
- Assess productive, technical and commercial constraints.
- Identify opportunities for strengthening the value chain.
- Analyze existing institutional support mechanisms.
- Evaluate opportunities related to European market access (market requirements, certifications' criteria's).
- Identify needs related to sustainability and green deal compliance.
- Present the main conclusions of the "cocoa sector assessment" to each platform/ regions (could be through workshops)

Phase II – Strengthening Partnerships and Sector Governance (for producers, cooperatives, institutions and private sector actors)

The contractor shall:

- Support existing cocoa sector coordination platforms (Northern and Caribbean region), this support will need to be discuss and detailed with each platform;
- Support organization of a new regional platform in Brunca region, through assemblies, workshops and learning events.
- Facilitate stakeholder dialogue processes.
- Promote participation of indigenous communities and women producers.
- Develop recommendations for long-term sector governance
- For each platform prepare the **diagnosis of governance**: mapping of actors, main governance bodies, analysis of institutional capacities, identification of obstacles and opportunities, roadmap and action plan (up to 5 years), in accordance with "the state of the governance" of each platform and if possible, propose different "governance model".

Phase III – Technical Assistance and Capacity Building adapted to each region

The contractor shall:

- Design and implement a capacity-building strategy.
- Organize regional workshops and technical events: at minimum 3 regional workshops will be launched and organized with an average of 45 participants, this numbers will be confirmed and reviewed with each platform;
- Strengthen producer organizations in sustainable production practices.
- Promote learning on climate-resilient and agroecological production systems.
- Support adoption of good agricultural practices.
- Facilitate exchange of experiences and learning processes.

Phase IV – Sustainability and Market Access

The contractor shall:

- Assess compliance gaps regarding European regulations.
- Provide technical guidance on EUDR, organic certification and sustainability requirements.
- Identify business opportunities and market trends.
- Facilitate contacts with potential buyers and commercial partners.
- Support development of commercialization strategies.
- Promote value-added and differentiated cocoa products.

Phase V – Consolidation

The contractor shall:

- Prepare “sustainability recommendations”: for instance, consolidate lessons learned about the Cocoa chain components, stakeholders’ coordination and this consultancy process, etc.
- Develop a sector strengthening roadmap.
- Organize a final workshop (to be defined at national or regional level).
- Present final recommendations to Expertise France and sector stakeholders.

Forecast anticipated deliverables

Phases	Titles	Forecast date	End date
0	Activities (non-exhaustive) Review existing documentation related to the cocoa sector, hold inception meetings with Expertise France, MAG and key stakeholders, Contact each platform’s responsible and present the mission. Develop a detailed implementation methodology, Propose an adjusted calendar of the mission Deliverable excepted (mandatory) Inception report with a working plan (D1)	Month 1	
I	Activities (non-exhaustive) Mapping of cocoa stakeholders, taking advance of existing information and field visits to the cocoa-producing regions (within the 3 main regions) Assess productive, technical and commercial constraints. Identify opportunities for strengthening the value chain. Analyze existing institutional support mechanisms. Evaluate opportunities related to European market access (market requirements, certifications’ criteria’s). Present the main conclusions of the “cocoa sector assessment” to each platform/ regions through workshops. Deliverable excepted (mandatory) Diagnostics by region (including assessment, stakeholders mapping, analysis of needs/opportunities, updated strategic and operational plans) (D2) Workshop’s presentations done for each regions, ex : power point, pdf (D3)	Month 2-4	
II	Activities (non-exhaustive) Facilitate stakeholder dialogue processes. Promote participation of indigenous communities and women producers. Develop recommendations for long-term sector governance Deliverable excepted (mandatory) Intermediate report and recommendations for incoming phases (D4) Diagnosis of governance for each platform (D5)	Month 4-6	

