



## Women's Empowerment Research Analysis World Cocoa Foundation (WCF) July 2017

### Introduction

The World Cocoa Foundation, the companies who participate in the CocoaAction strategy, and other external sources such as non-governmental organizations, academics, implementing partners, etc. have been conducting research on women in cocoa for several years. Women's Empowerment is a key focus area of the CocoaAction Community Development Package and has been a key focus area for many of CocoaAction companies and others who work in community development in West Africa. Women's empowerment is seen as a key factor in a holistic approach to a sustainable cocoa sector that is ensuring human rights and equitable and just human development. As part of a holistic approach to community development, empowered women are not only individually empowered, but help to foster educated, healthy, and protected families making them powerful change agents within their communities.

This paper is in response to a request from CocoaAction companies to aggregate the collective knowledge and research that has been built over the years which specifically focuses on "women in cocoa"<sup>1</sup>. This paper also identifies common themes or areas where there may be disagreement, as well as areas where research and further evaluation are still needed. This paper is not a re-iteration of what has been researched already but rather a summation of where there has been significant work done and where there is consensus and understanding of women in cocoa today. The purpose of this paper is to provide a baseline for CocoaAction companies of where the understanding women's empowerment within the cocoa sector is today and in turn drive the continued efforts of the CocoaAction companies towards areas where further research is needed, where work will be most beneficial, and where it is most urgent that we continue to ask questions and further our understanding of women in cocoa.

### Methodology

In early 2016, WCF issued a request to all CocoaAction companies to share any existing research, studies, guidance documents, etc. on community development and in particular women in cocoa in West Africa to enable WCF to aggregate the information, conduct an analysis to see where there is plentiful knowledge and agreement, identify where there may be conflicting advice on best practices, and determine where additional holes in research remain. In addition to the research that was shared with WCF by CocoaAction companies, WCF has reviewed the

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<sup>1</sup> For this paper, "women in cocoa" will be defined as women participating in a variety of roles within cocoa-growing communities and households



relevant, recent, most complete and conclusive research on women in cocoa in West Africa that is publicly available and has included this in the analysis. In total some 21 pieces of research, studies, and guidance documents were reviewed. This paper represents an analysis of CocoaAction company research and external sourced research in one complete package. For a complete list of resources examined, please see the Resources Reviewed at the end of the paper.

Some of the research that was shared with WCF is proprietary to companies. As such, WCF has been careful to single out where information may be company-specific and will share only common themes and confirm publicly available research in the following paper. If there is any concern over any information in the following paper, please contact Nira Desai and Victoria Woolner at [nira.desai@worldcocoa.org](mailto:nira.desai@worldcocoa.org) and [victoria.woolner@worldcocoa.org](mailto:victoria.woolner@worldcocoa.org) with any questions.

### **Are Women Important in Cocoa?**

A common theme amongst the existing literature on women in cocoa in West Africa is seeking to identify how and in what ways are women participating and important to the cocoa supply chain, both directly as cocoa farmers and indirectly as laborers on a cocoa farm. Before research, effort, and resources are committed on a large scale to women in cocoa, this research seeks to begin to build the business case for involving and promoting women in cocoa. At this point in time there is conclusive and extensive research that not only do women participate in the cocoa supply chain, but that they are undervalued and underappreciated for the work that they do.

Although specific numbers appear across the literature, there is general agreement that women cocoa farmers remain at approximately 20-25% of the total cocoa farmer population in Ghana and 5% of the total cocoa farmer population in Côte d'Ivoire. Though cocoa is still considered a "man's crop" by traditional gender norms and constructs, women do provide close to half of the labor on small-holder family cocoa farms. The specific activities that women most heavily engage in are cocoa harvest and post-harvest activities such as pod-breaking, bean fermentation, and transportation, as well as plot maintenance and weeding (Kiewisch, 2015). Several studies have identified women as participating in up to and even beyond 90% of all cocoa producing activities. Despite this significant contribution to the farm labor, this is considered unpaid family or casual labor and the contribution goes unrecognized. Women are rarely compensated for their labor and rarely are involved in any final sale points, instead depending on men to collect the cocoa payments. The lack of recognition for women's efforts in cocoa is a universality that is acknowledged in nearly every research paper or study on women in cocoa conducted over the past several years and is well established.



