



Partnerships for
Forests

**Enhancing resilience
of forest-based
businesses:
strengthening
value chains
as a support
strategy
during crises**



The case of the COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America

This report examines how forest product businesses supported by Partnerships for Forests (P4F) responded to the economic challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout the crisis, P4F-supported producers of hearts of palm and açai in Colombia, and P4F-supported producers of Brazil nuts, natural rubber, and cocoa in Brazil managed to sustain their supply chains, despite the obstacles created by the pandemic – particularly logistical issues and remote and virtual communication.

P4F support helped these organizations and communities to learn, adapt and transform their businesses, overcoming barriers that otherwise would likely have led to the interruption of their activities. In exploring how these forest-based initiatives weathered this unforeseen, extreme challenge, there are lessons to take away on the importance of strengthening and enhancing business maturity in order to safeguard livelihoods and continue to protect the environment amidst crises.





Picture: Project Archive

The COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America

Latin America and the Caribbean region was declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) to be the epicentre of the COVID-19 pandemic in May 2020, “accounting for more than 40% of the world’s deaths” (OECD). According to the International Labour Organization, “The measures undertaken by governments to avoid the spread of the disease directly affected the supply and the availability of basic means of production and that impact was more severe in the American Continent” (ILO). Alongside the COVID-19 imposed challenges that strongly affected the economy the region has also been experiencing political and environmental turmoil. These events had a strong effect on local economies, curbing economic growth and creating challenging conditions for small businesses, especially those in socio-environmentally sensitive regions.

Redirecting investments to regenerative business models, which create value from standing forests and other natural ecosystems, is one measure that the global economy can take to recover back better. Rerouting financial flows towards these regenerative models can generate billions of dollars in new investment opportunities and mitigate environmental-related risks, including climate change. Responsible, sustainable investment is also crucial to

protecting species against extinction, creating jobs, and building social and economic resilience to future shocks.

In recent literature, particularly within discussions of the International Panel of Climate Change (IPCC), the concept of resilience has been used to refer to situations in which systems face climate change-related challenges.

Resilience here is understood as:

The capacity of social, economic and environmental systems to cope with a hazardous event or trend or disturbance, responding or reorganizing in ways that maintain their essential function, identity and structure, while also maintaining the capacity for adaptation, learning and transformation” (KPI 4).

P4F was set up to address business operations challenges in forest product initiatives, acting as an incubator to increase investments in regenerative business models. With a portfolio of projects spanning 15 countries and 22 commodities, the programme has had to be flexible in its



Picture: Fred Mauro

work since the beginning of the pandemic. P4F has pivoted its support to protect businesses and communities from impacts, and responded to the increased challenges faced by smallholder low-income farmers, who are likely to suffer disproportionately from the crisis.

P4F has been operating in Latin America since 2018, supporting forest-friendly businesses and initiatives in Brazil, Colombia and Peru. In this region, the programme focuses on three strategies: valuing the standing forest by investing in forest-friendly businesses; harmonizing agricultural practices with improved land use management (known as 'produce and protect' or 'produce-protect'); and generating economic models for forest restoration.

Despite major challenges faced by the region, businesses directly supported by P4F in Latin America demonstrated resilience throughout the crisis – in some cases, even outperforming results from previous years.

To assess the contribution of the programme in building resilience for forest product businesses, P4F conducted an assessment with partners from four supported projects: **Planeta SAS**, based in Colombia, and Brazil-based partners **COOPAVAM**, **Veja** and **Cocoa Agroforestry Restoration**.

THE COMMON CHARACTERISTICS AMONG THESE CASES ARE THAT THEY:

- » involve products that support forest protection;
- » had communities involved in the production chain that face similar vulnerabilities related to the pandemic, such as reduced logistical infrastructure due to mobility restrictions; and
- » presented innovative solutions to adapt the pandemic-related barriers.

EACH CASE STUDY WILL INCLUDE:

- 1. CONTEXT;**
- 2. CHALLENGES IMPOSED BY THE PANDEMIC;**
- 3. SOLUTIONS DERIVED FROM P4F SUPPORT.**



Picture: Fred Mauro

Planeta SAS

Strengthening business through product diversification in the Pacific Region of Colombia

The Pacific Region of Colombia contains the second largest tropical forest in the country and is considered one of the world's biodiversity hotspots. This region has been substantially affected by deforestation and forest degradation, driven mainly by logging, mining and illegal agricultural practices.

