

## Gender inequality in cocoa farming in Ivory Coast

Oxfam's January 2013 trip to Ivory Coast included visits to eight communities in five regions, where we spoke with 15 women cocoa farmers on an individual basis and four men who work in cocoa cooperatives. Although they do not employ or control them directly, companies like Mars, Mondelez and Nestle depend on the hard work of these farmers. But there appears to be little visible evidence that the international food and beverage companies are making sufficient efforts to do their part to help alleviate the inequality endured by the women who grow their most precious ingredient. Following is a summary of what Oxfam learned about conditions for women cocoa growers in this pocket of Ivory Coast.

### Cocoa in Ivory Coast

Ivory Coast is the world's top cocoa exporter, producing about 35 percent of the world's crop.<sup>1</sup> Ivorian cocoa figures prominently in mass-produced foods like mainstream chocolate milk, hot cocoa powder, and candy bars sold by companies including Mars, Mondelez and Nestle. In Ivory Coast cocoa is more than a mere cash crop. It is, in many ways, the resource upon which the country has been built. The vast majority of cocoa production the country comes from small farms of less than 5 hectares in size.<sup>2</sup>

Although cocoa is a crucial part of Ivory Coast's economy, the industry is under threat in a couple of important ways. First, for the 2012-13 harvest, the Ivorian government set the price of cocoa beans at 725 CFA (about \$1.50) per kilogram. Ghana, just to the east, set its price per kilo about 25 percent higher, sparking concerns that cocoa farmers would seek to smuggle their crop across the border to earn a few dollars more.<sup>3</sup>

Second, there has been a surge in rubber growing, which many Ivorian farmers consider an easier and more profitable way to make ends meet. Olga Rosine Adou, a 38 year old woman cocoa farmer living in Agboville, told us: "Rubber is a great threat here to cocoa farming. Everyone is wanting to do it. Among other things, it produces every month. Some people are even destroying their cocoa fields to replace them with rubber. But I believe that if we can get well organized, cocoa will be more profitable in the end."

Adou is emblematic of another issue facing the Ivorian cocoa industry—the inequalities facing women farmers. Ivorian cocoa farms are, for the most part, owned and operated by men.<sup>4</sup> While women play essential roles in farming cocoa, Oxfam's on-the-ground reporting found that their work traditionally has been underappreciated, at best, completely ignored, at worst, and often underpaid.

<sup>1</sup> ICCO Quarterly Bulletin of Cocoa Statistics, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 3, Cocoa year 2011/12

<sup>2</sup> Page 11 Cocoa A lever for Development, BTC Trade for Development

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/10/18/ozabs-cocoa-smuggling-idAFJ0E89H01R20121018>

<sup>4</sup> 15-25% estimated in Ghana and Ivory Coast according to this:

[http://api.ning.com/files/zKGtTtKz5rpxD\\*9tNGabealhAHvB1Cbk6qH\\*Ixh145eMOdc22y2DNq6115eDFpNh0pMTu0Zw-E64DPQ\\*GqKlJLtemFTJJV7H/CocoaGenderreport\\_UTZSolidaridad.pdf](http://api.ning.com/files/zKGtTtKz5rpxD*9tNGabealhAHvB1Cbk6qH*Ixh145eMOdc22y2DNq6115eDFpNh0pMTu0Zw-E64DPQ*GqKlJLtemFTJJV7H/CocoaGenderreport_UTZSolidaridad.pdf)

While companies are winning extraordinary profits from chocolate products most cocoa workers internationally live below the \$2 per day poverty line, and Ivory Coast is no exception.<sup>5</sup> Fair trade certification efforts are underway and becoming widespread, but these certifications were never designed to specifically tackle gender inequality so their benefits have not always delivered the same results to women.

### **Unequal access to cocoa cooperatives**

Membership in cocoa growing cooperatives can afford growers significant benefits including access to training, fertilizer and insecticide as well as premiums paid at the end of harvest. But women told Oxfam that it is rare to find women in cocoa coops, especially in roles of leadership.

Bado, a 50 year old cocoa farmer says she would like to be in a coop, but so far has not been able to gain membership and the accompanying benefits. Bado lives in a cinderblock house with her brother and a few other relatives—six people in total—in a small village in eastern Ivory Coast, near the border with Ghana that is about 90 minutes from the closest paved road. Her inability to gain membership thus far is striking in light of the fact that her son-in-law is the President of the local cooperative. “It’s up to Oumar,” she says. “I’ll be a member as soon as he decides it.”

Allouko says her farm could benefit from Oumar and the coop’s help, “If he gives me the pesticides to help me pump my cocoa fields, my crop will do better. Often I don’t have the means to do it on my own.” Steps taken by companies- in coordination with suppliers and certification schemes- to enhance membership and leadership of women in coops could help women like Allouko.

