

PRO-PLANTEURS Factsheet: Promoting Balanced Nutrition

Introduction

PRO-PLANTEURS is a project co-financed by the Conseil du Café-Cacao (CCC), the German Initiative on Sustainable Cocoa (GISCO), and the German government (BMZ and BMEL). The target of the first phase of the project PRO-PLANTEURS (2015-2020) was to professionalize 20,000 families of small cocoa farmers and their 35 farmer organizations in the eastern, southern and south-eastern regions of the Ivorian cocoa zone. A second phase (2020-2025) will integrate another 10,000 producers from 2020-2025.

The objective of PRO-PLANTEURS is to improve the living conditions of cocoa farming families. To achieve this, the project aims to improve household incomes by increasing the productivity of cocoa farms and the diversification of their agricultural production. In addition, the project promotes Good Nutritional Practices in the cocoa farming households for better living conditions.

During dry periods, cocoa farmers often face low food availability and even shortages. These conditions have a direct impact on the quality of household food supply. Additionally, eating habits and lack of nutritional education result in low nutritional variety all year round. To strengthen the knowledge and capacities of producers and their families on a balanced nutrition, PRO-PLANTEURS has set up diversification trainings and awareness sessions on Good Nutritional Practices for the 20,000 target households of the project.



The nutritional situation in the project area

Malnutrition¹ is a health condition, which can have serious consequences on the development of individuals' capacities, especially for children under five years of age, pregnant women and breastfeeding women. High food prices, low household income and limited access to public health services influence the nutritional and health status and can result in malnutrition. In addition, especially the mother's education and the family's habits play a role.

¹ According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) [malnutrition](#) refers to deficiencies, excesses, or imbalances in a person's intake of energy and/or nutrients. The term malnutrition addresses three broad groups of conditions:

- undernutrition, which includes wasting (low weight-for-height), stunting (low height-for-age) and underweight (low weight-for-age);
- micronutrient-related malnutrition, which includes micronutrient deficiencies (a lack of important vitamins and minerals) or micronutrient excess; and
- overweight, obesity and diet-related noncommunicable diseases (such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and some cancers).

According to a study by the Fair Labor Association (FLA) in 2015, households in the cocoa zone in south-eastern Côte d'Ivoire do not have very varied eating habits, although a variety of foods are available. In general, meal ingredients are selected according to traditional recipes and not according to their nutritional value. Seasonal adjustments are often not made, although this means that prices of preferred foods may increase. The diet is mainly based on carbohydrates and lipids, i.e. food is too fatty. At the same time, during the lean season, households are subject to food shortages. Furthermore, some households neglect food hygiene.²

The diet in south-east of Côte d'Ivoire according to the FLA study (2015)³ concerning the three nutritional food groups as defined by the Ivorian government is the following:

- **Energy yielding foods (carbohydrates and fats):** Recommended amounts for carbohydrates (e.g. rice, cassava, plantain, etc.) and fats and sugar (e.g. palm oil, sugar, etc.) are often met, except sometimes in the lean season.
- **Body building foods (proteins):** The recommended amounts for body building foods (beans, cashews, fish, eggs, chicken, milk, etc.) are often not reached.
- **Protective foods (minerals and vitamins):** Theoretically, households eat enough vegetables in sauces, yet, traditional preparation, including long cooking periods, negatively affect nutrient content. Because fruits are not considered as alimentation, they are not sufficiently consumed.

Training rural women of the project zone as advisors



The advisors during their training with picture boxes

Given the nutritional difficulties of families in the project area and their possible impact, PRO-PLANTEURS carries out activities to improve nutrition in the households. Together with the National Nutrition Programme (PNN) of Côte d'Ivoire, the project selected and adapted the PNN training material used for AEN+ (Essential Action on Nutrition +), initially designed for medical professionals. This adaptation of the material was necessary to take into account the particularities and needs of the cocoa zone as well as the skills of the rural women in charge of carrying out the awareness-raising activities.

PRO-PLANTEURS and the PNN selected and trained 76 women as rural advisors "animatrices rurales", to conduct awareness-raising sessions on Good Nutritional Practices in the villages. The rural advisors live in the communities of the farmer organizations collaborating with the project. Thus, knowledge gained by the rural advisors is preserved in the villages and the advisors are always available to farmer organizations.



The PNN explains the process of the screening for malnutrition to a rural advisor

To conduct the awareness-raising sessions, the rural advisors obtained training material, such as four picture boxes to illustrate the subjects of the four training sessions, cooking kits (pots and bowls etc.), an adapted recipe book from the PNN (National Recipe Guide for Supplementary Feeding for Children Aged six to 24 Months in Côte d'Ivoire) and tools for screening for malnutrition.

² Fair Labor Association. 2015. Situational Assessment of Women And Youth Farmers And Family Nutritional Status in Two Cocoa Producing Communities In Côte d'Ivoire.

