

## **Empowering Ghanaian Women in Cocoa Farming: Contributions, Prospects and Challenges**

**Dorcas Owusua**

Labour and Global Workers' Rights Program, School of Labour and Employment Relations,  
Pennsylvania State University, Pennsylvania, USA  
dorcasonwusua@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

Women farmers in Ghana do not only contribute to Ghanaian Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and economy, but also manage home resources and farm produce very effectively. Yet, their enormous contributions are yet to gain deserving scholastic attention and exploration. This study appraises the role played by these women in cocoa farming, the challenges they face, and the empowerment strategies employed to elevate the livelihood of women and youth as well as the impact of women empowerment, their involvement and the strategies deployed. The study draws from observation, introspection and secondary data from the internet. Qualitative method, thematic and content analyses, systematic review and descriptive and interpretive tools are employed. The analysis shows that amidst the challenges faced by women cocoa farmers in Ghana, they resiliently contribute hugely to cocoa industry, Ghanaian GDP and economy, and home care economy and resource management. The study concludes that involving and empowering women in the sector offers huge opportunities to the women in particular and the society at large. It calls on stakeholders to address gender imbalances between women and male cocoa farmers in Ghana, and address other challenges militating against the ideal contributions of these women to the industry, the country's GDP and economy, and their families' resources and wellbeing.

**Keywords:** Women cocoa farmers, Contributions, Marginalisation, Challenges, Opportunities

### **Introduction**

The cocoa farming sector in Ghana serves as a critical component of the nation's economy, as cocoa is one of the primary agricultural exports of the country. Within this sector, women play indispensable roles across various stages of cocoa production, from cultivation to post-harvest processing and marketing. The study by Dery and Dongzagla (2020) highlights the significant contributions of women to agriculture in tasks such as planting, weeding, pruning, and harvesting alongside men. In the same vein, Kaschek (2021) points out that women are actively involved in post-harvest activities, including fermenting, drying, and sorting cocoa beans, crucial for maintaining quality. The points made by Dery and Dongzagla (2020) and Kaschek (2021) are apt, factual and apply to the women in Ghana.

Despite their essential roles, women in cocoa farming encounter numerous challenges, which include limited access to land, financial resources, and educational opportunities, and gender-based discrimination and exploitation (Maguire-Rajpaul et al., 2020). These challenges inhibit women's empowerment and hinder their full participation in and benefits from cocoa production and trade. Hence, there is a pressing need to examine the role of women in cocoa farming, the challenges they face, and the strategies for their empowerment to enhance gender equality and sustainability in the cocoa industry.

### **Women's Role in Ghanaian Cocoa Farming Sector**

Cocoa farming is not undertaken by men alone. Both men and women are engaged in this economic activity. Firstly, women are actively engaged in cocoa cultivation, undertaking tasks such as planting, weeding, pruning, and harvesting (Dery & Dongzagla, 2020). Their labour is fundamental to the production process, as cocoa farming is labour-intensive, requiring careful attention to details and sustained efforts throughout the growing season (Maguire-Rajpaul et al., 2020). Women's contributions ensure the maintenance of cocoa farms and the timely harvesting of cocoa pods, which are crucial for maintaining yield and quality. This assertion is affirmed by Kaschek (2021), who observes that women's involvement in these processes is essential for ensuring the quality of cocoa beans, as proper fermentation and drying techniques are critical determinants of cocoa flavour and aroma.

Women's knowledge and expertise in these areas contribute to the production of high-quality cocoa beans, which are in demand in both local and international markets. Also, women play a vital role in post-harvest activities, including fermenting, drying, and sorting cocoa beans (Kaschek, 2021). They are active participants in the cocoa trading and marketing chain, often involved in selling cocoa beans

to local buyers or cooperatives (World Cocoa Foundation, 2017). Despite facing challenges such as limited access to market information and transportation, women play a crucial role in connecting cocoa farmers to broader markets and ensuring the sale of cocoa produce (World Cocoa Foundation, 2017). Their involvement in cocoa trading contributes to household income generation and economic stability within cocoa-growing communities.

