

PRO-PLANTEURS Factsheet: Young Entrepreneurs' Service Units

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 of Food and Agriculture and Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development). The project aims to professionalize 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 **low cocoa yields** in Côte d'Ivoire can be traced back to, among others, **ageing cocoa plots, decreasing soil fertility and reduction of fertile land due to intensive deforestation and the non-use of high-performance plant material**. In addition, producers report the **lack of services such as labour, professionalized phytosanitary treatment and the supply of improved plant material** (seedling production).

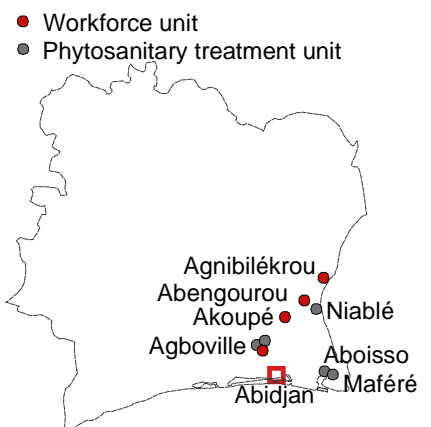


One of the objectives of the PRO-PLANTEURS project is the professionalization of cocoa production. By professionalizing producers the project aims at improving cocoa yields and increasing incomes. As a complementary activity to the project's productivity, quality and biodiversity enhancement activities, **the project initiated the provision of rural services to cocoa farmers**. This intervention also serves to **engage young people in different service provision activities in cocoa production as an income generating activity**.

The initiation and supervision of the service provision by the Young Entrepreneurs' Service Units was carried out by Léveil Entreprises. Nine service units were created that each work for some of the 35 farmer organizations of PRO-PLANTEURS as well as some other farmer organizations in the project region.

Activities for cocoa service provision

Two types of services are provided by the Service Units: workforce and phytosanitary treatment. The selection was based on a market study of rural services and an analysis of the needs of cocoa producers. **The farmer organizations serve as a link between farmers and Service Units**. In a system of joint ownership, farmer organizations belonging to the same area of intervention and according to their proximity were encouraged to form groups. Each group of farmer organizations chose the service which was most essential for their farmers. The advantages of this grouping are economies of scale (more effective and efficient management and utilization of equipment for the group size) and risk sharing, as well as increased collaboration between farmer organizations. In total, **nine Service Units for the three project zones were created**.



The nine Service Units are equipped with management tools, vehicles and technical equipment according to the type of service chosen by each unit. In addition, **347 young entrepreneurs were trained in the operation and maintenance of technical equipment**. Also, each Service Unit has a Business Plan that serves as a guideline for operational management. Finally, the Service Units are monitored regularly to facilitate understanding of the current state of business.



Next to the financial contribution of PRO-PLANTEURS, the service units are supported by **33 additional financial contributors**. These are 18 PRO-PLANTEURS farmer organizations and one farmer organization not taking part in PRO-PLANTEURS. In addition, 14 private persons, among them eight managers of the Service Units and six individuals appreciate the merit of the units. The investment of capital gives them the status of shareholder of the particular Service Unit.

The farmer organizations are the link between farmers and Service Units. After setting up and equipping the service units, the managers of the units, in collaboration with the partnering farmer organizations, carried out roadshows to introduce the Service Units in the respective localities and promote them to the farmers. The managers register requests, establish contracts, plan services, and inform their technical team which farm to treat. After carrying out the activity, the producer pays the manager for the service carried out according to the terms of the contract initially drawn up between the two parties (the service unit and the cocoa producer/customer).

Competitive pricing of services

For two reasons the services are offered at competitive prices:

- The Service Units have the objective to offer quality services at low prices to the members of the farmer organizations
- The competitive rates should attract more clients

For example, the rate of a Service Unit for phytosanitary treatment varies between 3,500 and 4,000 FCFA/ha (5.3-6.1 EUR/ha). Rates of individuals are usually between 5,000 and 6,000 FCFA/ha (7.6 and 9.2 EUR/ha).

Changes induced and success factors

The young entrepreneurs' trainers have expertise in the handling of rural youth. Additionally, they provide close monitoring of the activities contributing to the successful implementation of the Service Units.

