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## Identifying and predicting best-performance cases to foster a sustainability transition in West African cocoa production

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### Abstract

Over the past decade, in West African cocoa production, efforts to deliver trainings on more sustainable production techniques have been undertaken by various public and private actors. These interventions mostly combine trainings on ‘Good Agricultural Practices’ (GAP), and, more recently, also comprise aspects of on-farm diversification and agroforestry (AF). While up until now there is little knowledge to what extent these interventions show effect on the actual farmer income and farming practices, success still seems to be limited since poverty is still highly prevalent. However, while most cocoa farmers struggle under the given conditions of their enabling environments, there are farmers facing similar conditions that manage to outperform their peers, using creative and local solutions.

The proposed contribution assesses the existence of cases of such positive deviance among cocoa farmers in Côte d’Ivoire. In backdrop of the Living Income benchmark, and following the Positive Deviance approach, four dimensions of performance are measured: farmers’ cocoa income, their socio-economic situation, the degree of income diversification, and the amount of GAP and AF practices applied on the cocoa farm. Based on a survey conducted in 2022 among 303 cocoa farmers in five regions in Côte d’Ivoire, best performers are identified by comparing absolute performance with the performance that would be predicted given the farmers’ enabling environment. The difference is combined in one relative performance vector for each farmer, and then used to calculate the Pareto optimal. As such, farmers are identified that outcompete their peers in all three dimensions, and seem to be dealing with trade-offs successfully. In-depth interviews are then conducted with positive deviant farmers to identify reasons for outperformance.

The objectives of the study are twofold: first, it is aimed to identify and predict cases of positive deviance among Pro-Planteurs targeted cocoa farmers and second, to understand the reasons for their better performance. The findings help to provide lessons for future interventions aiming to create better conditions for farmers’ performance and for scaling-up locally tailored interventions.

**Keywords:** Cocoa, Côte d’Ivoire, positive deviance, sustainability transition