



COCABO – Panama

COCABO is Panama's oldest cocoa cooperative and has been a PRONATEC partner since 2001. The partnership helped connect COCABO's good-quality organic cocoa with the European market and supported the cooperative in achieving Fairtrade certification. Based in Bocas del Toro, COCABO brings together around 1,500 smallholder members, most of them from indigenous communities. Together, PRONATEC and COCABO work to strengthen quality, traceability and reliable market access for organic and fair trade cocoa from Panama.

Founded in 1952, Cooperativa de Servicios Múltiples Cacao Bocatereña COCABO R.L. is deeply rooted in north-western Panama. Most of its members belong to the Ngöbe and Buglé peoples, whose autonomous region was established in 1997 after long-standing efforts to protect ancestral lands from resource exploitation and environmental degradation.

Today, COCABO's members cultivate around 5,000 hectares in Bocas del Toro, a landscape shaped by rainforest, high biodiversity and small-scale farming. Many farms are located in the buffer zone of Parque La Amistad, a protected rainforest area shared by Panama and Costa Rica and recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Cocoa farming in this region is closely linked to local agroforestry traditions. Cacao trees grow alongside shade trees and other crops, helping to protect biodiversity and preserve soil fertility. Most farming families handle fermentation and drying themselves. This decentralised post-harvest process is part of the character of cocoa from Bocas del Toro, while also making quality assurance more demanding for the cooperative.



LATEST FAIRTRADE PROJECTS

- **Technical assistance** and educational training for members
- **Harvest materials** and tools that help members during the main and mid-crop harvest
- **Support for families** of deceased members in times of hardship
- **Investment** in a small restaurant project as an additional income opportunity

Here's how COCABO supports smallholder families

- **More secure income** through harvest pre-financing and reliable purchasing
- **Better cocoa quality** through support with fermentation, drying and quality assurance
- **Practical training** and technical advice for farm management
- **Farm rehabilitation** and tree nursery initiatives to improve yields over time

Here's what COCABO stands for

- Conserving biodiversity and keeping protected rainforest areas inhabited
 - Strong participation of women and indigenous communities in the cooperative
 - A clear commitment to no deforestation and small-scale agroforestry
 - Commercialisation of single-origin cocoa from Bocas del Toro
 - Democratic cooperative structures and long-term partnerships
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Partnership built on long-term commitment

When PRONATEC and COCABO began working together in 2001, the cooperative was already organically certified and produced good-quality cocoa, but had only limited access to international organic markets. For PRONATEC, this provided a strong basis for cooperation, while for COCABO the partnership opened up access to the European organic market. PRONATEC also supported the cooperative in achieving Fairtrade certification. Since then, the partnership has focused on reliable sourcing relationships, single-origin cocoa from Bocas del Toro and the continued development of quality and traceability.

PRONATEC's cooperation with COCABO has included purchasing different cocoa qualities, harvest pre-financing, support for working capital, farm rehabilitation and improvements in fermentation and drying infrastructure. These practical measures help the cooperative buy cocoa from its members, manage quality and prepare export-ready cocoa for the international market.

COCABO at a glance

- Founded in 1952
 - Fairtrade certified since 2001
 - Around 1'500 members
 - More than 50% women members
 - Around 5'000 hectares under cultivation
 - Based in Changuinola, Bocas del Toro, Panama
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