



PACER Plus

Pacific Success Stories

November | 2024



pacerplus.org

Pacific Success Stories

November 2024

The PACER Plus Implementation Unit is funded by the Governments of Australia and New Zealand.

© PACER Plus Implementation Unit (PPIU) 2024

All rights for commercial/for profit reproduction or translation, in any form, reserved. PPIU authorises the partial reproduction or translation of this material for educational or research purposes, provided that PPIU are properly acknowledged. Permission to reproduce the document and/or translate in whole, in any form, whether for commercial/for profit or non-profit purposes, must be requested in writing. All images in this document are the property of PPIU or supplied by the interviewees.

PACER Plus Parties



Contents

- 6** **Message from the Head of the PPIU**
- 8** **Empowering Women Entrepreneurs**
Vanuatu's Lapita Café's Journey to HACCP Certification
- 10** **Golden Success**
How PACER Plus Helped Niue Honey Thrive
- 14** **Ocean Depths To International Tables**
SolTuna's Journey of Triumph with PACER Plus
- 16** **From Cacao Beans to Fruity Bars**
Cathliro Commodities expands product line
- 20** **Vanuatu's Cacao Revolution**
PACER Plus helps chocolate dreams soar



Message from the Head of the PACER Plus Implementation Unit

The Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) Plus was envisioned as a tool to strengthen regional trade and foster economic cooperation across the Pacific. Central to its success is the role of the private sector, whose growth and dynamism are crucial in driving intra-Pacific trade and realizing the benefits of this agreement.

From the outset, PACER Plus's Development and Economic Cooperation (DEC) Work Programme has focused on enhancing the enabling environment for trade. This has involved regulatory reforms, capacity building for public officials, and strengthening information systems—all with the aim of

supporting Pacific Island Countries (PICs) to implement the Agreement effectively.

However, while the DEC Work Programme originally addressed trade and investment broadly, the past three years (2021-2024) have shown an increasing demand for tailored support to the private sector. PACER Plus parties have recognized that empowering businesses to export, access new markets, and engage in regional and global trade is essential for sustainable economic growth. This realization has led to a strategic shift towards providing targeted technical assistance to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and other private sector players.



These efforts, alongside strengthened policy and legislative frameworks, are slowly but steadily creating the conditions for the private sector to thrive.

Through early implementation efforts, we have worked to remove non-tariff barriers, modernize trade systems, and improve access to critical information.

These efforts, alongside strengthened policy and legislative frameworks, are slowly but steadily creating the conditions for the private sector to thrive. Yet, as we all know, changes to the enabling environment can take time to fully materialize. In the meantime, we've responded by directly supporting businesses to accelerate their entry into new markets and take advantage of the opportunities PACER Plus presents.

This publication highlights just a few of the success stories from the private sector across the PACER Plus parties. These stories demonstrate how SMEs, with the right support, can overcome barriers to growth and unlock new trade opportunities.

As we look to the future, it is clear that the private sector remains a cornerstone of PACER Plus's success. Without their active involvement, the long-term vision of this Agreement—prosperous, resilient Pacific economies—may not be fully realized.

Over the past three years, the PACER Plus Implementation Unit (PPIU) has focused on equipping businesses with the tools they need to meet international export standards, increase production, and promote their products more effectively. This work will continue as we aim to empower high-potential enterprises to thrive in regional and international markets.

With continued engagement and support, PACER Plus will help unlock new opportunities for trade, strengthen regional cooperation, and build more resilient Pacific economies.

Roy Lagolago

Head of the PACER Plus
Implementation Unit



Empowering Women Entrepreneurs

Vanuatu's Lapita Café's Journey to HACCP Certification

A widely respected community leader, Votausi Mackenzie-Reur wears many hats. One she dons proudly is that of founder of Lapita Café, an innovative and fast-growing food manufacturing and catering company in Port Vila, Vanuatu. Lapita Café is breaking barriers and reshaping the culinary landscape in Vanuatu. Lapita Café stands as a testament of advancing women's economic empowerment in the Pacific.

Lapita Café, the pioneering gluten-free cassava flour producer in Vanuatu, has achieved a milestone by obtaining the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) certification. The journey, however, was no walk in the park. Battling the aftermath of cyclones that hampered construction and overcoming numerous challenges, Lapita Café emerged triumphant.

Ms. Mackenzie-Reur's commitment to excellence led Lapita Café to become the first gluten-free cassava flour producer in Vanuatu.

with HACCP certification, setting a high standard for others to follow. The certification ensures the highest food safety standards, making Lapita Café's products not only delicious but also safe for consumers.