### Roles Women Play

In addition, it is also well established that women who live in cocoa-growing communities have responsibilities that extend far beyond their cocoa farming contributions (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1: The roles women in cocoa play, clockwise from top right: mother/child protector, cocoa farmers, food crop providers/income generators, household providers, cocoa laborers, child educators, role models in communities**

Women are heavily involved in food production and are in most cases the primary producers of food crops, providing approximately 85% of food crop labor (Kiewisch, 2015) which is primarily for household consumption. Women also perform the majority of tasks in the reproductive and household sphere (KIT, 2014). As a result, the literature is conclusive in acknowledging that the work load of women in cocoa-growing communities in West Africa is considered to be extremely high, with time being a resource which is in short supply for many women.

Across the literature, women are considered invaluable members of cocoa-growing communities, providing direct labor and participation in the cocoa supply chain, while simultaneously keeping the households that support cocoa production functioning. They contribute to the present cocoa production levels but also are in large part responsible for raising the children that we hope will be the cocoa farmers of the future. The question of whether women are important in cocoa has been answered to be unequivocally “yes”. It has been conclusively established that in order to see not only a continuation of the cocoa supply chain, but to see a truly sustainable cocoa supply chain, empowered women will perhaps play one of the most important roles. There is a clear business case for a holistic approach to



sustainable cocoa, looking at both productivity and community development, to empower women as both direct and indirect participators in the cocoa supply chain, and advocates for overall familial and community well-being. The question that remains is how to best empower, involve, and support women in cocoa-growing communities.

### **Barriers to Women in Cocoa**

Although it is well established that women significantly participate in cocoa production on an informal and unrecognized level, there are significant barriers to formally recognizing the participation of women in the cocoa supply chain and increasing their direct involvement in the cocoa supply chain. Many of the studies reviewed acknowledge the overlaying barrier as deep and entrenched gender dynamics that define specific roles, responsibilities, and expectations for women which are pervasive across West Africa, and indeed are likewise pervasive in developing countries around the world. In general, women will have less individual power, decision making capabilities, agency, and economic freedom than men. Several studies have also identified perceptions of cocoa production as ‘physically arduous’, involving ‘risky activities’, such as the use of machetes or cutting instruments (Barrientos, 2013) and therefore more appropriate for men to engage in.

A primary barrier which is overwhelmingly and consistently identified for women as direct cocoa farmers is the lack of women’s land ownership. In most of West Africa, only male land ownership is officially recognized (Fair Labor Association, 2014). As a result, women typically do not self-identify as farmers and consider their land-owning husbands to be the cocoa farmers. Because women are far less likely than men to own their own land, the estimated 20-25% of women in Ghana and 5% in Côte d’Ivoire who do identify as cocoa farmers will often be widows who have inherited their land from their husbands (Fair Labor Association, 2014).

The lack of land ownership is a vital barrier continuously acknowledged by research and studies on women and cocoa since it limits women’s participation in one of the main sources of cocoa trainings, tools, and resource delivery by the cocoa industry to cocoa farmers: cooperative membership. Land ownership is frequently a requirement for membership in a cooperative. In many of the research and studies analyzed it is repeatedly addressed as a problem for the cocoa industry since the traditional way of reaching cocoa farmers is through trainings, planting materials, loans, credits, education resources, good agricultural practice support, advice, and networks, all of which is provided through cooperatives. Additionally, cooperative leaders who become decision makers and valued contributors to cocoa-growing communities are generally pulled from the cooperative membership itself. This creates layers of structural barriers to women participating in cooperatives, which in turn creates layers of barriers towards reaching women with the support and



resources they need to become empowered, participating, and recognized cocoa farmers.

