

# Rurality – Annual report 2020



**A year of impactful collaboration  
with Nestlé, Godiva, Profairtrade,  
and SIPEFCI**

February 2021



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## Disclaimer

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# Our Rurality impact in the palm oil and cocoa supply chain in Soubré, Ivory Coast



1497 Farmers (oil palm and cocoa) engaged since start of project  
45 % of oil palm farmers reached in project area



100% of oil palm farmers in project area can be traced to farm  
3353 Farmers have transparent access to commercial information (price, deductions, payment schedule, informative radio programmes, etc.)



2525 Farmers implement BMP (112 supported by EF + 2413 supported by extension officers)  
10 to 50 % gain in productivity (measured in yield) of main cash crop



39 Farmers have diversified their source of income  
10 to 50 % approximate increase in income based on sampling



14 Stakeholder groups actively participating in Rurality, from public and private sector, academia and CSOs  
5 Stakeholder groups that have taken up Rurality solutions

*Cover photo: Awareness raising with community neighboring the Monts Kourabahi forest reserve.  
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# Rationale

Rurality is an initiative of Earthworm Foundation, a non-profit international organisation which works with companies, rural communities, NGOs and the public sector in order to conserve ecosystems and improve the lives of people. Rurality aims to stimulate the innovation of farmers by providing them means to create or improve their farm business and reinforce their resilience. By adding value to the foundation of the supply chain, Rurality brings shared advantages to all the stakeholders.

Nestlé, Profairtrade, and Godiva, members of EF, are keen to support their suppliers to engage in a transformation process. SIPEFCI, an oil palm producer and supplier to Nestlé and Profairtrade, as well as a number of oil palm and cocoa cooperatives based in the region of Nawa have since engaged in the transformation process brought along by Rurality.

Soubré is the capital town of Nawa Region, the supplying area of palm oil seeds for SIPEFCI company. The area is also well-known as the Ivorian cocoa loop as it produces around 40% of the cocoa of Ivory Coast. For both crops, smallholder production represents an important percentage. The presence of both crops in Nawa region attracts a great deal of people which cause a high pressure on lands and natural resources. Remaining forest areas in the region are being encroached and in many cases already strongly degraded.

As part of the Rurality initiative, Earthworm Foundation has focused its actions in Soubré / Nawa region around three main axes:

1. Improvement of traceability, transparency in the supply chains and strengthening of relations between farmers and other key players in the sector;
2. Strengthening the resilience of farmers through improving productivity, food security, diversification of income sources and training and monitoring;
3. Protection of the environment through the preservation of classified forests, soils and water sources, as well as through the promotion of agroforestry, in particular for cocoa

After an initial diagnostic in 2016, Rurality started its transformation activities in 2017 together with actors of the oil palm supply chain. In the second half of 2019, the project team increased its involvement with the cocoa sector, considering its overall importance in the region.