"Lapita Cafe's journey to be able to obtain its HACCP certification started in 2021, so it's been a long time. But we were thankful to PACER Plus because they came in and were able to fund our HACCP certification towards the end of 2023. We're immensely grateful to PACER Plus for supporting us in this," said Ms. Mackenzie-Reur.

The success story didn't unfold in isolation. The PACER Plus, in collaboration with the Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Australia Vanuatu Governance for Growth program, played a pivotal role by engaging Vanuatu consulting firm Quality Solutions to develop food safety systems and coordinate a third-party audit in late 2023, a process that added an extra layer of credibility to Lapita Café's operations.

PACER Plus's support, facilitated through VCCI and Quality Solutions, extends beyond Lapita Café. Four local manufacturers in Vanuatu are currently benefiting from ongoing initiatives to obtain similar international certifications, enhancing Vanuatu's export advantage.

The PACER Plus Implementation Unit (PPIU) recognises the important role women play in economic development and our capacity building programs. Supporting women entrepreneurs like Ms. Mackenzie-Reur is a testament to this. Gender is mainstreamed across PPIU's operational and governance functions and across PPIU's work programme.

Lapita Café stands tall, not just as a business success but as a beacon of empowerment for women entrepreneurs. Ms. Mackenzie-Reur's resilience and her company's achievements underscore the importance of investing in women to accelerate progress and foster economic growth in the Pacific.



...we were thankful to PACER Plus because they came in and were able to fund our HACCP certification.

Golden Success: How PACER Plus Helped Niue Honey Thrive

From the world's last parasite-free bees to international acclaim, the journey of Niue Honey is as unique as the taste of its product. Discover how PACER Plus supported this Niuean company to continue buzzing during a global crisis.



From the last healthy, clean bee colony* on Earth.



PACER Plus really came through for us. They helped us get our bottles made in time, allowing Niue Honey to re-engage with the market.

Niue Honey, recently named Best International Honey at the United Kingdom’s 85th National Honey Show — dubbed the Oscars of world honey — is not just any honey. It’s certified organic, unpasteurised, and boasts a complex palate of caramel and malt. But behind its success lies a story of resilience, innovation, and international collaboration that goes beyond taste.

At the core of Niue Honey’s triumph is its unique origin: Niue is home to the world’s last known significant population of Italian honeybees, completely free from diseases and parasites that plague bee colonies elsewhere. These bees, *Apis mellifera ligustica*, are responsible for most global pollination, and their isolation on Niue has preserved their purity, making them a key asset in global efforts to safeguard bee populations.

However, it wasn’t always smooth sailing. Like many businesses across the Pacific, Niue Honey Company faced significant challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of their biggest hurdles was securing their signature honey bottles, which had to be imported from China. With global supply chains disrupted, the company was at a standstill.

“We asked ourselves, ‘How can we present a world-class innovative product in a world-class innovative way?’: recalled Richard Duncan of Niue Honey Company. “Our unique bottles set

us apart, but when the supply from China stopped due to the lockdown, we were left scrambling for solutions. That’s when PACER Plus stepped in.”

PACER Plus provided timely assistance. Through its DEC Work Programme, PACER Plus helped Niue Honey secure the designs and models necessary to produce their bottles locally. This collaboration not only salvaged the company’s ability to package their honey but also helped them establish a new bottle manufacturer in New Zealand.

“PACER Plus really came through for us. They helped us get our bottles made in time, allowing Niue Honey to re-engage with the market. Now we have a New Zealand-based manufacturer producing our bottles, which has been a game-changer,” said Duncan.

With their packaging challenges resolved, Niue Honey quickly regained momentum in the gourmet honey market. In New Zealand, their product was already well-established, but 2024 saw their expansion into Australia, with plans to enter the United Kingdom by early 2025.

“We’re working through the final paperwork to access the UK market,” Duncan shared. “When we do, this will be the first time an agricultural product from Niue reaches the UK. It’s exciting, as our honey tells a story—not just about our bees but about Niue and the wider Pacific.”



Niue Honey is much more than a luxury product; it represents a significant contribution to agriculture and food security.

Beyond honey production, the company also exports pure, healthy queen bees to help repopulate bee colonies worldwide.

“Our bees are liquid gold,” Duncan said proudly.

“We have the opportunity to breed and export queens to other Pacific islands, supporting food security and agricultural productivity across the region.”

This sense of purpose extends beyond Niue. As Duncan explained, the company envisions creating livelihood opportunities across the Pacific by reintroducing beekeeping on other islands.