³ Fair Labor Association. 2015. Situational Assessment of Women And Youth Farmers And Family Nutritional Status in Two Cocoa Producing Communities In Côte d'Ivoire.

Awareness-raising on nutrition in the villages

Following their training, the rural advisors began to create awareness on Good Nutritional Practices in the villages.

To create awareness, the rural advisor organizes groups of 45 participants (women and men) in the communities of the farmer organizations. She intervenes four times per group. The four sessions take place in an interval of one week.

The awareness-raising sessions are carried out in the villages of the farmer organizations. The rural advisors use the image boxes to illustrate the information given. Each session focuses on one of the following four main topics:



1. Advice on nutrition and food hygiene

- The importance of nutrition
- The different food groups
- Access to food
- A balanced meal
- Good food conservation
- Food hygiene for health

2. Healthy nutrition

- Nutritional pyramid
- Specific contributions of some foods to the body: The fight against micronutrient deficiencies

3. The first 1,000 days in life

- Nutrition for pregnant and breastfeeding women
- Medical follow-up of pregnant and breastfeeding women
- Good breastfeeding practices
- Solving breastfeeding problems
- Supplementary feeding from the age of 6 months
- Birth certificate and access to vaccinations

4. Evaluation nutritionnelle et produire pour sa propre consommation

- Monitoring healthy growth
- Growth evaluation
- Nutrition for children and sick adults
- Food hygiene and everyday hygiene
- Own production for better food security

Each theoretical training session is followed by a screening for malnutrition. The rural advisors measure the brachial perimeter of children aged six months to five years, as well as of pregnant and breastfeeding women, that are present during the awareness-raising sessions. In cases of moderate or chronic malnutrition diagnosed according to the method, the family receives nutritional advice. In case of chronic malnutrition of a child, the family is advised to take the child to a hospital.

The sessions are concluded with culinary demonstrations. The advisors cook with the participants using balanced recipes for children with local ingredients. Examples of recipes are sweet potato soup (recipe for a sick child), stew with beans and fish (children from 11 months old) and fruit puree with orange juice (children from 7 to 8 months old). They are taken from the PNN recipe guide.

PRO-PLANTEURS has sensitized **22,700** individuals in the sessions on Good Nutritional Practices from 2018 to 2020.

72% of the participants were female.

83% of participants took part in all of the four awareness-raising sessions.

96 malnourished pregnant or breastfeeding women and 83 malnourished children were detected.

Success factors

A success factor of the activity is the innovative approach in the region including essential subjects for the participants. 72% of the participants are women, implicating that also men are interested in the subject.

Another factor of success is the fact that the advisors are integrated in the villages. The women became advisors who are always available in the villages. In addition, they can create awareness in the local language. A contributing factor to the success of training local women as advisors was that people have more confidence in someone they know.



Moreover, the culinary session after the awareness session is a place of exchange and learning for women and is part of the success of the approach. The presented recipes use local products and are adapted for the children as well as for the adults present. In addition, participants consider the collective culinary sessions enriching. They are motivated to come to the next session and to redo the recipes at home.

Lessons learnt

A topic that struck the participants very strongly was the process of issuance and usefulness of a birth certificate, which was explained in the sessions. The context is that birth certificates are often prerequisites for school inscriptions, which means, access to education for children without birth certificates can be limited. Therefore, raising awareness on the issuance of birth certificates also fights child labour at its roots.

62% of women, where a household member participated in the sessions, consume at least five out of ten nutritional groups daily. In comparison, only 47% of women of non-participating households do so.

The main constraint of the activity was that the rural advisors have no prior medical education. Further, it was necessary to adapt the medical language to the rural and often illiterate target population. It is recommended to even better adapt training materials to the skills of the rural advisors and the prior knowledge of participants of the awareness-raising sessions as done within the project. It is also advisable to involve health centres more closely in order to ensure better follow-up of screened malnourished people.

Testimony



“In the awareness-raising sessions on nutrition, the participants learn how to eat well and how to be in good health. We speak of three food groups: energy yielding foods, protective foods and body building foods. The participants appreciated a lot the theoretic part. The culinary sessions afterwards created a good atmosphere and motivated the people to come again to the next session.”

After my training my life has changed. Today, my family’s food is varied. My children no longer get sick as they used to. We are perfectly healthy and I myself feel also a lot better.”

AHONDJON Bony Rolande, rural advisor on nutrition for the farmer organizations Abôtre and Prania

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HQ of the organization
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GIZ Abidjan
01 BP 7172 Abidjan 01, Côte d'Ivoire
T +225 22 43 43 92
F +225 22 43 43 95
E info@giz.de
I www.giz.de

Head of Project
Sonia Lehmann, Abidjan

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