In addition to their contributions to cocoa production and trading, women also play a vital role in household and community decision-making related to cocoa farming (Dery & Dongzagla, 2020). They are often responsible for managing household finances, allocating resources, and making decisions about agricultural activities (Dery & Dongzagla, 2020). Women's decision-making power within households influences cocoa farming practices, resource allocation, and investment decisions, thereby shaping the overall productivity and sustainability of cocoa farms (Dery & Dongzagla, 2020). Despite their significant contributions, women in the cocoa farming sector face various challenges and barriers that limit their participation and opportunities for empowerment. These challenges include limited access to land and other productive resources, unequal access to agricultural extension services and training programs, and discriminatory social norms and practices (LeBaron & Gore, 2020).

Additionally, women often experience gender-based violence and exploitation in cocoa-growing communities that exacerbate their vulnerability and marginalization (Maguire-Rajpaul et al., 2020). To address these challenges and promote gender equality in the cocoa farming sector, concerted efforts are needed to empower women and enhance their participation and representation at all levels of the cocoa value chain (LeBaron & Gore, 2020). Doing so includes implementing policies and programs that promote women's access to land, credit and agricultural extension services, and putting up sustainable initiatives that challenge discriminatory social norms and practices (LeBaron & Gore, 2020). Another way of addressing the challenges is by strengthening women's leadership and decision-making roles within cocoa-growing communities (Maguire-Rajpaul et al., 2020). This can contribute to more inclusive and sustainable cocoa farming practices.

### **Challenges Facing Women Cocoa Farmers in Ghana**

Studies have extensively documented the disadvantaged position of women cocoa farmers in the cocoa farming industry of Ghana (Dery & Dongzagla, 2020; Kaschek, 2021; Maguire-Rajpaul et al., 2020). One of the interviewees of Dery and Dongzagla (2020) echoes the land-based challenges faced by women cocoa farmers viz:

Over here, it is the men who acquire and manage the land on behalf of the woman. It is difficult for an unmarried woman like me to easily secure land for cocoa production if I don't have plenty of money. If I have money, I don't need anyone to lead me to the landowner. Cocoa farming is an economic venture and with the needed finances, everyone can venture into it.

The above statement by the farmer is affirmed by LeBaron's (2020) research, which highlights stark gender disparities in access to land among women participants, none of whom were leaseholders. This finding underscores the unequal distribution of land ownership between males and women, which creates as well as widens gender gap in Ghanaian agrarian societies. Additionally, the study sheds more light on the precarious employment situations faced by women in the cocoa industry. Given the foregoing affirmation, this study observes that women cocoa workers often endure various forms of exploitation, including underpayment, non-payment, and the withholding of wages by farm owners. Furthermore, these exploitative conditions are sometimes compounded by verbal abuse, threats, and coercive labour practices.

Moreover, the labour-intensive nature of cocoa cultivation, coupled with societal perceptions that regard it as a male-dominated crop, presents further challenges to women farmers. There other challenges, such as physical strength requirements, inadequate agricultural tools, and prevailing social norms that dictate women should not engage in tasks traditionally viewed as men's work. These contribute to labour shortages among women farmers (Amuzu et al., 2022; Dery & Dongzagla, 2020; McCarthy & Muthuri, 2018). The findings of the study by Ahrin (2022) highlight the challenges faced by women in accessing resources, finance, and land, overcoming disadvantaged social norms, and a lack of awareness regarding

the value of their time. Similarly, Egyir et al. (2018) carried out a research on the imperative of utilizing women empowerment in agriculture in Ashanti region. The study reveals pervasive disempowerment of women across various domains, including production, resources, income, leadership, and time.

According to LeBarson and Gore (2020), the exploitation of women within the cocoa value chain stems from the intersection of numerous disadvantages. Gender inequality within Ghana's cocoa value chain is intricate and arises from various factors, such as women's land rights, labour rights, economic rights, social norms, access to facilities, education, information, and policy (Ahrin, 2022). In other words, it seems women in Ghana have no rights to the aforementioned, given the state of affairs. If they do, these rights are currently inconsequential or they are trampled upon by men, who take of women on the basis of masculinity, profiling women on the basis of their gender or feminine traits (Anyanwu, 2023).