“Rebooting beekeeping as a livelihood generator, but more importantly, as a way to increase agricultural productivity — that’s a game-changer for agriculture in the region.”



Award-winning New Zealand chef Peter Gordon, a champion of Niue Honey, stumbled upon the company's product during a visit to the island.

Known as the “godfather of fusion cuisine,” Chef Gordon has since used Niue Honey in various dishes and partnered with the company to help protect Niue's unique bees through the Pacific Bee Sanctuary initiative.

With PACER Plus's support, Niue Honey is more than just a success story; it's a testament to the power of regional cooperation and resilience. As Duncan put it, “The success of Niue Honey is not just about us—it's about the Pacific, our bees, and the future of agriculture in the region.”



Award-winning New Zealand chef Peter Gordon has partnered with Niue Honey, using it in a number of his dishes.



A consumer purchases a can of SolTuna in Nuku'alofa, Tonga. With the support of the PPIU, SolTuna is now able to export to new markets in the Pacific.

From Ocean Depths to International Tables

SolTuna's Journey of Triumph with PACER Plus

For years, the Solomon Islands' pristine waters have cradled SolTuna, a leading tuna company, in their cerulean embrace. Amidst the ebb and flow of the tides, SolTuna battled daunting challenges, determined to deliver their prized tuna to the plates of Australians and New Zealanders. Their journey took a historic turn in 2020, when the Solomon Islands ratified the PACER Plus, a unique development-centered trade agreement that transformed SolTuna's struggles into triumphs.

"Before PACER Plus, SolTuna faced significant hurdles in exporting our tuna to Australia and New Zealand. Burdened by import duties, we found it hard to compete in these markets," recalled Mr. Mark Gibble, SolTuna's Business Development Manager.

Despite these barriers, SolTuna's spirit remained unyielding. Their commitment to quality and sustainability buoyed them through turbulent



Our success is not just measured in tons of tuna exported; it's measured in the lives we touch and the communities we uplift in Solomon Islands.

waters. With the ratification of PACER Plus, their efforts were not in vain. The agreement ushered in a new era, one where import duties were but a memory, paving the way for tariff-free exports.

“PACER Plus has been a game-changer. It ensures we no longer pay import duties, revitalising our exports to Australia and New Zealand,” beamed Mr. Gribble.

In 2024, SolTuna marked a new chapter in its journey with its first-ever export to Tonga with the support of PACER Plus.

“We’re grateful to the PPIU who connected us to new markets in the Pacific, namely Tonga. We were able to find a distributor with the support from PPIU and now Tongans are enjoying our products,” said Mr. Gribble.

As SolTuna expanded its operations to meet the rising demand, a ripple effect of prosperity washed over the local communities. The increased production at SolTuna meant more hands were needed to harvest, process, and package the prized tuna, creating a surge in

employment opportunities for the people.