III	Activities (non-exhaustive) Design and implement a capacity-building strategy. Organize regional workshops and technical events: at minimum 3 regional workshops will be launched and organized with an average of 45 participants, this numbers will be confirmed and reviewed with each platform; Strengthen producer organizations in sustainable production practices. Promote learning on climate-resilient and agroecological production systems. Deliverable excepted (mandatory) Program for capacity building adapted to each regions (including training materials) (D6)	Month 6-10
IV	Activities (non-exhaustive) Assess compliance gaps regarding European regulations. Provide technical guidance on EUDR, organic certification and sustainability requirements. Identify business opportunities and market trends. Facilitate contacts with potential buyers and commercial partners. Support development of commercialization strategies. Promote value-added and differentiated cocoa products. Deliverable excepted (mandatory) Assessment document about market strategies (gaps, strategies and technical guides on access to markets) (D7)	
V	Deliverable excepted (mandatory) Final Report including results, conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations for a strategic roadmap of this sector (D8) Organization of a final workshop (conclusion of the mission) Presentation of the final workshop (D9) presentation of the main conclusions of all the studies and diagnostics done (power point for instance)	Month 10-12

2) Coordination

The consulting firm shall designate a Team Leader.

The assignment will be supervised by Expertise France through the Green Transition Project team in Costa Rica.

Technical coordination will be ensured in close collaboration with:

- Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG);
- Relevant public institutions;
- Producer organizations;
- Cocoa sector platforms;
- Other stakeholders identified during implementation.

Regular coordination meetings will be organized throughout the assignment and validation of deliverables will be carried out by Expertise France.

V. Place, duration and terms of performance

1) Implementation period: The assignment shall be implemented over a period of twelve (12) months from the date of contract signature, with a possible of three months of tacit renewal

2) Start date: Indicative start date: October 2026.

3) **End date:** October 2027.

4) **Maximum amount assigned:** 200.000 USD (not including VAT)

5) **Effective duration per assignment:** The assignment is estimated at approximately 430 expert-days distributed among the proposed team of experts throughout the implementation period.

Schedule/program:

The provisional programme for assignment implementation is as follows:

Phases	Place	Period	Duration (expert/ days)
0	San José and cocoa-producing regions	Month 1	30
I	San José and cocoa-producing regions	Months 2-4	40
II	Huetar Caribe, Huetar Norte and Brunca regions	Months 4-6	70
III	Brunca region	Month 6-8	120
IV	Cocoa-producing regions	Months 8-10	110
V	National level	Months 10-12	60
Total			430

VI. Required expertise and profile

1) Number of experts per assignment:

The consulting firm shall propose a multidisciplinary team composed of at least four (4) experts, to achieve expected results on time. One expert shall be designated as Team Leader and main contact point for Expertise France.

2) Profile of the designated expert(s) responsible for contract execution

A. Qualifications and skills

A.1 Team Leader

- Advanced university degree (Master's degree or equivalent) in Agronomy, Rural Development, Agricultural Economics, International Development, Environmental Sciences, Agribusiness Management or related disciplines.
- Excellent project management, facilitation and coordination skills.
- Strong analytical and report-writing capacities.
- Excellent communication and stakeholder engagement skills.
- Proven ability to work with public institutions, producer organizations and international cooperation agencies.
- Fluency in Spanish is mandatory.
- Professional proficiency in English is mandatory.
- Knowledge of French will be considered an asset

A.2 Additional Key Experts

The proposed team should collectively demonstrate expertise in:

- Cocoa production systems and value chains specialist.
- Agricultural extension and capacity building specialist.
- Sustainable agriculture and agro ecological practices.
- Climate change adaptation and resilience.
- Market access, commercialization and European regulatory frameworks applicable to agricultural exports.
- Governance Specialist; Facilitation of multi-stakeholder dialogue processes.
- Experiences in training of producers

The consulting firm can propose additional profiles.

B. General professional experience

The consulting firm shall demonstrate:

- At least ten (10) years of professional experience in agricultural development projects.
- Proven experience in value chain development programs.
- Experience working with producer organizations and rural communities.
- Experience implementing projects financed by international cooperation agencies, development banks or multilateral organizations.
- Demonstrated experience in Latin America and preferably in Central America.

C. Specific professional experience

The consulting firm and proposed team shall demonstrate:

- Proven experience in cocoa sector development.
- Experience conducting sector assessments, diagnostics and value chain analyses.
- Experience facilitating public-private dialogue and governance platforms.
- Experience designing and implementing capacity-building programs for agricultural producers.
- Knowledge of sustainability standards, certification schemes and European market requirements, including EUDR and organic certification systems.
- Experience supporting access to national and international markets.
- Experience preparing strategic roadmaps, action plans and policy recommendations.
- Experience working with indigenous populations and vulnerable rural communities will be considered an asset.