The Colombian Pacific is largely occupied by Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities, organised in collectively owned territories. In the region, most deforestation is driven by communities illegally logging, either for subsistence use or for commercialisation. The region lives in a post-civil conflict environment, with a cease-fire agreement between the government and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) in June 2016. Communities that were isolated during this period of conflict have subsequently felt an upsurge from external pressures. The Pacific region has since become one of the country's biggest deforestation hotspots.

With very few livelihood alternatives to turn to, increasing the value of the standing forest by supporting alternative and sustainable forest use has the potential to both protect the wellbeing of these communities and that of the surrounding forests.

Planeta SAS is based in the department of Antioquia, a territory occupied by community councils in communal lands and indigenous populations. The flooded forests along the Atrato river are rich in *Euterpe oleracea* (also known as

Naidi) – a native tree species that produces açai and heart of palm (also known as palmito). Planeta SAS buys heart of palm from local farmers and processes them to be sold to outlets in Bogotá and Medellín, where the product's high social, economic and environmental standards are rewarded with premium prices.

Planeta SAS is a private enterprise owned, managed and staffed by people from the local community. Representatives from these communities make up the company's nine shareholders, plus an elected CEO. The company works with associated collectors and directly employs staff in its processing and transformation plant, located in the small village of Vigía del Fuerte. The associated collectors are trained in sustainable harvesting methods by Planeta SAS, and are paid per kilogram of harvested hearts of palm.

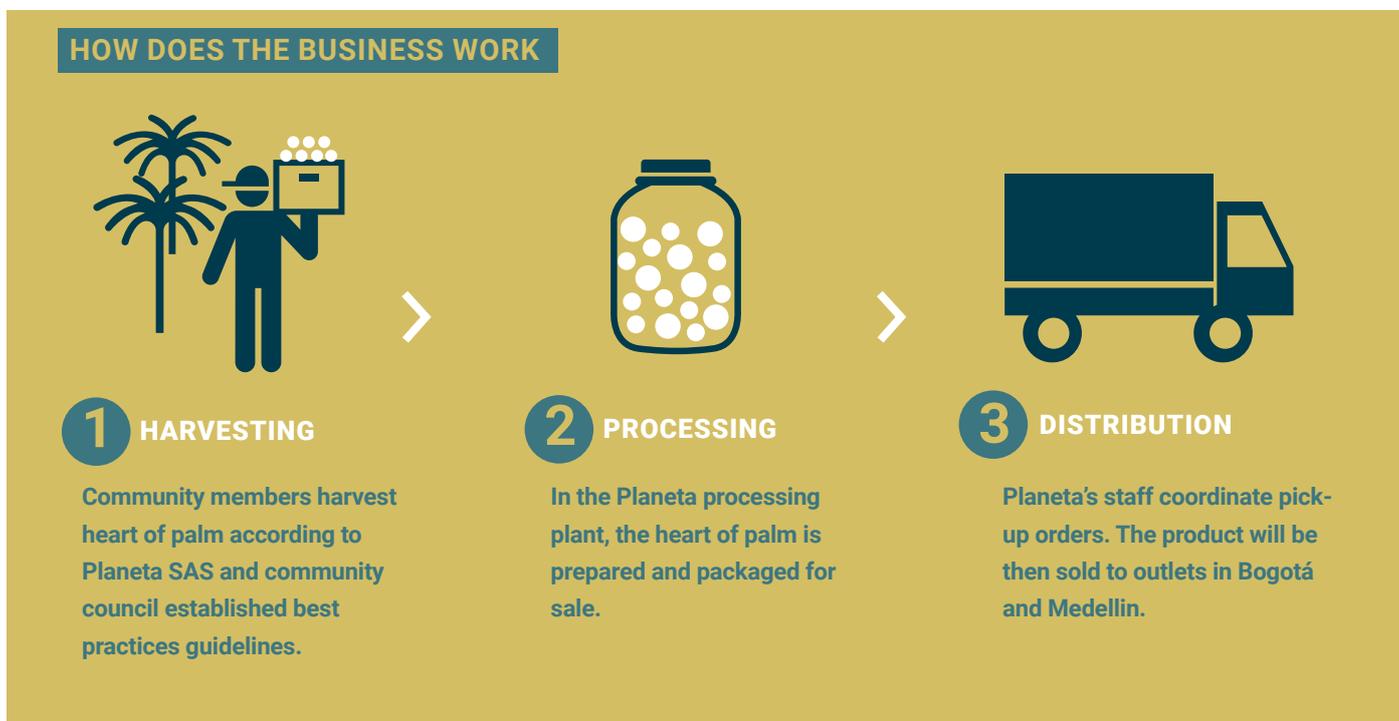
Planeta SAS receives a 60% price premium for its heart of palm. Crepes & Waffles – one of the largest restaurant chains in Colombia – is a key buyer of Planeta SAS's products, representing 15% of Planeta's production. As a company, Planeta SAS has grown significantly since 2018, and its agreement with Crepes & Waffles has set it on a trajectory of continued growth.