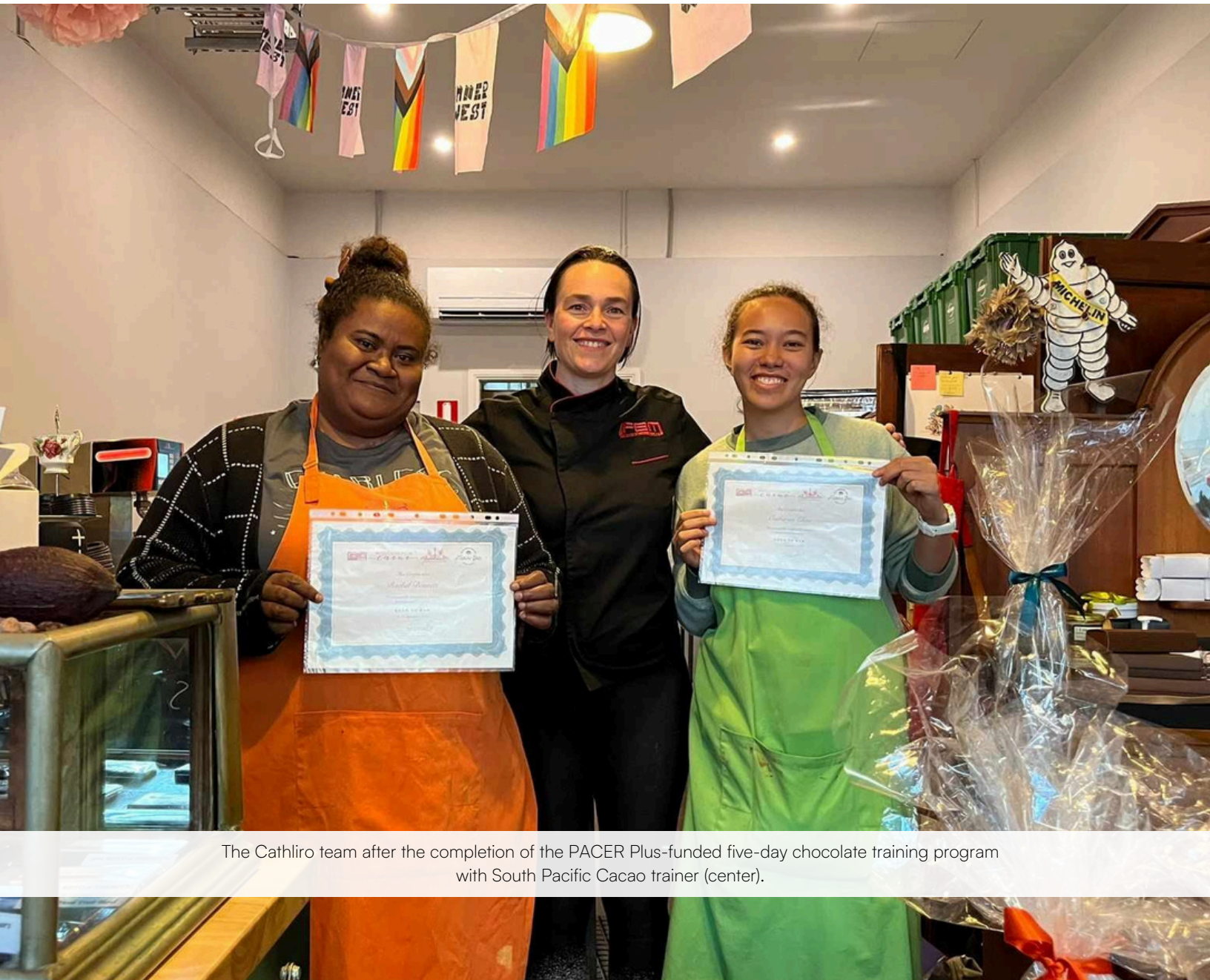
“Our success is not just measured in tons of tuna exported; it’s measured in the lives we touch and the communities we uplift in Solomon Islands. The positive impact of SolTuna’s growth goes beyond economic numbers. It’s about people, their dreams, and the collective progress of the Solomon Islands,” shared Mr. Gribble.

“The effects of PACER Plus are profound. It ensures sustainable growth for our industry. With rising demands, we’re adopting eco-friendly practices, safeguarding our marine resources for generations to come,” added Mr. Gribble. “The future is promising. PACER Plus has granted us a competitive edge. We envision expanding our operations, generating employment, and continuing to offer sustainable, high-quality tuna worldwide.”

Through tariff-free exports, SolTuna not only propels the economy forward but also safeguards the rich marine ecosystem that sustains countless livelihoods in the Solomon Islands.

From Cacao Beans to Fruity Bars

Cathliro Commodities expands product line and strengthens international market reach with a new food dehydrator



The Cathliro team after the completion of the PACER Plus-funded five-day chocolate training program with South Pacific Cacao trainer (center).



The company purchases cocoa beans from over 200 local growers, transforming these raw materials into high-quality cocoa products for export.

Cathliro Commodities, a women-led, locally owned cocoa producer and exporter in Solomon Islands, has taken a significant step forward in its operations with the recent handover of a food dehydrator machine. The equipment, officially delivered in September 2024 and funded by the PACER Plus Development and Economic Cooperation (DEC) Work Programme, is set to enhance the company's ability to produce value-added cocoa products and diversify into dried fruits. This support marks a turning point for the small business, which has become a beacon of hope for local farmers and a rising player in the international cocoa market.

Cathliro Commodities was founded by Ms. Diana Yates, a determined entrepreneur with a vision to elevate Solomon Islands' cocoa industry. Her 99-hectare cocoa farm, based in Guadalcanal, has been instrumental in connecting local farmers from nearby provinces, including Isabel and Makira, to international markets. The company purchases cocoa beans from over 200 local growers, transforming these raw materials into high-quality cocoa products for export. But the company's ambition doesn't stop there—Cathliro is diversifying its product line to include dried fruits like pineapple, banana, and pawpaw, a move that the new dehydrator will help realize.

Speaking at the handover ceremony, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade (MFAET), Mr. Collin Beck, emphasized the significance of empowering local producers like Cathliro Commodities.

“Cathliro's progress demonstrates the potential of Solomon Islands' agricultural sector, not only to enhance food security but also to build wealth from within. By empowering local farmers, Cathliro is helping them integrate meaningfully into the formal economy,” said Mr. Beck.

