Gender inequality in cocoa farming in Nigeria

Oxfam visited five communities near Ilesa in Nigeria’s Osun state to speak with women cocoa growers about the particular challenges they face in a supply chain that feeds some of the largest chocolate manufacturers in the world. Although they do not employ or control them directly, companies like Mars, Nestle, and Mondelez depend on the hard work of these farmers. But Oxfam’s scorecard highlights how corporate policies and standards that may promote equal opportunities and treatment in the workforce have not trickled down to the women growers who supply these companies with their most precious ingredients. Following is a summary of what Oxfam learned about working conditions for women in this pocket of Nigeria—a country that ranks fourth in the global production of cocoa beans.

Cocoa in Nigeria

In 2010/2011, Nigeria produced an estimated 240,000 tons of beans.\(^1\) About 85 percent of the country’s cocoa is exported as beans, mostly to the EU. Belgium, UK, Germany and the Netherlands are the largest consumers. Recently, U.S. cocoa imports from Nigeria have been trending upwards and were estimated at $40 million in 2010.\(^2\)

Nigerian cocoa growers supply some of the biggest chocolate producing companies in the world including Mars, Nestle and Mondelez for much loved products such as M&M’s, Oreos, and KitKat.

Even though cocoa has been produced in Nigeria for more than a century\(^3\) the cocoa industry has suffered from years of neglect – between 2001 and 2005, the Nigerian government devoted less than 2 percent of its total spending to the agriculture sector.\(^4\) However there are signs that things could be looking up – in 2011, the Nigerian minister of agriculture announced plans to encourage a near doubling of production by making new seeds and fertilizers accessible to farmers\(^5\).

Cocoa in Nigeria is largely produced on small farms. Yet while chocolate companies post healthy profits, Nigeria’s many small holder cocoa farmers struggle to earn a living in communities that have neither running water nor electricity. A 2007 field survey of cocoa farming households in Ondo, Nigeria’s top cocoa-producing state, found 57% of households were food insecure.\(^6\)

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Women farmers face a daily struggle with inequality. Cocoa growers told us women are often only hired for lower paying work while men do some of the more physically demanding jobs that command a higher wage. And sometimes, even when men and women do the same jobs, men earn more for that work. Women also told us they have unequal access to the essentials, such as credit and land that would allow them to increase their harvests. And while agricultural training is rarely offered, when it is, other demands on their time can keep women from attending the sessions.

In spite of these obstacles, women cocoa farmers are among the most entrepreneurial people you will meet, and many are determined to marshal their resources so they can send their children to school and build a more prosperous future. Matched with corporate attention and investment, the drive and hard work of these women could pay substantial dividends for their communities and the companies that rely on the beans they produce.

**Hard work for low and unequal pay**

Chocolate companies are thriving globally, agriculture accounts for an estimated 40 percent of Nigeria’s gross domestic product and cocoa is the second largest foreign exchange earner behind oil. But for many of the small-scale farmers in this region of Nigeria, cocoa production doesn’t mean handsome profits. Some of the farmers we spoke with reported current harvests as small as 50 KG while others say in a typical year their farms produced 1 to 2 tons of beans. Size of the farms, age of the trees, and agricultural practices all play a role in production. Prices can also fluctuate depending on everything from the quality of the beans to the buyer. A harvest of 150 kilograms selling at 320 Naira, or $2.04 per kilogram, could earn a farmer about $306 for a season of effort—not much when you consider that Mars is demanding as much as $26.45 for just one 1 kilogram (35 oz) box of chocolate.

For 35 year old Sade Rafiu, a cocoa farmer who also serves as a village level trader, the system is unfair, “The farmers do the most work and they’re realizing the least.”

From nurturing the trees to drying the beans for sale, cocoa production is a labor-intensive pursuit. Both men and women are hired as farm laborers. While many struggle to survive on the income from cocoa, it is the women laborers who appear to fare the worst. Typically, they are hired to do only the lower-paying jobs. Agnes Gabriel, a 37-year-old migrant worker living in Ayetoro-Ijesa says that one of the jobs she does on local cocoa farms is lug water that will be mixed with chemicals to protect trees from pests. Other tasks include removing the beans from their pods during harvest time, carrying them to the site where they will ferment and then helping with the drying process. For her efforts, she’ll earn 500 Naira a day, or just over $3. Farmers told us women are paid $2-3 for a day’s work while men, often doing a different set of tasks that include weeding, spraying, and harvesting, earn about $7 per day.