Early assessments indicated that Planeta SAS's sales of heart of palm were profitable but that costs needed to be reduced to make prices more competitive. P4F designed its support to, among other aims, reduce costs by streamlining processing and reducing logistical costs. P4F also

supported further diversification of Planeta SAS's client portfolio in order to strengthen the business.

Additionally, Planeta SAS needed to strengthen their business model in product price and certification, in order

to sustain their commercial relationship with Crepes & Waffles and to scale up as a company within both national and international heart of palms markets. INVIMA, the national sanitary and health certification, is needed for sales at national level..



COST PRESSURES AND LOGISTICAL BARRIERS BROUGHT BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The pandemic led to a more than 60% decrease in sales, which made Planeta SAS cut costs to a minimum in order to keep the business running. This was a direct result of Crepes & Waffles' reduced demand, as the restaurant sector was heavily affected during the pandemic.

There was also an increase in input costs: the price of petrol for transportation increased by 40%, and the packaging price rose by 30%. Strategies for keeping the product price stable included reducing staff on the field and seeking loans from partners.

MARKETING, COMMUNICATION AND DIVERSIFICATION AS A RESPONSE

The implementation of marketing and communication strategies offered by P4F's support of Planeta SAS triggered tangible market connections for the enterprise.

New markets were opened for Planeta through the incorporation of açai production into their business,

resulting in a more efficient economic recovery. Enhanced communications strategies, which foresaw rising demands from customers concerned about staying healthy in the midst of a pandemic, did much to help Planeta SAS's açai gained visibility. Planeta SAS's first official large-scale açai buyer purchased three tons of açai during the pandemic, while local sales had a sharp rise after a campaign to publicize its nutritional value.

All in all, diversification of both products and clients reduced Planeta SAS's market risks, generating more operational security for the business in times of crisis.

“The social vulnerability and the impact on price strongly affected the company's spirit. They came close to giving up and closing the business. I believe our support was key in giving Planeta a long-term perspective, a future to look forward to. Having a partner that believes in you through the moment of crisis is also crucial for overcoming hardships.”
-Antonio Espinosa, Project Officer at Partnerships for Forests in Colombia.



Picture: Fred Mauro

COOPAVAM

Expanding partnerships and markets – from the Amazon to the world

In the last decade, degradation and violence in Indigenous Lands (IL) have been growing concerns in Brazil, and the environment in the state of Mato Grosso is one of the most alarming. Between 2017 and 2019, more than 450,000 ha was illegally logged in Mato Grosso – corresponding to 53% of all logging in the state (ICV). Between 2018 and 2019, Mato Grosso ILs experienced 21 invasions, representing 8% of all IL invasions registered in the country (CIMI). In 2019, ILs located in the state of Mato Grosso alone suffered 74 cases of violence against property and 11 cases of violence against people.

Cooperativa de Agricultores do Vale do Amanhecer (COOPAVAM) is a community-based social business cooperative that creates value for standing forests by structuring the collection and processing of Brazil nuts, an Amazonian superfood. The cooperative works with four ILs in Northwest Mato Grosso and part of Rondônia, Brazil. This region, which encompasses Apiaká-Kayabi, Aripuanã, Sete de Setembro and Zoró ILs, is located in a deforestation hotspot in the Brazilian Amazon.

Since 2008, COOPAVAM has purchased locally extracted Brazil nuts from indigenous communities' associations and rural settlers, and processed shelled nuts into products such as flour, oil, and raw materials for health and cosmetic products. Supported by P4F since 2019, COOPAVAM improved production standards in the region by paying fairer prices to

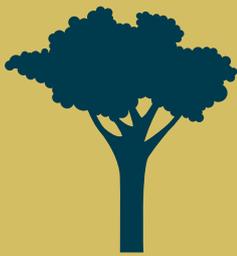
collectors (when compared to prices paid to middlemen), formalizing contracts, and offering institutional support to indigenous associations.