This is a problem that is well known but it is unclear whether there is a best practice solution. Many studies recommend increasing women's membership in cooperatives and in cooperative leadership, but perhaps there may need to be further research into alternative ways of reaching women cocoa farmers and cocoa laborers, and especially the very large percentage of women in cocoa-growing communities who do not identify as cocoa farmers and yet contribute to cocoa production on such a large scale. Furthermore, while cooperatives are well established in Côte d'Ivoire, in Ghana classic cooperatives may be less common and would therefore be even less likely to reach women cocoa farmers and cocoa laborers with membership and its associated benefits.

The small percentage of women who do identify as cocoa farmers will face many additional and related gendered constraints on access to resources due in part ultimately to the already identified social gender dynamics, land ownership, and cooperative membership. Several of these related constraints have been identified consistently as:

- lack of financial assets and access to credit;
- lack of market access;
- lack of protective gear;
- used or hand-me down tools;
- lack of training;
- lack of cooperative membership;
- lack of leadership roles and opportunities;
- lack of planting materials and inputs;
- lack of labor support;
- lack of time, etc.

Even beyond the constraints that women specifically will face, there are overall constraints to successful cocoa production in West Africa that are felt by both men and women including lack of infrastructure such as roads, clean water, electricity, health and sanitation, and limited value chain coordination. At a policy level, many of the policies and regulations created to further cocoa production in West Africa are gender neutral and do not do enough to actively address the gender specific constraints that women face. For instance, land tenure policies, quotas for women's leadership and participation, access to time and resources, household responsibilities, etc.

In summary, the gender dynamics and socio-economic norms of cocoa production are beginning to be understood in the literature on women in cocoa. However, given



the potential significance of these dynamics to limit the opportunities for women to pursue and be recognized for their contributions to cocoa production, this is an area where further analysis and understanding would be beneficial. In addition, the constraints that are identified above are consistently identified but there may be further institutional and structural barriers that would be unearthed through a deep understanding of gender dynamics in cocoa-growing communities through work and experience listening to both women and men as further activities geared towards greater gender equity are implemented. Until cocoa is no longer considered a “man’s crop” it will continue to be a challenge to achieve gender equity and opportunity in cocoa-growing communities in West Africa.

### **Increasing Opportunities for Women in Cocoa**

The existing research agrees that in order to have a sustainable cocoa supply chain, women must not only continue to be as involved in cocoa production and cocoa-growing communities as they currently are but that their level of involvement, recognition, and support must also increase. It has also been consistently noted that women are a particularly effective development force as empowered women will invest in their families and their communities, strengthening the community and the future of the community.

The literature is in general agreement on a set of recommendations on involving women in cocoa. One of the most agreed upon strategies for increasing the skills, knowledge, and production of the small percentage of self-identifying female cocoa farmers is to make farmer trainings and farmer field schools more attractive for women farmers. Women farmers have incredible workloads and time restraints that should not be underestimated. Women farmers need to be specifically targeted with tailored farmer trainings which often includes taking into consideration women’s lack of literacy when developing materials, considering alternative timing, providing childcare support, and gaining the support of the family for the women to participate. This is a well-established best practice. Women also frequently require additional literacy or financial literacy training, along with business skills training, which many women will not have received as thoroughly as men, in order to derive the same benefits from the farmer training courses. This should be taken into consideration when designing course materials, in addition to timing.

Another strategy that several studies suggest is to engage both men and women with awareness-raising activities on women’s empowerment. Men, especially husbands, fathers, and community leaders, need to be involved and engaged in conversations around equitable division of labor, traditional gender roles, and the benefits of gender equity. The current roles that women play and household responsibilities frequently outnumber those of men, and it is consistently recommended that this be highlighted along with the additional economic potential that comes with increased equity and involvement of women. Conversations and



mapping around the roles that men and women play can help to illustrate in a tangible way the many roles and duties that women take on.