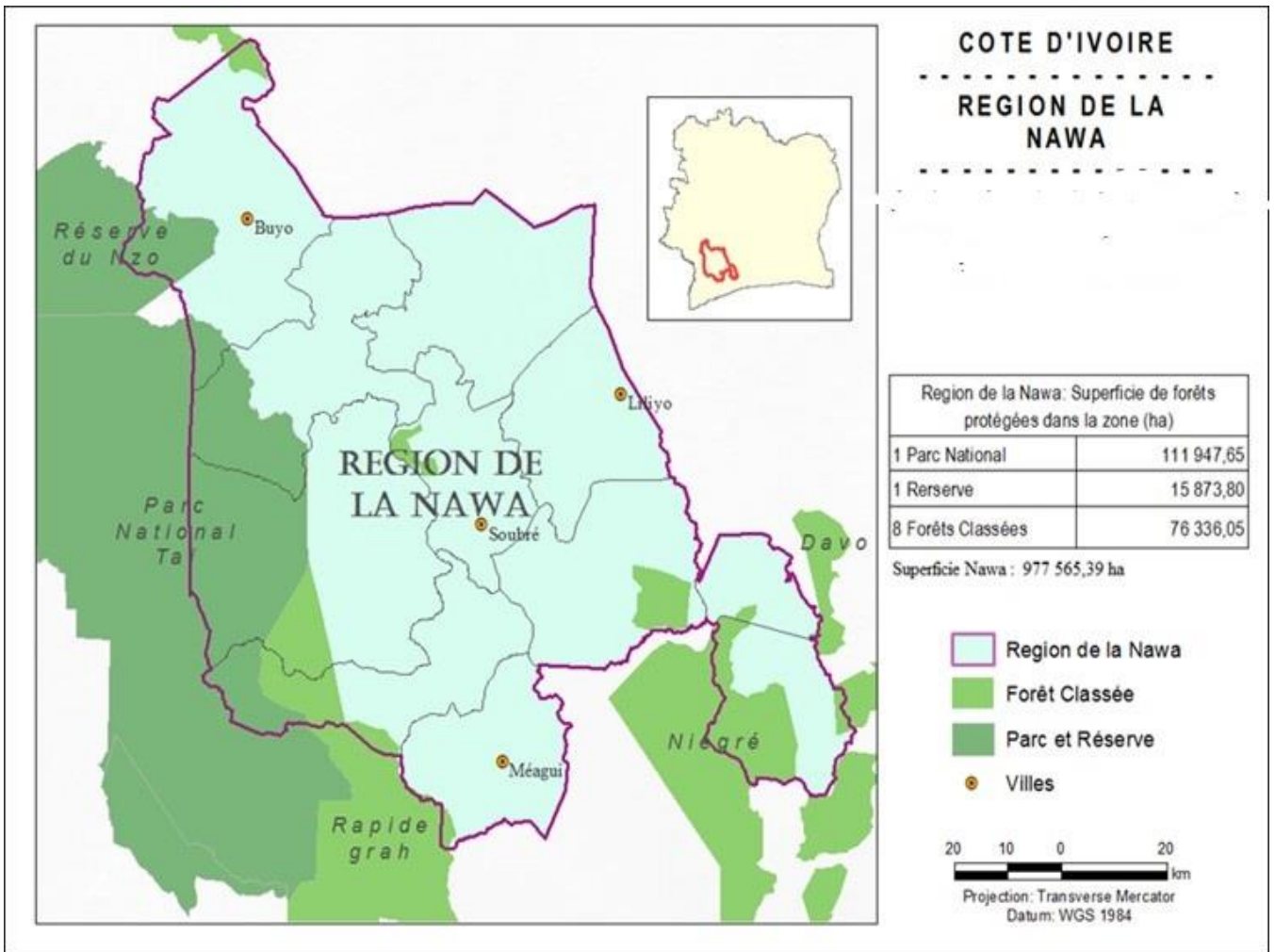


Figure 1: Landscape Soubré

# Outcomes since start of project

> 4000	Oil palm farms geo-located (with GPS points) by Rurality and partners (SIPEFCI, COOPAGRIS and COOPALM)
930	Oil palm farms mapped around SIPEFCI Ottawa mill
339	Oil palm farms mapped around SIPEFCI Bolo mill
320 km	of oil palm transportation routes georeferenced
2 525	Oil palm farmers applying best management practices on their oil palm and cocoa plantations
17	Extensions officers of oil palm mill and oil palm cooperatives trained in farm business management
1508	Oil palm farmers have benefitted from improved training by mill and cooperative extension officers
34	Extension officers of two cocoa cooperatives trained in farm business management
188	Farmers in vicinity of two forest reserves are sensitized on forest rehabilitation and protection
2	Local committees for forest reserve rehabilitation and protection set up in local villages
14	Oil palm and cocoa farmers interacting in moderated WhatsApp group on farm practices
8	Cocoa farmers implement agroforestry
2.3	Hectares of various forest species reforested on the Soubré dam site

