

**2024**

# EMPOWERING YOUTH IN COCOA GROWING COMMUNITIES IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE



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Côte d'Ivoire hosts 40% of the world's cocoa production, a market with considerable socio-economic potential. Due to a lack of access to good agricultural practices and financial services, farms are producing sub optimally with reduced outputs. The industry is also facing critical human resource challenges due to a combination of changing demographics and migration of young people to urban areas.

## **The Life Skills and Financial Education for Young People in Cocoa Producing Communities Pilot Project (2018-2019)**

There was an urgent need for the cocoa industry to demonstrate how the sector as a whole can provide a rewarding and secure profession to young people, which will help them thrive and improve their quality of life. As part of the Transforming Education in Cocoa Communities (TRECC) initiative of the Jacobs Foundation, Aflatoun partnered with Hershey and INADES-Formation to test the implementation and effectiveness of its youth life skills and financial education program - *Réalise ton potentiel dès aujourd'hui* ("Realize your potential today") in Ivorian cocoa growing communities.

Through providing young people with life skills and financial education the project aimed to address labour-force challenges by providing youth with meaningful, life-lasting skills during and after their school formation. The project further aimed to equip young people with foundational skills required to increase their prospects in agriculture in general, and in cocoa farming in particular, either as agri-entrepreneurs or as income-earning entrepreneurs.



The pilot targeted 300 beneficiaries in 4 communities – Toliesso, Affienou, Kotoka, Nguouankro - within the Maféré region in Ivory Coast. The target demographic was young people from 15 to 30 years of age. To be selected for the program, youth had to live in the project area and show motivation to learn about modern and professional agriculture. In total, 10 clubs of 30 youth each were created across all the communities with, on average, 39.7% women.

Two INADES-Formation staff, also called facilitators, trained each club on life skills and financial literacy. 24 regular sessions and 5 catch-up sessions were delivered to each club, guided by trained

facilitators from INADES-Formation. Sessions were held in French with peers' translation in local languages. In addition to these trainings, savings groups were organized under the supervision of the facilitators. Youth were also encouraged by facilitators to start Income Generating Activities (IGA) of any type. In parallel to this, the project aimed to increase youth awareness of the overall cocoa value chain by organizing events and site visits.

### ***2019 Project Evaluation***

Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) was contracted by TRECC to do an independent evaluation in 2019. Overall, the Aflatoun/INADES-Formation pilot project received a positive overall assessment, with significant achievements in addressing challenges such as low access to financial services and negative perceptions of agriculture. Successful outcomes include increased savings behavior, improved knowledge of the cocoa value chain, and positive shifts in attitudes toward agriculture.

Despite challenges, such as concerns about the sustainability of farming-related benefits due to limited land availability and youth interest in non-agricultural opportunities, the project demonstrated effective project management and cost control. Recommendations for scale-up focused on strengthening savings effects, refining enrolment processes, clarifying in-kind contributions, specifying funding for Income Generating Activities (IGAs), and exploring cost-efficient community engagement methods.

The evaluation acknowledges challenges in sustainability, particularly in implementing cocoa farming knowledge, but underscored the project's positive impact and potential for future collaboration with the Ministry of Education. Overall, the assessment highlighted the project's success in improving financial behaviours and knowledge among targeted youth, providing a solid foundation for potential scale-up.

### ***The 2023 Tracer Study***

In order to assess the medium-long term effect we conducted a tracer study among beneficiaries of the Life Skills and Financial Education for Young People in Cocoa Producing Communities Pilot Project. Through a mobile phone survey, we contacted all beneficiaries who originally participated in the training in 2018-19. We were able to reconnect with 42% of the original beneficiaries. The findings of this tracer study indicate that a significant majority of the beneficiaries had successfully integrated and applied the knowledge acquired during the programme, notably regarding the financial education component. More specifically:

- ***Entrepreneurial activities*** - Following the program, more than 79% of individuals attested to having undertaken or decided to undertake one or more entrepreneurial activities. Among the respondents who were not entrepreneurial active at the time of the tracer interview, 45% had not completed the entire Cocoa for Good Programme, compared to 19% not completing the training among those who were enterprising.

