

# EXECUTIVE LEADING THE PROFESSIONAL CHARGE INSIGHT

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## Making an **IMPACT**

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# Making an **IMPACT**

Koa, the Swiss-Ghanaian start-up, was set up in order to make a real difference – founded in 2017, the company is transforming the cocoa industry through its innovative upcycling of the cocoa fruit, and is the first company in West Africa to have unlocked a new value chain around the so far discarded cocoa pulp.

**T**he company is not only producing top, natural cocoa fruit products, thereby bringing unique new ingredients to the food and beverage industry. By working closely with cocoa smallholders in Ghana, Koa reduces on-farm food waste, and generates additional farmer income, redefining sustainability and social responsibility in the industry.

**KOA**

TASTE YOUR IMPACT











The company offers a cocoa fruit juice called Koa Pure, alongside a Koa Concentrate 72° (a reduced syrupy version of the juice) and dried cocoa fruit powder for other food manufacturers, to be used in a range of products from chocolate and confectionery to ice cream or drinks. Around 90% of the output is exported, primarily to Europe, where the Swiss parent company takes care of distribution, with the remaining 10% being sold in the domestic market. Customers include major companies such as Lindt, the prime chocolate maker that is now using Koa Powder in its Excellence bars.

Daniel Otu, Koa's Operations Director, explains that the business started with just an idea when Anian Schreiber and Benjamin Kuschnik, both working in the solar energy sector at that time, co-founded Koa, believed that sustainable technology has the power to unlock new economic opportunities in West Africa. The region is home to the two largest cocoa producers in the world – with Ivory Coast and Ghana accounting for over 60% of global market, so to focus on this particular sector was a natural decision.

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## From Ghana to the world

From the beginning, the founders were clear in their objective – to create a business that is both sustainable and has a strong social and environmental aspect, important factors in the cocoa industry, notorious for its impact on the climate (including deforestation).

That objective is being achieved. Koa enables smallholder farmers to sell not just cocoa beans but also the fruit pulp, a superfood that contains health-supporting flavonoids, which however, has been wasted. “The founders realised that only 25% of the cocoa fruit is

utilised and the rest is discarded. So they found a way to use this ‘waste’.”

To achieve this, the company uses an innovative mobile solar-powered fruit processing system which enables Koa to extract cocoa pulp right next to the cocoa farms, and buy it from the farmers on the same day. “Mobility in this respect is important, as the farms in Ghana are scattered,” says Otu, adding that making the farmers understand the concepts of the whole processing and building trust with them, was key.

Today, thanks to the partnership with Koa, thousands of farmers earn an additional income. Farmers receive the money on the same day as production, with 100% of the payments verified with blockchain.

How does the process work? Through solar power, the surplus part of the fruit is removed, with the beans remaining unharmed so that proper fermentation of the beans for the chocolate production continues to be guaranteed. After the first processing step, the fresh cocoa fruit

product is immediately brought to Koa’s factory in Assin Akrofuom in southern Ghana for further processing. Within just three hours, the Koa products are pasteurised, packaged and ready to be shipped to be enjoyed in the kitchens of the world.

## Force for good

Otu points out that providing extra income for the farmers also helps to reduce child labour, another pressing issue in Ghana, and the farmers are encouraged to use the additional money for their children’s education. To help the children aspire to a better future, Koa has launched a Koa Life initiative, within











which mentoring is provided and schooling promoted. The company is now about to start an adult learning programme.

The environment and its protection is just as important to Koa. covered under the Koa Green programme, aimed at eliminating single-use plastics in local communities. At the same time as the cocoa harvest is collected, so is the plastic which is then properly disposed of. Not only that, but the communities are also paid for each kilogram of plastic collected in this way, further increasing their income.

Over the short period of its existence, the Ghanaian-Swiss start-up has achieved a lot, and this has been widely recognised. As only a few companies in the sector, has Koa achieved the B









## “It was not an easy decision to come back to Ghana but I realise this was for a good cause”

Corporation™ certification, affirming that Koa is part of a community of companies using business as a force for good while meeting high standards of social and environmental impact.

### Ready to grow

In August 2023, Koa entered a new chapter of its development, with the opening of its second cocoa fruit factory in Akim Achiase, in the eastern region of Ghana. With this new facility, apparently the biggest cocoa processing factory in the whole of Africa, Koa has laid the foundations for increasing its production output tenfold while cooperating with an additional 10,000 cocoa farmers.

“The expansion was a challenging project, designed to be completed in just eight months. In the end, it took 11 months but is still a remarkable achievement,” says Abu, who himself was instrumental in making the project a success. With diverse work experience spanning multiple industries, he worked in Belgium when the opportunity came to help Koa grow. “It was not an easy decision to

come back to Ghana but I realise this was for a good cause. I decided to challenge myself and help support something that will have a real impact.”

And it certainly has, as recent developments show... Shortly after the inauguration of the new factory, the company raised US\$ 15 million in equity in a Series B round to finance its business growth. This will allow Koa to finance its ongoing scale-up while simultaneously expanding the cocoa fruit upcycling, and spearheading a shift to regenerative and climate-smart agriculture.

By making regenerative agriculture a cornerstone of Koa’s strategic expansion, the start-up aims to improve the resilience of cocoa farms while also reducing the carbon footprint of cocoa, says Otu, hinting that new products and new initiatives, such as making use of the husk for biochar, are also in the pipeline. This will further expand Koa’s scope of activities as well as its social and environmental impact, as it continues on its growth path while fulfilling its mission and demonstrating responsibility towards people, the planet and profit.





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