VII. Assignment reports

The Contractor shall submit all deliverables in electronic format (Word, Excel, PowerPoint and PDF, as applicable) in Spanish.

The following reports shall be submitted:

- Inception Report.
- Diagnostic and Assessment Report.
- Periodic Progress Reports.
- Program of Capacity Building and Technical Assistance Reports.
- Diagnosis of governance for each platform
- Market Access and Sustainability Report.
- Strategic Roadmap for the Cocoa Sector.
- Final Technical Report.

All reports shall be subject to review and approval by Expertise France. Comments provided by Expertise France shall be addressed by the Contractor before final validation.

VIII. Monitoring-evaluation

Performance indicators - Deliverables

Deliverables	Immediate effects	Intermediate effects	Verification sources
D1 Inception report with a working plan	Work plan validated ; Consultancy methodology	Efficient project implementation	Approved report
D2 Diagnostics documents by region	Sector information consolidated	Better strategic decision-making	Diagnostic report
D3 Workshop's presentations			Power point or pdf presentations
D4 Intermediate report and recommendations for incoming phases	Actions, progress and recommendations reported	Improved sector coordination	Meeting minutes, reports
D5 Diagnosis of governance for each platform	Evaluate the strength and weakness of each region in terms of governance		Mapping of the governance by regions
D6 Program of capacity building and technical assistance (including training materials)	Producers and organizations trained	Increased technical capacities	Attendance lists, evaluations
D7 Assessment document (gaps, strategies and technical guides on access to markets)	Compliance gaps identified, list of requirements to access UE Market	Improved readiness for export markets	Technical reports
D8 Final report including conclusions and recommendations for a strategic roadmap of this sector, the target reach for each expected results	Sector priorities and recommendations agreed	Long-term sector strengthening	Validated roadmap
D9 Presentation of the final workshop, main conclusion of all the studies			

IX. Practical information

The assignment will be implemented throughout the principal cocoa-producing regions of Costa Rica, including but not limited to the Huetar Caribe, Huetar Norte and Brunca regions.

The Contractor shall be responsible for all logistical arrangements necessary for the implementation of the assignment, including travel, accommodation, workshops, stakeholder consultations and field activities.

- Submission of the following is required for the application and evaluation process:
 - ❖ Document with the formal presentation of the company.
 - ❖ **Technical proposal** for the development of consulting, clearly describing the methodology to be used for the fulfillment of the products described, a proposal of specific activities and the time required for their development.
 - ❖ **Financial proposal at all costs**, which should include: fees, workshop development, mobilizations, travel expenses, use of equipment, taxes, etc. In addition, a breakdown of the costs for the days of work required by each member of the consulting team is requested.
 - ❖ **The CVs of the leader and team of the 4 experts** required for the development of the consulting, including the required experience and that can be verified.
 - ❖ **Income statements for the last fiscal year available**, showing the handling of amounts equal to or greater than USD 170,000.

Note: For the application to the selection process of the consulting company, the document "Tender Rules" must be considered (which is located within the file of the process).

The financial proposal shall include all costs associated with the implementation of the assignment, including professional fees, travel expenses, workshops, materials, administrative costs and any other expenditure necessary to achieve the objectives of the assignment.

All intellectual property rights derived from the assignment shall belong exclusively to Expertise France.

The Contractor shall comply with Expertise France's ethical standards, conflict of interest requirements, data protection provisions and visibility guidelines applicable to projects financed by the European Union.

X. Some baseline costs required for the budget estimate

Based on previous experiences in the platforms of the Huetar regions, some estimated costs for workshops are presented, considering an average of 45 participants per workshop (estimated costs in Costa Rican Colones):

- Transport of participants: approximately 450,000 per session (or 500-600 per kilometre, as appropriate).
- Catering:
 - General reference: 450,000 per session
 - In individual activities: 8,500 per person, including breakfast (3,500) and lunch (5,000).
 - Accommodation: where applicable, at the current rate for each event location.