# Achievements 2020

## **SIPEFCI goes ahead on traceability**

The mapping of 930 farms around Ottawa mill and 339 around Bolo mill was undertaken by the Rurality field team together with the SIPEFCI technical team. Main objective of this exercise was to increase the traceability in SIPEFCI's supply chain and allow the company to comply with the requirements of RSPO. The increased traceability over the supply chain will also enable the company to avoid the purchase of FFB from unknown sources or regions and to continue improving the pick-up schemes of the fruits.

## **Improvement in transparency**

Rurality worked this year also in improving the connection and communication between oil palm farmers, cooperatives and mill. Our team supported the diffusion of information on harvest, FFB prices, payment and collection schemes in 27 villages, reaching approximately a total of 3 353 oil palm farmers. Diffusion of information was undertaken through SMS, village representatives and notice boards. Lack of communication and connection between producer and uptaker has been a continuous challenge in the Nawa region.

## **Increased collaboration among supply chain actors and other stakeholders to improve support provided to farmers**

At the start of the year, the project team worked on a training manual for extension officers to improve their training provided to farmers, in both palm oil and cocoa. The aim of the manual is to help farmers not only in aspects of productivity, but also in aspects sustainability, diversification and overall farm business management. These aspects are often not sufficiently recognized by extension officers, yet important for the resilience of farmer families.

Once finalized, the Rurality team used the manual to train:

- 17 extension officers of both SIPEFCI and palm oil cooperatives
- 11 lead farmers (leaders in their communities with strong entrepreneurial spirit), and
- 34 extension officers of two cocoa cooperatives

These trained trainers are expected to improve the extension officers' and lead farmers' support to farmers. By the end of 2020, their improved training has reached already a total of 1508 farmers.

## **Direct training and coaching to farmers for responsible and sustainable farm management practices**

As in previous years, the Rurality team has continued with direct support (training, coaching, visit to plantations) to farmers aiming at an improvement in farm productivity and diversification. Although the direct support for farmers only reaches a small percentage of all farmers in the region, it is an important strategy to show the positive impacts of a change in practices. It sets an example, helps us gain credibility and invites others to replicate. Often times, our technical team creates a close relationship with the respective farmers and gains an entry point for a wider discussion at village level. Making farmers change practices takes time, trust and credibility.

Since the beginning of the project a total of 185 farmers have received direct training and coaching by Rurality. From these, according to our monitoring, a total of 112 farmers have adopted and apply regularly the recommended best management practices, leading to a 10 to 50% increase in productivity in oil palm and in cocoa (according to a small sample group). The training on BMP by cooperatives extension officers has led to a significant adoption rate among farmers. An estimated 2413 oil palm farmers trained by extension officer are now applying BMP.

During group training with farmers we observe a lot of peer learning and exchange. This dynamic is something we want to support and strengthen as much as possible. In 2020, the Rurality field team also led discussion with farmer



groups on the establishment of collective oil palm nurseries. Establishing these nurseries in collective groups may be one of the priorities for 2021. In a quick estimation, we identified that in 2021 up to 120 hectares of smallholder oil palm plantation may require renovation.

Our training on diversification has inspired a total of 39 farmers who have now additional sources of income in pig farming, poultry, bred farming, cow husbandry. Also through diversification, we have observed an increase in income between 10 and 50%. Animals farming drive the most income and limited land use requirements. The diversification activities coordinated by Rurality were strongly supported by the organisation COLOMBE IVOIRE focussing in particular on animal farming.

### **Forest preservation and protection of the environment**

Our Rurality approach includes a strong focus on the preservation of existing forests and the rehabilitation of degraded lands. For this, we engage with all farmers and in particular cocoa farmers as well as with communities in the proximity of forest reserves.

