



CARE and Mars Expand Collaboration to Support Women's Empowerment in Cocoa-Growing Communities

CARE to expand VSLA program in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana with \$10 million investment from Mars Wrigley

CHICAGO (February. 20, 2020) – CARE and Mars Wrigley are building on the success and learnings of their Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) initiative, building women's social and economic empowerment in cocoa-growing communities in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. Through an additional US\$10 million investment from Mars, CARE will expand the VSLA program beyond the 12,000 members Mars and CARE have supported through mid-2019 and are targeting to reach 50,000 more members in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana by 2025.

Globally, VSLAs are remarkable engines for development and transformation, and powerful facilitators of economic empowerment. Since its inception, CARE's promotion of the VSLA model has formed a constellation of more than 330,000 groups representing over 7 million members – the overwhelming majority of whom are women. VSLAs can help households accumulate savings, provide loans, and provide access to local finance institutions so women can build their own businesses and increase their economic security. The program can benefit families and the community at large when the VSLA resources are then reinvested locally.

Together, CARE and Mars have developed a VSLA model that includes a number of essential building blocks beyond standard savings and loans activities. The model starts by setting up VSLA groups – comprised of 15-25 members. Once in place, these groups act as entry points in the community or through the farmer groups to support interventions in four areas over a period of three years:

- Financial inclusion and connections to formal finance;
- Entrepreneurship, supporting income growth and diversification;
- Gender-equality interventions at individual, household and community levels (including literacy);
- A healthy family curriculum that promotes early-childhood development and child protection by engaging parents and households.

Research shows that participation in VSLA groups can contribute to the overall well-being of families, children and cocoa communities, by increasing women's social and economic empowerment with the potential to more than double women's average savings over a three-year period.

"The well-being of women in cocoa-growing communities in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana is a critical link to family food security and nutrition, education, health and child protection, and drives the long-term prospects for a future of educated cocoa farmers," said John Ament, Global Vice President – Cocoa, Mars Wrigley. "Based on CARE's implementation of this approach for Mars since 2015, our ambition is that each element of the VSLA model will not only contribute to closing the gap to a living income for cocoa-growing households, but will also increase resilience and women's confidence, and strengthen local governance and child protection."



The Mars DOVE® brand first implemented VSLAs in collaboration with CARE and with support from the Jacob's Foundation in Côte d'Ivoire. The program grew in 2018 as part of Mars' Cocoa for Generations strategy aimed at creating a quicker pathway for cocoa farmers, their families and their communities to thrive. By mid-2019, 458 groups had been formed with 12,134 members – 80 percent of which are women – and a total of more than US\$700,000 in savings mobilized.

“We are honored to expand our collaboration with Mars,” said Michelle Nunn, President and CEO of CARE. “Their investment will significantly scale our VSLA programming in cocoa-growing communities in West Africa. With this expansion, thousands of women in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana will come together and – under their own leadership and with their own aspirations – realize critical improvements in their lives, and those of their families and communities.”

For more information about Cocoa for Generations and Mars' approach to driving towards a sustainable cocoa supply chain, please visit: www.mars.com/sustainability-plan/cocoa-for-generations.

About Mars, Incorporated

Mars is a family-owned business with more than a century of history making diverse products and offering services for people and the pets people love. With more than \$35 billion in sales, the company is a global business that produces some of the world's best-loved brands: M&M's®, SNICKERS®, TWIX®, MILKY WAY®, DOVE®, PEDIGREE®, ROYAL CANIN®, WHISKAS®, EXTRA®, ORBIT®, 5™, SKITTLES®, UNCLE BEN'S®, and COCOAVIA®. Mars associates proudly take care of half of the world's pets through our nutrition, health and services businesses such as Banfield Pet Hospitals™, BluePearl®, Linnaeus, AniCura, VCA™ and Pet Partners™. Headquartered in McLean, VA, Mars operates in more than 80 countries. The Mars Five Principles – Quality, Responsibility, Mutuality, Efficiency and Freedom – inspire our more than 125,000 associates to take action every day to help create a world tomorrow in which the planet, its people and pets can thrive. For more information about Mars, please visit www.mars.com. Join us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#).

About CARE

Founded in 1945 with the creation of the CARE Package®, CARE is a leading humanitarian organization fighting global poverty. CARE places special focus on working alongside poor girls and women because, equipped with the proper resources, they have the power to lift whole families and entire communities out of poverty. Last year CARE worked in 100 countries and reached more than 56 million people around the world. To learn more, visit www.care.org.

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