Some argue that women do not deserve equal pay because they do different jobs that are less strenuous. But women are sometimes paid less even when they do the same work. “There are times when [women] could work on the same kind of jobs, such as shelling of the pods. But even then, you cannot pay them the same wages because

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9 [http://www.lindtusa.com/category-exec/category_id/21/nm/Bars](http://www.lindtusa.com/category-exec/category_id/21/nm/Bars)
the men work harder and longer than the women,” said Aina Aluko, a 40-year-old cocoa farmer, teacher and mother of six. But women are regularly involved in 12 of the 19 key stages in cocoa production, and play a lead role in early plant care, fermentation and drying - activities recognized by the industry as critical to ensuring good yields and quality production. Even so, company policies do nothing to ensure women receive fair and equal compensation.

**Limited access to training**

Women cocoa farmers say that training could help them increase productivity to earn more to help feed their families, but sessions are held only infrequently, sometimes they don’t hear about them, and some said competing demands on their time keep women from attending. While women were not overtly excluded from these trainings, there are questions about how accessible to women they truly were.

Women describe work days that can start before dawn with household chores and march through until the evening meal, sometimes without a break for lunch. There are children to care for; small businesses to tend to, and farms to work on or oversee. Yet Oxfam’s analysis of company policies saw no evidence that trainings are designed with such constraints on women’s time in mind.

Jumoke Popoole a 35 year old farmer from Oke Agbede Oke says trainings used to be offered intermittently, but women didn’t usually attend. But Popoole and other women said they would like training that would help her improve their productivity.

**Unequal access to land**

Despite the Land Use Act of 1978—intended, in part, to encourage more equal access —land tenure in Nigeria generally follows customary law. Typically, under these systems, women have limited rights. According to 2008-2009 United Nations Human Development Report, just 36 percent of Nigerian women have access to farmland.

And when it comes to ownership, women’s participation is even more tenuous—and may even be declining.

“Nigeria’s 80.2 million women have a worse chance in life than men,” Hajiya Zainab Maina, Nigeria’s minister for women affairs and social development, told a reporter for the Vanguard in July, 2012. “60 to 79 percent of the rural workforce is women, but men are five times more likely to own land.” A 2012 report on gender in Nigeria noted that in 2006, just over 7 percent of women in the country owned land, compared to 38 percent of the men. For women, that figure had dropped from about 13 percent in 2003.

Adelaju Olaleye is one of the small percent of Nigerian women who own their own land. In her case, it was through inheritance that she got her roughly 2.5 hectares—a means of acquisition most often reserved for men in some regions of Nigeria. But since there were no appropriate males to whom her father could leave the land at the time, he chose to give it to her. And the gift—about 15 years ago-- changed her life.

10 [http://api.ning.com/files/zKGtTkz5rpXD*9tNGabealhAHvB1Cbk6qH*Ixh145eMOdc22y2DNq61I5eDFpNh0pMTu0Zw-E64DPQ*GgK1LtemFT7jV7H/CocoaGenderreport_UTZSolidaridad.pdf](http://api.ning.com/files/zKGtTkz5rpXD*9tNGabealhAHvB1Cbk6qH*Ixh145eMOdc22y2DNq61I5eDFpNh0pMTu0Zw-E64DPQ*GgK1LtemFT7jV7H/CocoaGenderreport_UTZSolidaridad.pdf)


“I have seen what good things people are doing with their land and I can also do,” says Olaleye, who is now about 65 and lives in the village of Oke Agbede Isale. “I enjoy my life. I get money to do things in life. I have trained my children and most of the children are well off.”

**Unequal access to credit:**

Access to credit is essential for cocoa farmers to invest in fertilizers, pesticides and labor to help run their cocoa operations. Women told us there are not specific restrictions on women borrowing but with limited assets, women face limits in borrowing too. Yet Oxfam’s analysis found that promoting equal access to credit is another gap in company policies.

Jumoke Popoole says it’s easier for men to borrow money because they have property and they own land, while many women are dependent on their husbands. “Men could borrow more because they have bigger farms,” explains Aina Aluko.

Cocoa farmers often have to turn to village-level buyers for loans. The problem comes at harvest time: farmers who have borrowed from the village-level buyers are obliged to sell their beans back to those same buyers at rates they dictate, which are very low.

“There is nothing I can do,” says Olaleye, “I have no control over the price. Whether I’m satisfied or not, I take the price as given.” Adelaju says that the traders say the price is dictated from beyond and they can’t do anything about it. “It seems for now we are powerless.”

Typically cocoa farmers don’t turn to banks for loans. Beatrice Olowe who owns a farm of about four acres, borrows from friends and relatives when she needs to. Omowumi Afolabi, the mother of five children who works on a cocoa farm she rents with her husband says she borrows from the local cocoa buyers, who will loan her cash or materials. But the money she borrows is on her husband’s shoulders. Omowumi says they don't use a bank, and banks would say that they are not credit worthy. “The reason we have not been exposed to any other source [is] they will claim they don’t know us. You don’t feel comfortable giving to someone you don’t know.”