Our work with cocoa farmers included capacity building and support for agroforestry with the objectives to transform existing cocoa plantation to a more sustainable and healthy production. In 2020, a total of 130 cocoa farmers received our support in agroforestry. This approach follows the principles of individual coaching, to set an example with a small amount of farmers that can lead to replication at larger scale.

For 2020, we also developed materials (flyers, dialogue boxes, etc.) to raise awareness on forest preservation in communities in the vicinity of forest reserves. In a close collaboration with SODEFOR, the National Forest Agency, Rurality raised awareness in 6 communities (total of 188 farmers) located next to Mont Kourabahi and Niégré forest reserves. As a result, two local committees were set up to lead agroforestry and forest rehabilitation and preservation activities, in one village (Obrouayo) and one settlement (Kossou). We expect to continue supporting these committees in 2021.

**Through the above described activities, Rurality reached in 2020 a total of 1087 farmers. Since the project start, the total reach sums up to 1497 farmers.**

The Rurality work plan for 2020 had to be adjusted due to the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic. For 2 to 3 months, the field and technical support team could not undertake any visits or meetings. The time was used to prepare training material for activities programmed later on in the year. Also, it gave the opportunity to establish an exchange among farmers via what's app to support on question concerning the pandemic and on any other questions concerning oil palm and cocoa farming.

Thanks to a collaboration established with the radio station of the Marie Esther Foundation, we also started to broadcast information on a various farming topics relevant in particular smallholders (such as better management practices, diversification, market information, weather, etc.).

A recently published EF news article provides insights into our work on the ground:

<https://www.earthworm.org/news-stories/protecting-forests-developing-responsible-products-ivory-coast?x-craft-preview=AqMEJAEKkn&token=m3uc3BULYxEqld9Dx6m94WhWJU1SRUZT>





*Picture 1 Farmer implementing agroforestry in his cocoa farm*



*Picture 2 Lead farmers training on farm business management*

### Success stories of 2020 – Discussing forest protection with farmers

In December 2020, we gathered farmers in Kossou village, in the vicinity of the Monts Kourabahi forest reserve. We aimed to get information related to their agricultural practices by using visual material. As some farmers have cocoa farms in the forest reserve, we sought their opinions and views in order to foster a potential collaboration with the National Forest Agency, SODEFOR. During the meeting, we suggested activities to be undertaken to work towards the preservation of the forest, namely the setting up of indigenous tree nurseries with the involvement and support of the farmers. The group warmly welcomed the news and showed great willingness to share details on their history related to arrival and settlement in the forest reserve. With this franc discussions, the Rurality team managed to create trust with the farmers and was asked to mediate in the discussions with SODEFOR. This clearly showed EF's potential to contribute to a successful forest rehabilitation and preservation.



*Picture 3 Farmers gathering in the vicinity of the Monts Kourabahi forest reserve.*

# Priorities for 2021

In 2021, Rurality will continue working on transformation activities in the Landscape of Soubré, Nawa Region. Our vision is to engage a wide range of supply chain actors from oil palm and cocoa, farmers and other local stakeholders and jointly improve the sourcing of commodities, preserve and restore the remaining forest areas and increase the resilience of local communities. Our connections established in previous years and our knowledge about the local context, puts us in a good position to continue pursuing this goal. We continue our work, as in previous years, with a permanent presence in the field.

Key outcomes to be expected:

- A robust reinforced multi-stakeholder network of public authorities (CCC, SODEFOR, Agric authorities, etc.), private entities from all sectors (cocoa traders and brands, Rubber companies, ICRAF, ANDER, GIZ ...) and local organizations,
- Significant reduction in new land clearing combined with restoration process of critical landscape areas like the Tai National Park periphery.
- Protection and conservation of the identified HCS forests and HCV areas in the landscape (13'490 ha)
- Improved livelihoods through diversification and farm business management of cocoa, oil palm and rubber farmers