“We encourage everyone to support local producers—whether by drinking cocoa tea, using cocoa powder in your baking, or purchasing our new fruit-infused cocoa bars.”

The new dehydrator, Mr. Beck explained, will enable Cathliro to sustain and expand its production of high-value cocoa products, providing a boost to both domestic markets and international exports. The equipment is also expected to enhance the company's capacity to process fruits, tapping into a growing niche market for dried tropical fruits and cocoa-based products in boutique overseas markets.

For Ms. Diana Yates, the founder of Cathliro Commodities, the new equipment is a game-changer.



“This support from PACER Plus is a big win for us. We’ve been working tirelessly to grow our business and help local farmers, but this dehydrator opens up a new world of opportunities,” she said. “Now, we can diversify our products and ensure sustainability in our operations, whatever the weather. We’re able to expand our drying techniques and process a larger volume of both cocoa and fruit, which is crucial for entering new markets.”

The dehydrator will enable Cathliro to boost the production of cocoa paste, cocoa nibs, cocoa powder, cocoa tea, fruity chocolate bars, and a range of dried fruit products. These innovations are part of the company’s broader effort to move from raw material exports to high-value, finished goods that meet international standards.

PACER Plus’s support extended beyond equipment, including valuable capacity-building initiatives for Cathliro’s staff. Ms. Yates shared that staff members received both online and hands-on training, some of which took place in Australia.



Diana Yates (left), Cathliro Commodities founder, and Collin Beck (right) at the dehydrator handover.

“Our team has grown so much thanks to the training provided by PACER Plus. It’s been transformative,” she said. “The capacity-building workshops helped our staff develop new products like our fruity cocoa bars, and we’re even working on launching nutty bars soon. This progress wouldn’t have been possible without PACER Plus’s support.”

Looking ahead, Cathliro is set to improve the quality of its offerings and scale its operations to meet international export requirements. With the help of PACER Plus, Cathliro Commodities is not only elevating Solomon Islands’ cocoa industry but also providing a blueprint for local businesses to grow, innovate, and thrive in regional and global markets.





Vanuatu's Cacao Revolution

PACER Plus helps chocolate
dreams soar

What started as a passion project to highlight Vanuatu's rich cacao heritage has transformed into a thriving business for Gaston Chocolat exporting award-winning chocolate to Australia and New Zealand. But behind the success of Gaston Chocolat is a story of hard work, dedication, and the support provided by PACER Plus.

Founded by Olivier Gaston, Gaston Chocolat was born from a simple idea: to produce world-class chocolate locally in Vanuatu while showcasing the country as a premium origin for fine cacao. But turning that vision into reality came with its challenges, especially when it came to meeting international food safety standards—a necessary step to export to larger markets. That's where PACER Plus stepped in.

In collaboration with the Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Australia Vanuatu Governance for Growth program, PACER Plus engaged local consulting firm Quality



In 2023, Gaston Chocolat exported 17 tonnes of dried cacao. This year, they're on track to export 60 tonnes—almost a fourfold increase.

Solutions to help Gaston Chocolat develop food safety systems. The goal was to achieve Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) certification—a globally recognized standard that would open the doors to international trade.

For Olivier and his team, the certification was a game-changer. “The HACCP certification shows that our operation is up to international standards,” says Olivier. “This way, people can trust the product. Because our chocolate can now travel to Australia and New Zealand, we can sell the cacao on a much larger scale to chocolate makers.”

And the results speak for themselves. In 2023, Gaston Chocolat exported 17 tonnes of dried cacao. This year, they're on track to export 60 tonnes—almost a fourfold increase.

“That's almost fifteen percent of the national market, and we're quite proud of that achievement,” Olivier adds.

But Gaston Chocolat's impact goes beyond just business success. The company has built a network of 367 Ni-Vanuatu farmers, training them over the last decade to grow and harvest high-quality cacao. In 2024 alone, the farmers have been harvesting for a total of 57 days. And the rewards have been significant.

“Our farmers now earn the equivalent of twice the minimum wage by working just one day a week,” says Olivier. “Because we create jobs in the islands that pay more than the jobs in Vanuatu's capital, Port Vila, we are fighting the urban drift. We've proven that rural jobs can pay better than city jobs.”

Olivier is driven by more than just profits. “We are always conscious about looking after our staff well, respecting the culture, and considering our environmental impact,” he explains. “I want to run Gaston Chocolat sustainably, and I want everyone in the supply chain to benefit from the business and improve their standard of living.”



PACER Plus
IMPLEMENTATION UNIT