COOPAVAM promotes the supply of organic, fair trade and forest-friendly products as alternatives to cattle ranching and illegal logging in the 1.5 million ha of forests covered by these ILs, while enhancing forest vigilance.

Picture: Fred Mauro



HOW DOES THE BUSINESS WORK



1 COLLECTING

Indigenous and small-holder collectors collect the Brazil nuts in their territories.



2 LOGISTICS

COOPAVAM coordinates the transport of the raw material from indigenous territories to their headquarters.



3 PROCESSING

The Brazil nuts will be processed into products and packaged for sales.



4 DISTRIBUTION

COOPAVAM organizes sales and distribution to main outlets in the country and abroad.

REDUCED MOBILITY, COMMUNICATION AND SALES - EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic posed major challenges for COOPAVAM – communicating with partner associations in ILs became practically impossible due to drastically reduced mobility and poor internet connection. During the most critical period of the pandemic, COOPAVAM activities were completely interrupted. On top of that, in 2020, their largest customer reduced their purchase quantity by 30%.

P4F SUPPORT OF COOPAVAM'S FINANCIAL AND MARKET ADAPTABILITY

Faced with these challenges, P4F's support of COOPAVAM was redesigned to focus on two dimensions: enhancing its access to markets, and strengthening its relationship with a financial institution. For collectors, having a guaranteed consumption market provided a safe income flow during the crisis.

Access to credit

In 2019, COOPAVAM opened an account with Banco do Brasil and gained access to credit for working capital thanks to P4F's institutional support. As a result, during the pandemic, the cooperative was able to get loans from the bank, which provided funds in a time of reduced production and commercial activities. Additionally, Banco do Brasil donated approximately BRL 60k for the purchase and distribution of 500 staple food kits (cestas básicas) for rural settlers and indigenous communities.

Following the established relationship with Banco do Brasil, as well as Conexsus, a microcredit financing social enterprise,

COOPAVAM was qualified to access the Family Agriculture National Program (Pronaf). This resulted in receiving a line of credit that generated GBP 192k in investments for structural improvements of their factory, such as the purchase of an autoclave, preparing a cracking machine for operation, the installation of a greenhouse, improvement of manual break room, and the purchase of machines to separate nuts by size and for CO2 packing.

Access to markets

P4F financed the development of a business plan aimed at reducing COOPAVAM's dependence on one buyer. Thanks to P4F's support in designing a sales and marketing plan and consolidating a more robust institutional arrangement, three export rounds for new buyers in Switzerland were carried out. Gebana, a fair trade and organic production company, which sells online, became the first exporter of COOPAVAM's nuts to Europe. Gebana has a special focus on promoting sustainable livelihoods of small farmers, which aligns with COOPAVAM's values.

Continued support from P4F offered stability, which allowed COOPAVAM and Gebana to negotiate the dollar exchange rate to benefit COOPAVAM, fixing the price in contract. Gebana demonstrated interest in maintaining a long-term relationship with COOPAVAM. Besides the partnership with Gebana, a second commercialization contract was established with a big player in the retail business. Finally, P4F was responsible for creating a relationship between COOPAVAM and BSD, a consultancy firm specialized in sales and marketing, which now gives direct assistance to the cooperative.

“I think that the [P4F] project arrived at the right time for us. When the pandemic came, we were in the phase of searching for markets. In 2020, if we had not encountered this foreign company to buy the nut, we would not have been able to maintain COOPAVAM.”

- Luzirene Lustosa, president of COOPAVAM.

“COOPAVAM did not have appropriate planning for production and to meet clients’ demands over a year. So today you can say that they are much more advanced in a commercial negotiation dynamic which generates income from sales. They are planning their own production thanks to the contracted sales, as is the case with Gebana. There is more planning.”

-Johann Schneider, consultant at BSD.



NEXT STEPS: DEEPENING COOPAVAM'S INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE

As a next step, today COOPAVAM is part of “Unlocking Brazilian non-timber forest products’ exports”, a joint project between P4F and the Brazil Trade programme. The programme has received support from the United Kingdom Government to develop innovative services in management, access to foreign markets, logistical support, and access to credit for community-based businesses expanding to international markets.



