

# PRO-PLANTEURS Factsheet: Professionalization of Cocoa Producers

## Introduction

PRO-PLANTEURS is a joint project of the Ivorian Conseil du Café-Cacao (CCC), the German Initiative on Sustainable Cocoa (GISCO) and the German Government (Ministry for Food and Agriculture and Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development). The project aims to professionalise 20,000 cocoa-producing family-owned businesses and their farmer organizations in the eastern, southern and south-eastern regions of Côte d'Ivoire within a five-year period (2015-2020). PRO-PLANTEURS cooperates with 35 farmer organizations and their members.

**The professionalization of producers through the improvement of productivity, quality and conservation of natural resources and biodiversity** within the PRO-PLANTEURS project was conducted by the Ivorian National Agency for Rural Development (ANADER). The training of producers, members of the PRO-PLANTEURS farmer organizations, is organised through the approaches **Farmer Field School (FFS)** and **Farmer Business School (FBS)**.

Cocoa is cultivated by approximately 1 million smallholder farmers in Côte d'Ivoire<sup>1</sup> on approximately one to three hectares surface area on average. In PRO-PLANTEURS' baseline study in 2015/16, farmers in the project region reached a production of **320 kg/ha**. Yet, **potential yields can achieve 700 kg/ha when cocoa is cultivated according to recommended technical norms and even up to 1.200 kg/ha when additionally growing improved varieties.**<sup>2</sup> The low productivity is, on the one hand, the result of **aging cocoa plantations, planting of non-improved plant material, low soil fertility**, and, on the other hand, caused by **low application of recommended Good Agricultural Practices and low levels of investment in the farms**. The latter difficulty raises the problem of **poor management of cocoa revenues**, which confines cocoa producers to a vicious circle of increasing impoverishment, often leading to the "collateralization" of plantations in exchange for a small amount of money from fraudulent moneylenders.

## Activities for the professionalization of cocoa producers

### Farmer Field School: Professionalization by Application of Good Agricultural Practices

The cocoa producers need **knowledge on biological processes** in their cocoa plantations and on **how to make a basic assessment of the agro-ecosystem** on their farms to **take informed management decisions** for an efficient agricultural production.

PRO-PLANTEURS selected the Farmer Field School (FFS) approach as the tool for the



<sup>1</sup> Groupe de la Banque Mondiale. 2019. Situation Economique en Côte d'Ivoire. Au Pays du Cacao : Comment Transformer la Côte d'Ivoire.

<sup>2</sup> GIZ/Profiab. 2015. Cacao modèle standard.

extension of Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) due to its participatory learning and learning-by-doing methods.

PRO-PLANTEURS has the objective to train 5,720 cocoa producers. The majority of those farmers produce their cocoa under sustainability standards and have a certification, yet, 908 of them are not certified. 700 trained producers will be followed up and visited regularly by ANADER agents.

Already successfully piloted in Côte d'Ivoire since 1996, a **Farmer Field School (FFS)** is a wall-less class composed of a group of producers (20-30) from the same or neighbouring communities who meet once in a two-week-period in a plantation of a producer with a minimum area of 0.5 ha ("demonstration plot"). A trained facilitator guides through one cropping cycle, thus, improvements can be seen on site during the cycle. It is a participatory training and farmers are encouraged to experiment on their own farms and make their own decisions based on their observations and knowledge. In addition, a FFS permits new production options to be experimented with.

Realisation of GAP activities within the PRO-PLANTEURS project (situation as of March 2020):

Activity	Achieved	Foreseen
Installed Farmer Field Schools	228	229
Producers trained in Good Agricultural Practices	5,429	5,720
Producers trained in cocoa plantation and re-plantation techniques	383	400
Producers sensitized on the topic "Fight against the Swollen-Shoot-Virus"	5,062	5,000

After the first trainings, the project re-assessed the target group and identified **non-certified producers as the main target group for CEP trainings**. This ensures that the contents of the training courses carried out within the framework of the certification programmes are not repeated. In addition, the **focus was shifted to the approach Farmer Business School**.

### Farmer Business School: Professionalization by improving Operational Farm Management

FBS aims to **develop the entrepreneurial skills of producers, an important prerequisite for the improvement of techniques and investments in agricultural production**. The FBS approach has induced a change of attitude among producers by **making them aware of market opportunities, of a better management of their income, and ways to improve their productivity and family income**. It also targets **better household nutrition**.