Olga Adou also wanted to help organize cocoa farmers, so she started her own coop. The COOPASA cocoa cooperative was founded with 100 members in 2010 and now has about 300 of which about 30 are women including the director Epi Joelle Kouamela. Adou says it is difficult to find women farmers in cocoa coops but she desperately wants to forge a new path, “I hope other women will follow us. We want women to realize they can do whatever men can do.” The COOPASA cocoa cooperative is seeking certification, but they cannot afford the startup costs.

### **Men’s work vs. Women’s work**

Some of the challenges facing women in the Ivory Coast are cultural. Even though women are regularly involved in 12 of the 19 key stages in cocoa production, and play a lead role in tending the young cocoa trees and performing post-harvest activities,<sup>6</sup> cocoa farming is considered by some to be “man’s work” off limits to women. The result is that at times women must rely on male laborers which can eat away at their income.

“Women don’t really do the cocoa work,” says Etchi Avla a 43 year-old mother of five who owns and manages her own cocoa farm in Botendé, a small village on a dirt road about 90 minutes from the nearest paved road. “From the very beginning it has always been men ever since the field has been there and when I needed to take care of it then I would call the men. My biggest problem is to prepare the field and encourage the men and thank them.” Because many tasks are considered by some to

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<sup>5</sup> ILO, Labour conventions and specifications, accessed at [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org)

<sup>6</sup> [http://api.ning.com/files/zKGtTtKz5rpxD\\*9tNGabealhAHvB1Cbk6gH\\*Ixh145eMOdc22y2DNq61I5eDFpNh0pMTu0Zw-E64DPO\\*GqKlJltemFTJJV7H/CocoaGenderreport\\_UTZSolidaridad.pdf](http://api.ning.com/files/zKGtTtKz5rpxD*9tNGabealhAHvB1Cbk6gH*Ixh145eMOdc22y2DNq61I5eDFpNh0pMTu0Zw-E64DPO*GqKlJltemFTJJV7H/CocoaGenderreport_UTZSolidaridad.pdf)

be men's work, Alva relies on a male laborer, with whom she shares her crop at harvest time—she keeps two-thirds, and the laborer gets one-third.

But some question whether this division between men's and women's work should remain in place. "Women can do anything they want," says Olga Adou. "And women are taking more responsibility. And so if our government and authorities can realize that they shouldn't put us at the bottom like that."

### **Carrying household burdens**

A shift in opportunities available to women cocoa farmers will require steps by many actors in society to help balance the additional household burdens women face. Like many places around the world women in Ivory Coast frequently must juggle obligations, hardships and daily tasks that men do not have. These obligations can make it more onerous for women to earn a living.

"It's very difficult to do this work as a woman," says Adou. "Women have so much to do at home—cleaning the house and keeping up the courtyard, preparing meals, etc. Women are the first to get up in the morning and the last to get to bed at night. They are educating their children. It's really difficult. They need help to survive."

Aminata Diavala lives in Léléblé in a dark concrete house near the edge of town. She is 50 years old, and shares her home with seven people—children and adults who are relatives. Diavala owns her cocoa farm which covers two hectares of land she inherited from her mother. The cocoa trees are relatively recent, 8 years old, so she's planted bananas among the trees to help feed her family. Her husband, who was also a cocoa farmer, died a decade ago. She has 8 children, but most are grown and married and have moved elsewhere.

Diavala told us she gets up at 5am, sweeps the courtyard, straightens the house, and washes the dishes from the night before. Then at about 7-she doesn't always eat breakfast in the morning- she goes to the fields, about a mile past the outskirts of the village. Diavala herself does some of the work in the cocoa fields—weeding around the seedlings and vegetable gardening. But the cutting of the cocoa pods, etc, is reserved for men. She leaves to go home at 2pm where she prepares dinner all afternoon. Without electricity, running water or packaged foods this can be a demanding process which includes gathering water and firewood, preparing everything from scratch and slaughtering animals when they eat meat. In addition to caring for her farm, she's in charge of taking care of all seven people living in the house.

### **Looking for partners in change**

In spite of significant obstacles many women cocoa growers in the Ivory Coast continue to be ambitious, entrepreneurial leaders in their communities. If they can find willing partners in companies these women can be powerful agents for change creating opportunity for a new generation of farmers.

"As a woman I know that there are other women in other countries who would like to support us," says Etchi Avla. "As a woman when you see another woman is suffering you want to help." Support could help them pursue the better future they are seeking for their families. "I would like for my children to go to school and work," said Bado Allouko. "I would like the children to succeed and be able to work and make money."

"There are many things we want," Olga Adou said, when asked what international companies could do to help women cocoa farmers in Ivory Coast. "For example, we

want to be trained, taught about what steps to take to do it well. We also need tools, equipment, machetes, motos, buckets, etc, to get the work done. If we had those things, it'd be easier. We also need pesticides and fertilizers to treat our farms."

"We want that these conditions to get better," said Adou. "We want men to understand that women can do what men do. Women are not inferior to men. Men must understand that. And I think that with international pressure, things will start to change."