- **Bigger impact on women** - a large proportion of women did not exercise any activity before the program (45% among women and 26% among men). Men therefore had, before the program, a more developed interest in entrepreneurship than women. However, after the program, women's interest in entrepreneurship increased significantly. More than 69% of women planned to create or develop at least one activity.



- **Increased savings behaviour** - more than half of the beneficiaries (about 52%) did not save before the implementation of the programme. After implementation the percentage of individuals who have adopted the habit of saving increased to around 72%. And among the beneficiaries who had not used to save before the program, more than 66% started saving right after the program was implemented.

## The Cocoa for Good and AflaYouth programme (2020-2023)

Following the 2019 IPA evaluation (see above) it was decided to implement a larger scale follow-up intervention. A partnership between Aflatoun, Barry Callebaut, Hershey, Inades-Formation with additional financial support from the Jacobs Foundation focused on 1100 Youth.

The main objectives of the project included:

- To socially and economically empower and equip 800 youth in Soubre with life skills and financial literacy education;
- To improve the employability and entrepreneurship skills of 300 pilot participants and support them in designing and starting income generating activities;

The project also included the creation of 40 IGAs; Training of trainers for coaches and facilitators within target communities, and; Set up of youth-based Village Savings and Loan Associations ("VSLAs") and facilitate linkage with MFIs.

### ***Pre-post study evaluating the effectiveness of the Cocoa for Good and AflaYouth programme***

The primary objectives of the pre-post study were to evaluate the effectiveness of the Cocoa for Good and AflaYouth programme. The focus was to assess the impact of the programme on entrepreneurial

and employability skills and knowledge before and after its implementation. The study also assessed the effect of the programme on financial capacity and attitude and character traits of the participants.

The baseline was conducted in November 2022 in 2 cocoa producing regions in Côte d'Ivoire, Abengourou and Soubré. At the end of the intervention the same participants were surveyed, using the same self administered questionnaire, three months after the programme completion. The endline survey was conducted in March 2024, sixteen months after the baseline survey. In total, 763 participants were surveyed across both regions, with 368 participants from the Soubré area and 395 from Abengourou.

Key findings:

- **Working in the Agricultural Sector** - The programme has had the expected effects on the participating youth in terms of stimulating their interest in job opportunities in the agricultural sector and more specifically in the cocoa value chain. When asked what type of job they had, agricultural/forestry/land-based jobs showed a statistically significant increase at the endline. Almost 4 out of five (79%) had a job of this type, compared with 55% at baseline. There was also a significant improvement in the participants' opinion about farming at the end of the programme.
- **Ability to enterprise** - There was a small decline in the participants' perception of their ability to run a successful business, with an average score of 3.9 on the Likert scale at the baseline, compared to 3.7 at the endline. While this result may appear counterintuitive, it could be attributed to an enhanced understanding of the necessary skills and competencies and a re-evaluation of their abilities by the participants themselves.
- **Financial Inclusion** – The programme had a significant impact on financial capacity and attitudes towards saving, particularly in relation to opening and owning a mobile money account and the use of VCA as a savings mechanism. There was a significant increase in the proportion of youth who have a mobile money account (Before: 81% - After: 95%) and who are members of a village savings and credit association (VCA/VSLA) and use it as their preferred method of saving (Before: 56% - After: 72%).
- **Gender** - In terms of perception of gender roles in the household, there are noticeable improvements towards perception of women's role with an average score of 3.5 on the Likert scale at the baseline for a secondary role for women in the household, compared to 3.0 at the end line.
- **Future perception** - The proportion of youth with a negative perception of future prospects in their community decreased significantly (Likert scale).

Several areas for improvement were identified, including addressing challenges during implementation, refining the program based on local limitations, and further strengthening the gender perspective in the cocoa value chain. The study underscored the importance of training and capacity building in thematic areas for young people in rural farming communities to further enhance their economic opportunities and savings habits.

Overall, the "Cocoa for Good" and AflaYouth program in Côte d'Ivoire has shown promising results in empowering youth, fostering entrepreneurship, and promoting sustainable development in the cocoa sector. By addressing the identified areas for improvement and building on the program's successes, it has the potential to create lasting positive impacts on the participants and their communities.