
EXPLORING A NEW MODEL OF FARMER ENGAGEMENT:

From training
to coaching



Cocoa
Fertilizer
Initiative

The logo for the Cocoa Fertilizer Initiative, featuring a stylized cocoa pod icon above the text 'Cocoa Fertilizer Initiative' in a white, sans-serif font, all enclosed in a white, rounded rectangular frame.

Why did you prototype coaching?

Challenge:

The Cémoi team felt that an innovative way of working was required to reduce the burden of investment. To enable farmers to gradually reinvest part of their income into their farms without “pain,” they needed a progressive process of training that would guide them to invest according to their income levels.

Solution:

Cémoi aimed to test the new “¼ farm fertilizer approach.” This approach allows farmers to progressively invest in their farms using the income generated from the farms’ increased production. Through the data collected, Cémoi’s system demonstrated and measured the growth of the farmers’ income through the increase of production and related it to their decision-making about investments.

Summary of prototyped coaching approach

The coaching consisted of providing individual and technical assistance to farmers directly on their farms using the “¼ farm fertilizer approach.” This approach allowed farmers to progressively invest their time, effort, and money into their farms’ transitions.

The implementation of the project involved various steps: selecting coops and farmers, establishing a data collection system, recruiting coaches, and the coaching activities themselves.

Three cooperatives were selected based on 1) their commitment to Cémoi 2) dynamism 3) good internal structure and governance and 4) thorough knowledge of members. Within these three cooperatives, 1,500 farmers were selected based on the following criteria:

- The loyalty of farmers: 80–90% of their production sold to the coop.
- The age of the farm.
- The application of a minimum level of GAP on the farm.
- The health of the farm.

The prototyping project led by Cémoi had three main objectives to achieve by 2018:

- Cover an average of 1,500 ha of cocoa farms by coaching 2,000 farmers on fertilizer purchase and application to build their skills in farm/fertilizer management.
- Enable the farmers enrolled in the program to produce an average of 900 kg/ha in the fertilized sections of the farms by 2018.

TFT conducted a baseline study of the cooperatives to identify them as start-up, “promising” or professional cooperatives and to develop an accurate understanding of the needs of the cooperatives and farmers. To make sure that data collection and analysis could be continued after the baseline study, a technical documentation system was set up to record data during the coaching process.

To implement the coaching activities with the producers, the cooperatives hired 11 extension agents. These agents had an academic background in agronomy as well as experience in the cocoa sector or in rural activities. We learned that the coaches were not directly effective in their work. It was therefore important to build their capacities in terms of cocoa farming but also in the use of educational tools.

In line with the results from the baseline study, Cémoi decided to combine coaching activities with farmers training in Farmer Field School. Most of the selected farms needed to be prepared for fertilizer application by a correct implementation of GAP. The coaching began with the process of creating a farm development plan and the activities were implemented according to the ¼ approach developed by Cémoi.

Farmers have a positive perception of coaching. After one year of coaching, improvements can be noticed in the maintenance of the farm. Even if the effects of fertilizers are not directly visible, the farmers deeply appreciate the coaching. As a result, new farmers are showing an interest in the cooperatives’ coaching services.

This also leads to the realization that “coaching” is a tool for cooperative professionalization, since it allows cooperatives to provide embedded services to farmers, which increases and strengthens the farmers’ commitment to the coops.

However, individual coaching needs time and dedication to be effective. The commitment of farmers is an imperative for success; similarly, coaches must have enough time to visit all the farmers in their cluster and practice with them on the farm itself.

Farmer coaching is a new method that requires changes for both farmers and cooperatives. It could be profitable for both only through a process of awareness and capacities building.

Key facts & figures

Jan 2015 -
June 2016

2,210
Farmers
trained

1,500
Farmers
coached

11
Coaches

€223
Cost/farmer

Next Steps

The coaching services will be extended to all the cooperatives involved in Cémoi’s Transparence program. ANADER will set up the training /coaching of farmers. The organization will be in charge of the selection of coaches and their capacity building. ANADER will also oversee the monitoring of coaching activities. TNS has been identified to provide support at the level of cooperatives to develop service packages which are profitable for both cooperatives and the farmers.

For ECAKOG, SCOPAKAM, and SOCOPASG, the coaching pilot is still in progress and will continue with the help of ANADER and TNS. The project is facilitated by the fact that the coaches are employees of the cooperatives and Cémoi is providing a specific market for their beans.

Biggest Challenges

- The coaches have an academic background, yet the Cémoi team noticed they need help with capacity building. ANADER provided master training and a training plan was designed to support the technicians.
- The cost of coaching for cooperative. The costs of the coaches’ salaries became too high for the cooperatives. Cémoi and one of its clients offered to pay a premium, and in so doing, took on the wages of two coaches.

Most important lessons learned

- A major learning is about the maximum farmers-to-coach ratio. According to the coaches, they feel less effective with more than 80 farmers in their clusters. A coaching session must span at least half a day to be effective.
- The cooperatives now have an internal department in charge of training and coaching. With this, they are able to provide an embedded service to their members and have increased their knowledge of their member farmers.

FARMER IMPRESSION



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We have seen farmers that don’t succeed in applying all that they are taught at the farmer field schools on their plantations. But with the coaching and the monitoring they continue to do the work they have learned.”

- Gnanbo Konan Lazare