Gender inequality in Ghana extends to economic aspects, particularly concerning income control and access to credit among Ghanaian women (Jamal et al., 2021). Typically, monetary gains from cocoa and other cash crops are controlled by men in typical Ghanaian families (Friedman et al., 2019). Women often require their husbands' approval to make financial investments (Dery & Dongzagla, 2020), and when working alongside their husbands as farm labourers, their earnings are typically received by their spouses, who determine the amount (LeBaron & Gore, 2020). This often results in unfair compensation. Research indicates that women cocoa farmers earn substantially less than their male counterparts, with figures ranging from 25% less (Doherty, 2018) to around 25-30% less (Hiscox & Goldstein, 2014). This wage gap is attributed to social biases that undervalue tasks traditionally associated with women (Kissi & Herzig, 2023; LeBaron & Gore, 2020). It is also attributed to time constraints due to household responsibilities, which limit women's opportunities for paid work (LeBaron & Gore, 2020). In addition, societal norms deem certain off-farm work as 'inappropriate' for women, with the basic implication being the restricting of women's income-earning potentials (Maguire-Rajpaul et al., 2020).

Access to credit and bank accounts poses significant barriers to women cocoa farmers. A report indicates that women are less inclined to take out loans and are less likely to have bank accounts compared to men (Ahrin, 2022). Studies also reveal a decrease in the likelihood of women receiving loans and having bank accounts compared to men (Hiscox & Goldstein, 2014), with men generally finding it easier to access credit facilities (Barrientos, 2014). Weak land rights further hinder women's access to credit and agricultural inputs (Hill & Vigneri, 2014), compounded by the fact that men typically control bank accounts and passbooks (Dery & Dongzagla, 2020). Besides, women farmers are often overlooked by extension agents, as they are underrepresented among the more prosperous farmers (Hill & Vigneri, 2014). These systemic barriers perpetuate economic inequalities faced by Ghanaian women in the cocoa industry.

Furthermore, various challenges faced by Ghanaian women in cocoa farming, beginning with the observation that many farm implements are often too heavy or inappropriate for women to use (Dery & Dongzagla, 2020; Kaschek, 2021). Also, transportation constraints further limit women's mobility, thereby forcing them to rely on their husbands for travel (Dery & Dongzagla, 2020). Furthermore, women-headed households tend to have the lowest access to resources, exacerbating their economic vulnerability (Ahrin, 2022; Hill & Vigneri, 2014). The lack of access to credit and resources leaves women unable to afford necessary inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides, and they may resort to cheaper but highly hazardous options due to financial constraints, posing serious health risks (Dery & Dongzagla, 2020; Anning et al., 2022; Osei-Owusu & Owusu-Achiaw, 2020).

Moreover, the low levels of education among women cocoa farmers impede their ability to comprehend pesticide instructions and navigate paperwork for land documents (Osei-Owusu & Owusu-Achiaw, 2020; Forson, 2013). In addition, women face significant barriers to accessing information and extension services, with men having easier access to information channels (Denkyirah et al., 2017). Extension services often fail to adequately reach women farmers (Hill & Vigneri, 2014; Maguire-Rajpaul et al., 2020). This increases the knowledge gap between males and women in Ghana. Gender concerns are also often overlooked in policy and support initiatives, as there is a lack of clear gender categorization in relevant databases (Dery & Dongzagla, 2020).

Additionally, the underrepresentation of women in cooperatives and decision-making bodies at the local level stems from broader political underrepresentation, resulting in a lack of women voices in governance processes (Ahrin, 2022). These cumulative barriers perpetuate the marginalization of women in cocoa farming in Ghana. Again, women in cocoa-growing communities face significant challenges that hinder their empowerment and autonomy. Firstly, they encounter barriers in accessing training and education, which are crucial for enhancing their skills and understanding (Awuah-Frimpong et al., 2023). This lack of access perpetuates their dependency and limits their ability to improve on their own situations and get themselves asserted (Awuah-Frimpong et al., 2023). Also, despite contributing to 40% of the work on cocoa farms, women only own a mere 2% of the land (Addaney et al., 2022).