Picture: Fred Mauro



Picture: Project Archive

COOPERACRE and Veja

Solidifying a commercial relationship in the Amazonian native rubber value-chain

COOPERACRE is a cooperative of forest product workers that commercialises fruit, Brazil nuts and, under the scope of this project, rubber. Veja is a French sneakers company that sees sustainability and fair trade as core to its business model. Veja was created in 2003 with an aim of producing the most sustainable pair of trainers in the market. Veja is a certified B-Corp with a fair trade certification.

The company has a well-established relationship with their suppliers and pays prices above the market, increasing social benefits for rubber tappers and raising the value of the standing forest. In 2018, Veja started a Payment for Social Environmental Services (PSES) programme. The company requested P4F's support to increase rubber production and ensure sustainability within its rubber supply chain.

COOPERACRE works with Veja by acting as the recipient of Cernambi Virgem Prensado (CVP), which is the rubber pre-processed by rubber tappers. It is then processed into Granulado Escuro Brasileiro (GEB) to be sent to Veja's factory in Rio Grande do Sul, where sneakers are made.

COOPERACRE CHALLENGES DURING THE PANDEMIC

The fruit pulp market was very affected during the pandemic. In 2020, the closure of schools resulted in a

60% reduction in demand from the National Programme of School Meals (PNAE), the major buyer of fruit pulp from COOPERACRE, according to the cooperative.

Interruptions in activities for some periods during the pandemic, the reduction of staff by 50% to avoid crowding, and logistics interruptions led to delays in Veja factory. However, as Veja did not stop its purchases, COOPERACRE was able to keep regular payments for tappers, who, as a result, did not suffer income reduction. Additionally, despite moments when shipping services were delayed and Veja ceased receiving materials, the company continued making advance payments.

Although in-person meetings are, in this case, generally more effective, the project invested in adaptation to WhatsApp communication to make remote meetings possible.

We faced difficulties with some products, but regarding rubber, thanks to Veja, which continued receiving our production, we did not suffer so much impact, because there is a contract and they kept their word about sending resources, and, as we also had resources to complement, that did not allow the producer to be let down.” - Manoel Monteiro de Oliveira, Cooperacre

HOW DOES THE BUSINESS WORK



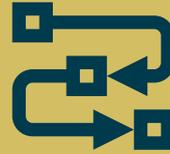
1 TAPPING

Rubber tappers collect rubber from trees and do initial processing of the raw material while still in the forest



2 TRANSPORTING

Tappers transport the processed material to a local cooperative. Transport modes often consist of small boats owned by the tapper



3 PROCESSING

COOPERACRE collects the rubber from local cooperatives and does final processing



4 DISTRIBUTION

Rubber is shipped to Veja's factory to be used in the production of sneakers.

P4F'S ROLE IN STRENGTHENING COMMERCIAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN COOPERACRE AND VEJA

The solidity of the commercial relationship with Veja was a crucial factor for COOPERACRE and, consequently, for the rubber suppliers' market security.

The project with P4F had the objective of strengthening this relationship even further, increasing rubber production sustainably, scaling up the PSES, developing the deforestation monitoring framework, and creating the carbon insetting scheme. This all led to better means of monitoring rubber tapping activities, which generated improved product and environmental quality, and in turn, resulted in significant price premiums for the tappers.



Picture: Project Archive

To increase production, 200 new rubber tappers were included in Veja's supply chain, with collection kits distributed among producers and training on best practices for rubber collection and technical assistance were offered. The opening of access trails to 200 new tapper families generated social and economic benefits to the local population, while reducing the risk of supply shortage for the company.

The creation and public disclosure of the PSES protocol in cooperation with the rubber tappers, as well as giving them ownership of the process, also contributed to better governance and risk assessments – factors that promote further stability and predictability for Veja. This all activated a positive reinforcement cycle that generates a more robust relationship between Veja and COOPERACRE.

Veja also evaluates its business by social and environmental criteria, and these stronger relationships with suppliers enabled the company to continue achieving social and environmental results during 2020 and 2021.

“I believe that with an even more solid structure between Veja and the rubber supplying cooperatives, which involve payment for social and environmental services, forest monitoring and well-established sustainability criteria, crises will be faced without damage to any of the parts of the value chain, especially rubber extractors.” - Mariana Paulino, Senior Project Officer at Partnerships for Forests.

