

EXPLORING A NEW MODEL OF FARMER ENGAGEMENT:

From training to coaching



Cocoa Fertilizer Initiative



Why did you prototype coaching?

Challenge:

The ECOM and Mondelez team observed that cost and structure issues remain prohibitive to a more individualized service when trying to progress the most advanced farmers' knowledge and practical adoption of certain agricultural practices. This is the case even with the high level of technical input from ECOM's Sustainable Management Services (SMS) on the agricultural side.

Solution:

The new phase of the program therefore concentrated on using past experiences to develop a leaner and more focused training program that targets specific training interventions; this way, farmers receive a more tailor-made package according to their progress. Coaching involves physical visits to farms on a cyclical basis for one-to-one consultations with farmers. This is required on the subject of farm planning (Nov–Dec), pruning and removal of trees that need to be replanted (Feb–Mar), preparation for fertilization (Apr–May), application of insecticides (Jun–July), and the preparations to receive planting material (Sep). To achieve this, the team aimed to further train Farmer Trainers so they could provide a coaching service to 150 farmers each over the course of 50 days (3 farmers / day), allowing them to visit each farm four times per year.

What did the prototype look like?

From January to June 2016, SMS's field agronomists and Lead Farmers trained and coached 100 farmers on GAP, GESp, and GBP. The agronomists' monthly individual coaching sessions followed group trainings in the Farmer Field Schools and Farmer Business Schools. The monthly sessions focused on effective implementation of practices according to the agricultural calendar, which covers when to conduct activities such as pruning and tree removal, soil fertility management, and tree replantation. All of these farmers were greatly satisfied with the coaching approach, and SMS's local staff observed clear improvement on GAP implementation.

As on-the-ground coach representatives, Lead Farmers were also responsible for supporting farmers in the development and gradual implementation of their farm development plans. They visited farms

The coaching pilot program had the following two objectives to fulfil in order to increase farmers' productivity:

- Increase the effectiveness and the number of farmers effectively implementing Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), Good Environmental and Social Practices (GESp), and Good Business Practices (GBP) through the development and establishment of a farm development plan.
- Support farmers in accessing and investing in farm productive assets (inputs such as fertilizers and planting material) and diversifying their revenues.

every two weeks and used the specifically designed “Farm Plan” manual to record and evaluate farming activities and action plans after each individual visit. In order to ensure alignment and effective monitoring of staff coaching, the agronomist and the Lead Farmers met monthly to share experience and coaching progress, and provide technical advice and directives.

During the coaching period, and as part of the GBP implementation, farmers were also advised and supported in their decisions to make productive investments in their farms, in particular with regard to applying fertilizers and replanting old plantations. In addition, coaching was successful in enabling farmers to diversify their revenues into new activities that can compensate for low revenues during the off-season. In particular, the agronomists and Lead Farmers provided strong support in accessing improved planting material for cocoa as well as for food crops, advising on replanting tasks, fertilizer application, and phyto products treatments. In order to facilitate access to inputs, input credit schemes were put in place by the cooperatives or through ECOM’s own input distribution scheme, to ensure fertilizer access at the ideal application time in March.

As a result, yields averaged 532 kg/ha for the 2015–16 cocoa season. Fertilizers were applied on more than 40,000 trees, and 12 ha of seedlings were distributed to these farmers for cocoa replanting, while 64 ha of trees were regenerated. Thanks to coaching, some farmers are now willing to save and invest in productive investments and other revenue-generating activities.

Key facts & figures



Most important lessons learned

- Coaching’s long-term success strongly depends on the provision of a comprehensive sustainability package.
- Coaching should adjust to farmers’ low literacy levels and reinforce farmers’ accountability skills.
- The farm development process is significantly aided by an efficient farm data management system adapted to the rural context for regular data collection and real-time tracking of project performance.

Next Steps

In the future, the project will be scaled up to include all of ECOM’s partnered cooperatives, and it will be integrated into a comprehensive package of sustainability services delivered by SMS to the Ivorian cocoa producers.

In particular, coaching will be the last segment of SMS’s capacity-building program, which will start from basic group trainings on GAP and GSEP and progressively include the Farmer Business School, food crop trainings, and coaching. In other words, coaching will be the last phase of SMS’s comprehensive capacity-building curriculum.

As part of SMS’s sustainability package, coaching will also be associated with the provision of financial services. Coaching will directly support the building of credit-worthy farmers as well as the provision of other products and services (planting material, agro-inputs, solar and water products, etc.) that can significantly improve productivity and local living conditions.

Biggest Challenges

- Despite their strong interest in the project, farmers are not always able to make the most of and graduate from the coaching because of their inability to use the farm development plan on their own.
- One of the key challenges relates to farmers’ limited access to financial services. Farmers need to be given the opportunity and the means to apply the technical advice provided during coaching.
- Centralization of these data and regular reporting was hindered by inadequacies in the data management system, and the ongoing transition to a new and a more efficient data management system.

FARMER IMPRESSION



Coaching has been very beneficial in replanting my plantation. The agronomist has helped me to find improved planting material and apply good agricultural methods. I am very proud to show my replanted plantation to my farmer colleagues.”

- George Yaho