Beyond agreed upon strategies for working within the communities, much of the literature calls on cooperatives and governments to help set an institutional and social environment where women can be empowered and succeed as part of the cocoa supply chain. Cooperatives can set quotas and by-laws requiring women inclusion and the number of women in leadership positions in cooperatives and community based organizations and committees should be increased. The number of women extension agents and trainers should also be increased. Companies can actively set targets and policies within their own networks to be more gender equitable and target women specifically with their policies and programs. Governments can work to ensure that adult literacy and financial literacy are provided, as well as basic social services for cocoa-growing communities such as health centers, sanitation, clean water, schools, and electricity. Financial institutions should be encouraged to provide better access to credit, loans, and financial services. There should be new Government policies and regulations to target women specifically, and those policies that are already existing should become more gender-equitable. Women-only support networks, cooperatives, savings groups, mentors, extension services, etc. should be fostered where possible.

Another area where there are significant opportunities for empowering women is financial inclusion. Several recent studies have focused on how economically empowering women increases their decision-making abilities and in return, their agency within their households. When combined with basic business-skills training, financial literacy training, and dialogue between men and women in the household, activities such as Village Savings and Loans Associations or Groups (VSLA/VSLG) and support for women to develop small income-generating activities have been consistently shown to increase women's ability to contribute to financial household decisions. An emerging area for increasing women's financial inclusion includes increasing women's access to loans, credit, and banking services and products, perhaps through mobile and ICT related solutions to reach rural, underserved areas.

For many of the agreed upon strategies, a consistent element is that women's empowerment needs to be thought about at every level of the cocoa value chain, including production and community life. Women must be actively sought out and encouraged to participate with targeted activities. As to the actual method, there seems to be a variety of strategies and techniques, but there is not yet a best practice as to how to empower women successfully in cocoa-growing communities. This will likely take time to identify the most effective and efficient methods, to identify the most important steps or elements to take. It will also require intense support from the governments and local communities to recognize the importance and potential of empowered women to affect positive change in their households



and communities. The real opportunity most likely lies in a combination of several approaches over a sustained period of time that together build to an atmosphere of equity and recognition.

### **Conclusion: Areas Where Research and Understanding is Still Needed**

Overall, the amount of research that has been done over the past several years fully supports the idea that, beyond understanding gender equity as a fundamental human right, it is crucial to cocoa sustainability and the cocoa value chain to invest in women's empowerment. It is well understood that women contribute not only to cocoa production, but in significant ways to the health and welfare of the communities that cocoa farmers and their families live in. While self-identifying women cocoa farmers are still a small percentage of the cocoa farming population in West Africa, that does not undermine their significance in the value chain and the communities.

It is understood that women need to be further supported in order for women and cocoa-growing communities to reach even greater potential, and several barriers and opportunities for addressing those barriers have been identified. Several roles in creating an enabling environment have also been identified, particularly for governments which need to provide an adequate baseline of social services to cocoa-growing communities which is not always in place. Structural and institutional barriers are universally understood to be major challenges, as well as those that are most difficult to address.

However, one hypothesis to be explored further is there are still some areas and roles that are less well understood. Although some women cocoa farmers will be reached through traditional cocoa farmer training methods through cooperatives, further research, studies, and guidance may need to be developed for reaching women cocoa farmers who are not members of cooperatives and may not self-identify as farmers and yet are contributing to almost half of the cocoa production in West Africa. How can these women be targeted?

For the small percentage of women who do self-identify as cocoa farmers, it was challenging to identify what a successful women cocoa farmer in West Africa looks like. This may be another area that further research could explore and be promoted amongst women in cocoa-growing areas, perhaps with the help of new networks of women in cocoa being formed such as the Women in Cocoa & Chocolate network (WINCC). Profiles of successful women farmers across West Africa should be compared and contrasted for commonalities and environmental similarities. Specifically, what qualities are most important to make them successful? Is it a support network? Education level? Land ownership? Labor availability? Community respect? Entrepreneurship level?