The disparity not only undermines their economic security but also excludes them from group training sessions, which further expands the scope of their marginalization (Addaney et al., 2022). Furthermore, women often face challenges in decision-making processes at various levels, from household to national levels (Barrientos, 2014). Their voices are frequently silenced, and they are underrepresented in leadership positions (Barrientos, 2014). This lack of decision-making power perpetuates their vulnerability, and inhibits their ability to effectively address the challenges they face (Barrientos, 2014). Addressing these systemic barriers is essential for fostering gender equality and empowering women in cocoa-growing communities in Ghana.

Finally, globalization has ushered in changes in the cooperation dynamics between international companies and farmers, with contract farming emerging as a prominent mode of collaboration. Contract farming entails companies engaging in legally binding agreements with farmers to secure a stable supply of agricultural products (Callahan, 2019). However, Callahan, highlights that this model may exacerbate the disadvantaged position of women, primarily due to their limited access to land. This disadvantage manifests in several ways: firstly, most women cocoa farmers lack access to land, which makes them unable to benefit from contract farming arrangements. Secondly, buyers often prefer participants from cooperatives or farmers' organizations, which women are less likely to have access to or decision-making power. Lastly, the introduction of contracts may alter the allocation of labour within households, potentially reducing the control women have over household crops, as resources shift towards cash crops (Callahan, 2019).

### **Empowering Women in Ghanaian Cocoa Farming Communities**

Empowering women in Ghanaian cocoa farming communities would enhance as well as increase their contribution to the industry in particular and to Ghanaian economy at large. Doing is of great benefits to the women on one hand, and the society at large on the other. Addressing gender inequality in cocoa farming is crucial despite being gendered by the Ghanaian society from time immemorial. This paper advocates the un-gendering of this industry in Ghana so as to accommodate women farmers in the same regards with the male farmers. This is in view of the fact that women farmers play a vital role in cocoa production, impacting on quality and pricing of cocoa in particular and economic growth at large (Doherty, 2018; Barrientos & Bobie, 2016; Barrientos, 2014). By virtue of the foregoing, these women contribute significantly to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Ghana.

Enhancing gender equality and women's empowerment can bolster resilience in the cocoa sector (Doherty, 2018). In the quest to address gender inequality in Ghana's cocoa industry, policy interventions are imperative. These encompass a diverse array of strategies. Among the recommendations that have been made are empowering, encouraging and supporting women farmers, offering them equal access to land, credits, grants and mechanised implements offered by government and the like other donors, and meeting their needs according to their hierarchy, not on the basis of gender (Doherty, 2018). There is also a call for empowering women cocoa farmers through tailored support mechanisms, such as improved access to credit and training opportunities (Doherty, 2018; Donkor et al., 2022), and the provision of productivity tools specifically designed for women (Kaschek, 2021).

Efforts to strengthen women's access to land are also deemed essential (Addaney et al., 2022; Hill & Vigneri, 2014). Another way-out is the integration gender perspectives into climate change adaptation and pesticide use policies (Tham-Agyekum et al., 2023; Jamal et al., 2021). Organizational support strategies emphasize the establishment of women-only cooperatives to foster community unity among women (Danso-Abbeam et al., 2020; Barrientos, 2014; Hill & Vigneri, 2014) alongside multi-organisational collaborations to address the systemic challenges comforting them (Dery & Dongzagla, 2020; Doherty, 2018). This study observes that multi-organisational arrangements would yield more results than women-alone arrangements. This assertion is in consideration of gender streaming that may arise among members of women-alone organisations, whereby the advocacy of gender balance, justice or equality may be turned into the fight by women against men (that is, gender streaming or feminine sexism).

