

INTERVENTION HIGHLIGHT



Quality beans, quality 'chocolat'

Gaston Chocolat's growth in premium cacao markets

With an established factory and iconic store front on Port Vila's main street, Gaston Chocolat's close relationship with its network of rural cacao suppliers made it an obvious choice for a partnership with PHAMA Plus. The local chocolate producer sources dried cacao beans from Santo, Malekula and Epi islands. Gaston produces around 28,000 chocolate bars per year, which it sells primarily in the domestic market. The company also sells to international markets such as Australia, New Zealand, Japan, USA, and more recently a trial shipment to France.

At a glance

- PHAMA Plus has had a long-standing partnership with Gaston Chocolat to improve quality and invest in its supply chain to help it succeed in premium export markets.
- The collaboration supported the company to source high quality cacao beans by obtaining two gateway certifications: HACCP certificate and B Corp.
- These certifications helped Gaston Chocolat maintain existing markets and access new export markets.

Adapting to a new business model

Gaston Chocolat has adapted its business practices since initiating its partnership with PHAMA Plus. In addition to investing in the modernisation of its processing facility to adhere to HACCP and B Corp standards, Gaston Chocolat introduced a customised design for its solar dryers using local materials for more farmers to adapt. In the reporting period, Gaston Chocolat further invested its own resources to set up additional solar dryers and fermentation boxes in Pinalum to increase the production of high-quality cacao beans which can be sold to premium markets.

Cacao farmers, who supply the chocolatier, now have a better understanding of bean quality and the importance of proper fermentation and drying. The improved quality of their beans has been fetching a price premium from agent farmers and helped Gaston Chocolat sell its chocolate bars to premium markets. Gaston's HACCP and B Corp certifications have also attracted new buyers. The company's farmer network has expanded by 90 additional farming households with its total reach at 154 households. The company also recorded a remarkable 232% growth in cacao exports since June 2022, attributed to the partnership with PHAMA Plus.

It's a little-known secret of chocolate making that the final flavours of high-quality chocolate are developed in the field through the cacao bean fermentation and drying process. We decided from day one to work with the cacao growers and handle the whole harvest and post-harvest process, from the fruits on the trees to turning them into chocolate bars.

- Olivier Fernandez,
Gaston Chocolat co-founder