The approach **Farmer Business School (FBS)** was developed by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). A **Farmer Business School (FBS)** training typically hosts 25 to 30 male and female farmers, who are trained in five successive mornings. The training takes place in communities of producers, on various sites (communal houses, warehouses, schools, meeting rooms of cooperatives, concessions of village chiefs, rural agriculture training centres or under a tree, near a wall where posters can be put up).



In PRO-PLANTEURS, training is carried out with 16,000 producers. 7,528 Farmers have been reached by the project by March 2020. 1,850 trained producers will be monitored and coached in the application of good agricultural entrepreneurship practices.



## Changes induces and achievements

With FFS and FBS trainings, the project has enabled producers to acquire knowledge of the technical itinerary and Good Agricultural Practices in cocoa production. According to a report by ANADER in 2018, 40% of producers trained in Good Agricultural Practices apply technologies that have been disseminated.

At the same time, the producer **becomes aware of being an "Entrepreneur" on his or her own farm.** They are aware of the profitability of their farm and their ability to regularly record farm data increases.

The endline survey of the project of 2020 shows an increase in productivity of 62% from 323 kg/ha in 2016 to 524 kg/ha in 2019 for project beneficiaries. Half of the respondents had a productivity of 500 kg/ha or more. This gives hope for continuing improvements of cocoa productivity.



## Success factors



The **regular monitoring of activities** in the field by project partners and agents is very motivating for producers, leaders of farmer organizations and service providers in the implementation of activities and their application.

**Training on the production of seedlings** from the surrounding area during FFS and their transfer to farms allows producers to be able to easily source shade tree seedlings without great difficulty, thus improving GAP.

Finally, knowledge of the profitability of farms contributes greatly to the **awareness of producers as entrepreneurs and guides them in the realization of their investment.**

## Testimonies

*"Before the PRO-PLANTEURS project, we did the work without knowing how to do it. We didn't know the demands of the cocoa tree and the soil. Today, I walk into a cocoa field and at the same time I notice everything that needs to be done and everything that is not in good condition."*

Mr. Drissa TRAORE, cocoa producer on 2 hectares, member of the farmer organization SCAMA in Ayamé, Aboisso



“After the producers' trainings in Farmer Business and Farmer Field School, the yield of our cocoa farmers has remained practically the same, but the areas for the cocoa trees have become smaller, well defined, better maintained, well pruned and thus better ventilated which favours the plants to produce more. Thus, there was an improvement in productivity per hectare.”

Mr. Heinand Cyriaque Didier AMOI, Director of the farmer organization SCOOPACA COOP CA, Amélékia



## Challenges and lessons learnt during implementation



A lesson learnt across all cooperative societies and their producers was that **literacy among producers is an important factor in the effective extension of the tools for their professionalization**. It is therefore essential to ensure that producers have a level of functional literacy prior to FBS training. For the time being, training is being disseminated in the local language, but this does not effectively solve the problem of farm data entry by the producers themselves after training.

Another difficulty is the **low rate of effective implementation of training content** due to the lack of manpower, the lack of financial resources for certain investments and operating expenditure as well as the large surface areas of some producers, which can be as much as 10 to 20 hectares. Some of the solutions developed by the PRO-PLANTEURS project include setting up **Cocoa Farmers' Service Units** (see PRO-PLANTEURS Factsheet: Young Entrepreneurs' Cocoa Service Units) and **bringing microfinance institutions and farmer organizations in contact**.

Additionally, **low participation rates** were observed mostly of producers who are members of certified farmer organizations as for the certification they already took part in similar interventions. To this end, the PRO-PLANTEURS project, in its second intervention from 2018 onwards, has targeted non-certified farmer organizations for the FFS approach.

**The insufficient involvement of the managers of the farmer organizations in mobilizing producers** to participate in training sessions was one of the major constraints to the success of the trainings. If **the farmer organizations do not take ownership of the project, implementation becomes very difficult**. The involvement of farmer organizations in the process of identifying and planning training courses facilitates a better organization of training sessions. Moreover, some farmer organizations are ready to contribute financially to the training costs of their members, because they have understood that a good training of their members opens the path to prosperity and sustainability of their farmer organization.

Finally, the ability of some farmers to produce shade trees from seedlings from the surrounding area themselves and to plant them in plantations demonstrates their willingness to practice agroforestry.

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