Read more on the Veja case in the case-study: “How sustainable rubber production can reduce deforestation while promoting sustainable livelihoods in the Brazilian Amazon: the case of Veja”.





Picture: Erik Lopes

Cocoa Agroforestry Restoration

Lessons from the shift to remote rural assistance

Pará has the highest rate of deforestation of all states in Brazil, having lost around 1.2 million hectares of forest between 2015 and 2020, driven mainly by cattle ranching. In South and South-Eastern Pará, 40% of deforestation occurs on small farms. For ranchers looking to improve their income, opening new areas of land by cutting into the forest is one of the most straightforward strategies. Alongside cattle ranching, illegal logging and agricultural expansion for other crops (such as manioc, cocoa and corn) also play a role in farmers' decision to encroach. However, this model is unsustainable.

Cocoa is a promising opportunity to generate income while also meeting restoration requirements. Cocoa is a native species in the Amazon, and Brazil was one of the world's top cocoa producers until the 1990s, when an outbreak of witches' broom disease drastically hampered production. As one of the world's biggest chocolate consumers, Brazil now imports cocoa to run its grinder industry and satisfy local demand.

Increasing production trends in Pará provide an opportunity to improve standards and restore degraded pastureland into cocoa agroforestry, providing a profitable alternative to small-scale cattle ranching. Furthermore, there is growing demand for sustainable and ethical chocolate across the world. It is in the interest of the cocoa value chain to increase sustainable sourcing, and consumers are doing so by requesting more sustainable, traceable, and best-practice cocoa.

The Cocoa Agroforestry project has been working to develop an economically viable and technically feasible model of restoring degraded lands through cocoa agroforestry systems. Led by The Nature Conservancy (TNC), in partnership with the agricultural commodities multinational Olam and the chocolate industry Mondelez, the project has piloted a technical assistance (TA) hub to support increasing sustainable cocoa production.

The goal of the TA hub was to test ways to overcome two critical barriers to a large-scale shift to cocoa agroforestry: large upfront loans for smallholders; and affordable, large-scale TA to build smallholders' skills.

Together, partners have unlocked rural credit for smallholders and built an institutional arrangement, backed by private capital, to cover these costs. By partnering, risks and returns are shared across the cocoa value chain. As a result of the project, 250 smallholders, to date, have moved away from unsustainable practices and adopted cocoa agroforestry methods, while restoring more than 16,600 hectares of degraded lands.

Before the introduction of COVID-19 restrictions, 253 farmers took part in seven workshops on four topics: banana and cocoa management techniques; critical topics on cocoa growing best practices; implementation of agroforestry systems; and cocoa harvesting best practices. As a result, four demonstration units were created.

HOW THE INITIATIVE WORKS



1 PRODUCTION

Smallholders receive technical assistance to produce and harvest the cocoa in agroforestry systems within their properties.

2 TRANSPORTATION

Local cooperatives organise the logistics of collecting cocoa from producers, who are scattered across the municipalities where the project operates.

3 PROCESSING

The cooperatives select the cocoa almonds and process for commercialisation to the industry.

COVID-19 RESTRICTING IN-PERSON WORKSHOPS

One of the key pillars of the project was based on offering rural technical assistance to farmers who were once dedicated to cattle ranching and enabling them to instead invest in cocoa in agroforestry systems. The technical assistance provided under the scope of P4F support included engaging farmers in forest restoration techniques.

Coordenada Rural, the local technical assistance service provider, supports projects to unlock rural credit to small, medium and large-scale farmers. It also provides soil analysis, environmental licensing, and rural technical assistance to producers focused on increasing productivity – activities that require a close contact with producers.

In-person activities were suspended from the start of the pandemic. Coordenada Rural had its office closed for six months after social distancing measures were adopted in Brazil. Producers were impacted in a range of ways, including by experiencing delays in the flow of credit analysis by the bank.

Due to mobility restrictions imposed by the pandemic, group training and field visits were substituted by remote TA, presented in 20 videos, 26 cards and 26 audios about

the harvesting process, fermentation, the drying process, warehousing, phytosanitary treatment, fire, and COVID-19 prevention – among other topics. More than 150 farmers have interacted with the technician through remote assistance.

Additionally, field visits were adjusted to meet COVID-19 protocol and workshops were carried out with a limited number of participants.