Be it as it may, ensuring women representation in leadership positions within these organizations is crucial (Egyir et al., 2018) along with providing women-centred training programs and economic assistance (Donthu et al., 2021; Kaschek, 2021). Research recommends establishing dedicated databases for women farmers (Dery & Dongzagla, 2020), employing participatory approaches in gender strategy development (Kaschek, 2021), and considering power dynamics and contextual factors in research design (McCarthy & Muthuri, 2018). Education support initiatives advocate for tailored training programs that accommodate the specific needs of women (Addaney et al., 2022; Doherty, 2018). The initiatives also advocate the promotion of equality education so as to reduce women's dependency (Kaschek, 2021), while also leveraging radio broadcasts to enhance women's access to information (Awuah-Frimpong et al., 2023).

There is also the dire need for economic support interventions that target increasing access to credit for women (Dery & Dongzagla, 2020; Doherty, 2018; Hill & Vigneri, 2014) and enhancing their economic knowledge through programs like Farmer Business School and the adoption of labour-saving technologies (Dery & Dongzagla, 2020; Egyir et al., 2018). For example, the efforts by Mondelez International have had a significant impact on women within cocoa communities, reaching 2,597 villages and benefiting 45,656 women farmers. Through the interventions, women have gained increased access to household and productive resources, as they get empowered to take on leadership roles and amplify their voices in their communities. Annually, 112,505 women receive financial support for education and entrepreneurship, which fosters their empowerment and potentials. In addition, by the end of 2021, an additional 232,308 community members had undergone gender awareness training that was aimed at shifting attention from gendered perceptions and behaviors to addressing gender disparities (Dery & Dongzagla, 2020).

Indeed, the cocoa sector presents several best practices for empowering women, as highlighted by recent studies. Companies like AgroEcom and Kuapa Kokoo are supporting women by providing alternative livelihood opportunities, offering bonuses, and conducting training sessions on best agronomic practices (Addaney et al., 2022). Kuapa Kokoo's initiative encouraging male cocoa farmers to transfer land to their wives aims at increasing women's participation in the cocoa value chain (Addaney et al., 2022). Also, COCOBOD, through programs like CHED, provides free as well as subsidized inputs, such as fertilizer, insecticides, and pesticides, for male and women cocoa farmers alike (Addaney et al., 2022). The Farmer Business School (FBS) stands out as another effective strategy for women's empowerment. FBS sessions equip both male and women farmers with financial management skills and literacy, helping them recognize farming as a viable business option (Kaschek, 2021). Exercises within the program enhance farmers' ability to manage cash flows, particularly important during the lean seasons of cocoa.

In various cocoa-growing districts, CHED prioritizes women farmers in inputs distribution and support services, often facilitated through women's groups (Addaney et al., 2022). Women's engagement in Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA), promoted by sustainability programs that enhance their economic empowerment. Employing women extension officers emerges as another effective approach. Communities served by women supervisors exhibit higher levels of openness among women farmers, who feel more comfortable discussing their faced challenges with their fellow women than

with male supervisors (Kaschek, 2021). Women who own cocoa farms demonstrate remarkable resourcefulness, confidence, and resilience, engaging in alternative livelihoods and investing in their families' education and housing (Addaney et al., 2022).

Ownership of cocoa farms does not only enhance women's economic status but also elevate their social standing, granting them agency and recognition within their communities. According to the findings of the survey carried out by Barrientos (2014), women farmers were found to have relatively higher access to support from NGOs and private organizations than male farmers. Such findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to address gender disparities in accessing agricultural support services. That is, given Ghanaian male cocoa farmers enjoy more opportunities than the women ones, such interventions are aimed at making it possible for women to enjoy such opportunities too. They also aimed at increasing women's involvement in the system. It is important to note that the essence of the empowerment is to bridge the gender gap between male and women cocoa farmers, and address the peculiar challenges faced by women cocoa farmers.