At the **level of the farmer organizations** PRO-PLANTEURS finds:

- **The cooperation between several farmer organizations to set up a common service unit in order to promote economies of scale and risk sharing** took place. Two to five farmer organizations intervening in the same localities agreed to group together for the establishment of a Service Unit whose head office is based in one of the headquarters of one of the farmer organizations. The process was conducted in a democratic manner.
- **The financial participation of farmer organizations in the composition of the Service Unit's capital** creates "ownership". It is voluntary and according to the financial capacity of the farmer organization and.
- **The Service Units' business was established** by the farmer organizations and the service adopted by their members.

At the **level of the Service Units** PRO-PLANTEURS finds:

- **The entrepreneurial skills of the managers were quickly developed.** They managed to mobilize several young people to join the project in a short period of time. This mobilization made it possible to surpass the initial number of 250 young people, which now stands at 347.

- **The young women and men are motivated** to work together in the Service Units.
- A reduction of the hardship of work by **using new technologies** helps to reduce the duration of work and the number of resource persons required.
- **The organisation of services is improved and monitored.** The dates of the services are determined in agreement with the producers and recorded in the service planning book. The persons responsible for carrying out the task are designated in advance.



At the **level of the farmers** PRO-PLANTEURS finds:

- **The competitive pricing offered to producers allows for good acceptance** among farmers/producers. This allows producers to apply good agricultural practices at lower rates than before.
- **Profitable agricultural services** for producers with good organisation and competitive prices are **successfully promoted**.
- **An improvement of knowledge on farm and plot maintenance.**

Testimony



“As part of the PRO-PLANTEURS project, I took part in the training of managers and we learned about self-management, stock management, human resources management, organisation, monitoring and evaluation, and marketing.

My team is motivated to stay in the agricultural sector. For several years now we have had the idea of rehabilitating the fields of our parents who do not have the means to maintain their fields because they lack manpower and machinery for phytosanitary treatment. If the work is well done, we will have a high yield. Farmers and cooperative societies will benefit from the work we will do. This project is the realization of our dream.”

ADY DOFFOU, Fulgence, Manager of the Entreprise des prestations agricoles d'Agboville (EPAA)



“The Young People's Services Units are responding to a real need for a professional workforce. Producers have little access to such services. At the same time, young people are readily available in rural areas. It is in the interest of young people to have the chance to express their desires for this professional occupation. There were already some who were doing these activities before, but they have not yet realized that they can become professional and that this can be their profession. In addition, within the framework of PRO-PLANTEURS the Units are equipped, which gives them even greater opportunities. The Service Units are an innovation in the rural environment. This is why cooperative societies and their members must be encouraged to adopt the idea, to see the need to set up such structures.”

SORO N'GAFFONA, Jean-Michel, Responsable for the Monitoring of the Service Units, Léveil Entreprises

Challenges

Difficulties during the implementation of the activity at the youth level were on the one hand **the varying levels of maturity among the units, requiring more or less technical support**. On the other hand, **management and leadership capacities were different among managers**. This situation required more coaching time for some. In addition, there was an imbalance in the number of young people from one locality to another. Moreover, in some localities, young people are less motivated to participate in the activities of the service units because of gold panning or the financial opportunities offered by crops such as rubber and oil palm.

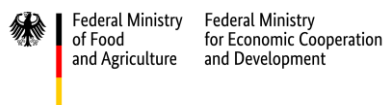
Funding was another constraint in the implementation of the activity. Firstly, working capital requirements at the start-up of each service unit were difficult to acquire for the service units. Secondly, the effective disbursement of the committed capital by the service unit partners was slow.

Lessons learnt during implementation

The involvement and engagement of the managers of farmer organizations in the implementation of projects is a crucial precondition for the success of development projects. In addition, the **commitment of managers** in such projects creates enthusiasm among young people and farmer organization members to participate in the activities of the project. Finally, such **cooperation between farmer organizations is a means of uniting them and enabling them to develop common projects** for the well-being of their members.



PRO-PLANTEURS is a joint project of



Published by:
Deutsche Gesellschaft für
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

HQ of the organization
Bonn and Eschborn, Germany

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

Photos credits:
GIZ/PRO-PLANTEURS

GIZ is responsible for the content of this publication.
Abidjan 2020