



Maya Mountain Cacao (MMC) was founded in 2010 as Uncommon Cacao’s first origin project and is majority-owned by Uncommon Cacao. It was the first specialty grade, high quality, fine flavor cacao out of Belize.

MMC sources from smallholder farmers in Southern Belize and centralizes the post-harvest processing, marketing, and export. The idea behind this new approach-- **Centralized fermentation and drying and buying wet cacao rather than dry cacao from farming families across the country** -- was not only to improve quality, but also to create higher prices and better value for farmers. This new model creates completely transparent business transactions and a true direct farm-to-consumer story for any chocolate manufacturer sourcing from Maya Mountain Cacao. MMC’s control over the quality and post-harvest processing for the cacao allows the company to produce cacao beans of world class quality and cleanliness from smallholder farmers.

IMPACT OVERVIEW

Description	
Cacao processing facility sourced from small Indigenous farmers	
No. of beneficiaries	350 farmers
Monthly income	\$300-\$500 USD

COMMUNITY

	Country	Belize
	Municipalities	Southern Belize
	Communities	Q’eqchi’ and Mopan Maya

Maya Mountain Cacao sources cacao from approximately 350 smallholder farming families and ferments and dries all cacao at its processing facility, built in 2016. For farmers, this model provides market stability, convenience, and focused attention on growing yields, while ensuring a fair and stable price for their product. For chocolate makers, this means beans are of the highest quality, consistent in flavor profile and size, and reliable.

Impact Background



Indigenous peoples in Belize, all of Mayan origin, are present in all six districts. They live mainly in rural areas in essentially peasant communities, but are not distributed uniformly throughout the country. The Indigenous peoples in the south, where MMC is located, practice subsistence farming using traditional cropping methods. Maize, beans, rice and cacao are grown for family consumption or local sale, and in some cases the hunting of wildlife continues to be practiced. (CADPI, 2017)

According to the 2010 Poverty Assessment Report (PAR), rural poverty affects 44% of rural population while urban poverty incidence is 22%¹. Further 14% of households is deemed vulnerable to poverty, with uneven access to resources across groups and communities along age, gender or ethnic groups. Therefore, more than half of all households (57%) are either poor or susceptible to being poor. Several internal and external factors have contributed to the decline in living conditions of the rural poor, inter alia unemployment, inadequate tax and trade policies, no institutional support to poverty programmes, limited institutional capacity, increased crimes and violence. Belize's small-size economy, high dependence on exports and imports, and exposure to natural disasters make the country particularly vulnerable to terms-of-trade shocks and volatility. (CADPI, 2017)

To generate the consistent sales that allow Maya Mountain Cacao to decrease poverty in their region, the company has historically focused on quality and flavor consistency through tight control of fermentation and drying. This feature has enabled Maya Mountain Cacao chocolate bars to win many awards globally and have good sales.

Impact Delivery

Maya Mountain Cacao promotes prosperity for Indigenous cacao farmers in Southern Belize. For this, they are committed to:

Outcome

Improvement of livelihood

- MMC buys wet cacao so farmers can focus on successfully growing their cacao crops and are not responsible for the post-harvest processing and final product.
- Farmers are paid \$300-\$500 USD a month for wet cacao (\$1 dollar/pound of wet cacao). At the same time, they can work in other industries, like tourism, or grow other crops like rice.
- Indigenous farmers get to preserve all their cultural elements: food, language, festivities, agricultural practices.

Environmental preservation

- MMC buys from certified organic production and assists farmers as needed to keep a sustainable model of production.