Further, the study by Dery and Dongzagla (2020) reveals prevalent perceptions in Ghanaian cocoa farming households, where women are often relegated to supportive roles, while men are regarded as primary providers. Despite their significant contributions to farming and household sustenance, women have limited control over cocoa-generated income due to cultural norms that favour male domination and male-exclusive decision-making. This gender disparity leads to dissatisfaction among women, who advocate for empowerment to manage household finances more effectively. Empowering women is crucial to ensuring fair treatment and maximizing the benefits of cocoa farming for the entire family. Addressing entrenched gender roles is essential for promoting equality and recognizing women's contributions to cocoa farming communities in Ghana (Opoku et al., 2020).

### **Opportunities and Challenges of Women's Involvement and Leadership**

There are opportunities and challenges of women's involvement and leadership in cocoa farmer cooperatives. Women's leadership in cocoa farmer cooperatives is characterised by both opportunities and challenges, which shape their participation and influence in these organisations. The women leadership crisis in cocoa farmer cooperatives stems from many spheres of life; deep-rooted gender biases and stereotypes often limit women's access to leadership roles in cocoa farmer cooperatives (Danso-Abbeam et al., 2020). Cultural norms may prioritise male leadership to the outright marginalisation of women, thereby silencing their voices and contributions.

Danso-Abbeam et al. (2020) further opine that women frequently encounter barriers to accessing resources like finance, land and training that are essential for effective leadership. This lack of access hinders their ability to engage fully in cooperative activities. Power dynamics in cocoa farmer cooperatives often favour male members, leaving women with limited decision-making authority. As a result, women's perspectives may be overlooked, and their interests are largely underrepresented in cooperative governance. Women in cocoa farming communities often bear significant household and caregiving responsibilities, which can impede their participation in cooperative activities. Balancing family duties with cooperative duties poses a significant challenge for women leaders. According to Danso-Abbeam et al. (2022), there are four major opportunities for women leadership in the cooperatives. That is, women taking up leadership roles in the cooperatives have several opportunities. To start with, being provided with training and capacity-building programs tailored to women's needs can equip them with the skills and confidence to assume leadership roles in and even outside cocoa farmer cooperatives. These programs can include leadership development, financial management, and cooperative governance training. Also, promoting inclusivity and gender diversity within cooperative structures can create opportunities for women to participate and contribute meaningfully to decision-making processes. Establishing gender-sensitive policies and quotas can help ensure equitable representation of women in leadership positions. Besides, empowering women economically through access to credit, inputs, and market opportunities can enhance their status within cocoa farmer cooperatives. By supporting women's economic independence, cooperatives can foster greater autonomy and agency among women members.

Lastly, raising awareness about the importance of women's leadership and advocating for gender equality within cocoa farmer cooperatives can create a conducive environment for women's participation. Engaging male members and community leaders in dialogue about gender norms and roles can also facilitate greater acceptance of women in leadership positions. The Women Empowerment initiatives under Cocoa Life are designed to address various facets of gender inequality within cocoa-growing communities. Efforts are focused on enhancing women's access to essential resources, such as farm inputs, land ownership, and membership in farmer organizations (Addaney et al., 2022; Hill & Vigneri, 2014). Additionally, promoting women's leadership roles within Community Development Committees and Community Action Plan processes, with a target of 30% representation, fosters their active participation and decision-making (Danso-Abbeam et al., 2020; Barrientos, 2014). The Cocoa Life program has been instrumental in promoting women's leadership and empowerment across cocoa farming communities. Through various initiatives and interventions, Cocoa Life has facilitated the emergence of women leaders and increased their participation in decision-making processes. Cocoa Life has worked to address structural barriers to women's leadership, such as land ownership rights. Sensitization campaigns at the community level in Ghana and engagement with Community Development Committees in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire have aimed to ensure greater land access for women. Moreover, Cocoa Life aims to enhance women's financial inclusion by promoting shared decision-making on household finances and providing training on gender roles and responsibilities. Additionally, efforts to improve working conditions for women in the cocoa sector and close the gender pay gap are underway (Mondelez International, n.d.).