Additionally, further information on gender dynamics in cocoa-growing communities should continue to be gathered and examined as new actions and activities are put into place to ensure that many of the assumptions that are made regarding solutions to empower women are not misleading. In depth, human-centered design pilots and programs that involve women in cocoa-growing communities in the design of the solutions should be prioritized. This should be done in a “fail-safe” environment, allowing the necessary work to be done to build learning and understanding, recognizing that any outcome is a lesson learned. As work with a particular focus and target on women’s empowerment begins in earnest, these areas will become more clear and a true set of best practices and environmental conditions can be identified.

In summary, the Recommendations for Areas of Research / Pilots / Interventions are as follows:

#### Research

- Identify what a successful woman cocoa farmer looks like and promote this through women in cocoa networks and groups;

#### Policy

- Encourage companies, cooperatives, governments to help set an institutional and social environment where women can be empowered;

#### Practice

- Develop guidance for reaching women cocoa farmers who are not members of cooperatives and do not self-identify as farmers;
- Engage in human-centered design pilots to include women and ensure understanding of gender dynamics;
- Develop specific recommendations and actions that can be taken to broaden both men’s and women’s understanding of land tenure issues;
- Advance and establish pilots around women’s financial inclusion to build best practices for women’s economic empowerment.



## **Resources Reviewed**

**African Development Bank Group** (2015) *Economic Empowerment of African Women through Equitable Participation in Agricultural Value Chains*

**Anselm, A. Enete and Taofeeq, A. Amusa** (2010) *Determinants of Women's Contribution to Farming Decisions in Cocoa Based Agroforestry Households of Ekiti State, Nigeria*

**Barrientos, Stephanie** (2010) *Improving Opportunities for Women in Smallholder-Based Supply Chains: Business Case and Practical Guidance for International Food Companies*

**Barrientos, Stephanie** (2013) *Gender production networks: Sustaining cocoa-chocolate sourcing in Ghana and India*

**CARE/Cargill** (2015) *Situational Analysis of Gender Integration at Production Level in The Cocoa Value Chain*

**CARE/Mondelēz** (2016) *Women's Leadership in Cocoa Life Communities*

**Department of Agricultural Marketing and Cooperatives** (2014) *Strengthening Female Leadership in Farmers' Groups and Cooperatives*

**Development Initiatives** (2014) *Trends in Donor Spending On Gender in Development*

**FairLabor Association/Nestlé** (2014) *Assessing Women's Roles in Nestlé's Ivory Coast Cocoa Supply Chain*

**IFPRI** (2002) *Empowering Women and Fighting Poverty: Cocoa and Land Rights in West Africa*

**International Center for Research on Women/Mars** (2015) *Investing in Women's Economic Empowerment for a Sustainable Cocoa Value Chain*

**Kiewisch, Elizabeth** (2015) *Looking Within the Household: A Study On Gender, Food Security, and Resilience in Cocoa-Growing Communities*

**KIT/Cargill** (2014) *Gender Assessment - Female Leadership in Cocoa Cooperatives*

**KIT/Solidaridad/Marks & Spencer/Barry Callebaut** (2016) *Ideation of Small Medium Enterprise (SME) Services in Cocoa Growing Communities in Ghana*



**Mondelēz** (2016) *Cocoa Life: A Transformative Approach for Women's Empowerment in Cocoa Communities*

**Overseas Development Institute** (2009) *When Being More Productive Still Doesn't Pay: Gender Inequality and Socio-Economic Constraints in Ghana's Cocoa Sector*

**Oxfam** (2016) *Women's Rights in The Cocoa Sector: Examples of Emerging Good Practice*

**Utz/Solidaridad** (2009) *The Role of Certification and Producer Support in Promoting Gender Equality in Cocoa Production*

**Wageningen UR/Cargill** (2013) *Towards the Cocoa Promise*

**Wokia-azi N. Kumase, Herve Bisseleua and Stephan Klasen** (2010) *Opportunities and Constraints in Agriculture: A Gendered Analysis of Cocoa Production in Southern Cameroon*

**World Cocoa Foundation** (2016) *Gender in the Cocoa Livelihoods Program: What Have We Learned*