Producers who did not connect to the Remote Assistance Center (CARP) were the most harshly impacted, as they could not count on technical assistance. Then, when the in-person activities resumed with new safety protocols, producers located in more distant farms were the most hampered, as the technicians were not allowed to sleep over in hotels or in producers' residences. Producers in risk groups who did not have immediate substitutes, like their wives, were also affected as they could not receive technical visits.

The cocoa market itself was not significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially, there was a decrease in demand in Brazil due to the crisis, but in approximately six months the demand stabilized. Pricing also did not change significantly, because while there was an initial drop in demand, the rise in dollar combined with more demand in Europe maintained stable prices.

LESSONS FROM THE REMOTE ASSISTANCE CENTRE (CARP)

Coordenada Rural and TNC, with P4F support, were able to create a 'remote call centre', through which producers with internet access and smartphones were identified. The WhatsApp tool, the main instant message app used in Brazil for texting, became essential in this process.

The CARP is based on two pillars: to deliver cost-efficient technical assistance, and to optimize work using technology.

The lack of internet access remains a major gap in the territory. Some of the producers may have internet access but use older mobile phone models. In these cases, technicians offered assistance using the phone line.

The development of the CARP involved systematising lessons derived from the producers' evaluations of the services provided. Although this profile of activity usually requires a geographically close relationship, the remote

assistance and good practices in agroforestry and land management, but also about fires and COVID-19.

“Remote technical assistance has been generating excellent results for us. With it we are able to be practically immediately in contact with the rural producer. Before we used to travel more than 100km off road to be in touch, but today we send a message in the morning and in the afternoon the producer will respond. Besides that, with such system, other members of the family are integrated, the wife can participate, the children, grandchildren, all of them are able to build that relationship.”

- Frederico Azevedo, Coordenada Rural

“The support of P4F was very valuable. In times of crisis like COVID-19, the programme's posture of believing in alternatives, and in a

service has been well accepted by producers.

Young people and women had a special role in adapting to remote assistance, as they were generally more familiar with the use of mobile devices. Women who are the wives of producers are typically less engaged on in-person technical on-site visits, as they are usually dedicated to household affairs, cooking and property management. Remotely, they had the chance to demonstrate the central role that they play in the cocoa value chain.

Despite this success, one of the main lessons is about the value that still exists in building in-person relationships, as the trust bond between technicians and producers previously built was fundamental for the remote system being adopted by the producers

When in-person visits resumed after the six-month suspension, there was an increase in demand for much longer visits, which resulted in further delay in implementation, demonstrating that remote meetings do not substitute face-to-face direct assistance.

Through CARP, producers not only kept receiving technical

very humane way, was very positive.”

- Thais Ferreira Maier, project manager at The Nature Conservancy.

“In the beginning, we feared that the producer would get tired of virtual communication, which, in a way, did occur. When we went back to in-person visits, the producer was satisfied. Now we are adapting the system to attend both remotely and in-person. It is still challenging, because the technical assistance team needs to offer remote and in-person assistance, but we found that this allows us to have a more continuous contact with the producer. Costs are also lowered, because less fieldwork is required.”

- Frederico Azevedo, Coordenada Rural.

What remains - the pandemic as practice of resilience

We have seen how forest product businesses were impacted by the economic consequences of the pandemic and how each of them developed a different strategy to tackle specific challenges. The common challenges among all of them were related to the nature of the businesses: they are all located in remote regions and depend on commercialisation, and as such, logistical, communication and market demand barriers were observed in all of them.

The engagements (like field visits) with producers that had been carried out prior to the pandemic reduced communication issues, because remote communications were established based on these previous contacts. In fact, COVID-19 accelerated a process that would have eventually occurred in the long run, as the high costs of technical assistance are a known issue for numerous value chains in the region.

Faced with challenges imposed by COVID-19, the P4F programme needed to adapt in order to maintain its activities. Replanning involved revisiting the scope of projects, adjusting schedules, renegotiating payments, and finally, revisiting expectations regarding end results.

"Partnerships for Forests was not immune to the pandemic. It demanded creativity and resilience from the team and flexibility from all our partners, especially of our main supporter, the UK Government, which was able to understand the contexts and needs and support us in times of crisis."

- Marcio Sztutman, Director at Partnerships for Forests Latin America.



Picture: Fred Mauro

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Picture: Fred Mauro





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