Despite the challenges faced by women and young people entering cocoa production, there are opportunities for rejuvenating the sector and improving on living standards in cocoa communities (Löwe, 2017). With aging cocoa farmers and declining yields, there is a pressing need for farm rehabilitation and replanting, which present a significant opportunity for youth and women involvement. Initiatives by organizations like MASO and COCOBOD aim to address access to cocoa land through engagement with local leaders. As Löwe (2017) agrees, there is need for further expansion so as to ensure broader access for young people. Moreover, opportunities extend beyond cocoa production, with the potentials for young people to provide services to the sector, offering additional income sources. However, sustained support from various stakeholders, including COCOBOD and community leaders, is essential to enable young people capitalize on these opportunities.

Women play a crucial role as agents of change, bringing diverse perspectives and driving collective action toward common goals. Their participation in decision-making processes and leadership roles contribute to inclusive governance structures, and promote the interests of marginalized groups. Similarly, youth inject vitality and innovation into community efforts, contributing fresh ideas and entrepreneurial spirit to the society in various regards. Their active involvement in various activities fosters social cohesion and intergenerational collaboration, thereby laying the foundation for sustainable development.

More so, targeted interventions, including capacity-building programs and gender-sensitive policies, are essential to enhance the participation and leadership of women and youth in community development processes (Danso-Abbeam et al., 2020). The engagement of young people in Ghana's cocoa-growing communities challenges the perception of disinterest, as they actively contribute labour to cocoa production amidst the significant barriers to entry. Limited access to land and financial resources hinder their ability to establish themselves as cocoa farmers, while existing farming arrangements offer minimal economic returns. Initiatives to enhance land tenure security, expand access to financing, and provide targeted support programs are crucial for attracting and retaining young farmers in the cocoa sector (Löwe 2017).

Furthermore, Cocoa Life endeavours to improve women's livelihoods through initiatives facilitating access to finance and entrepreneurial skills training (Dery & Dongzagla, 2020; Doherty, 2018). The program's unique approach involves bottom-up development, engaging women, men, boys, and girls in the planning process. Recognizing the importance of women and youth inclusion, the program aims for the participation of 50% of young women in youth-oriented programming, empowering them from

a young age (Jamal et al., 2021). One key success factor has been the effective training provided to women farmers, including programs on Good Agricultural Practices and Village Savings and Loan Associations (Dery & Dongzagla, 2020). These initiatives have not only enhanced women's agricultural skills but also empowered them economically by enabling access to financial resources and promoting financial literacy.

This inclusive approach fosters a supportive environment where women feel empowered to voice their concerns and ideas (Egyir et al., 2018). Importantly, there is a noticeable shift in community attitudes, with more men advocating for the recognition and participation of women (Egyir et al., 2018). Such holistic efforts are pivotal in fostering gender equality and empowerment in cocoa-growing communities. In the case of youth empowerment, Cocoa Life plans to explore mentorship programs for young women to foster professional development and role modelling opportunities. By investing in women's leadership and empowerment, Cocoa Life seeks to create lasting positive impacts on women's agency, community development, and sustainability in cocoa-growing regions.

Finally, Cocoa Life has mainstreamed gender equality through various activities, including gender dialogues, the promotion of gender champions, and engaging couples in discussions on shared responsibilities. These efforts have contributed to shifting social norms and promoting more equitable gender relations within cocoa farming communities. To further strengthen women's empowerment, Cocoa Life has proposed several recommendations across its focus areas. These include advocating for women's land rights at the national level, expanding the role of Women Extension Volunteers, and implementing strategies to address violence against women (Dery & Dongzagla, 2020; Doherty, 2018).

### **Conclusion**

As shown from extant studies, women in Ghana play pivotal role in cocoa farming and thereby contribute significantly to GDP, and economic growth and development in Ghana. Their contributions are also enormous in parenting, home management, care ethics and economy, and social sphere of life. As people found a patriarchal country, their ideal contributions are limited by a range of cultural factors. Gender disparities persist in income control, decision-making processes, and access to opportunities within the cocoa industry, exacerbating women's marginalisation and vulnerability. Women in Ghana's cocoa chain undertake the following aspects of cocoa farming: cultivation, post-harvest activities, and household decision-making, among others.

Yet, they encounter barriers like limited access to land, financial resources, education, and extension services, among others. Apart from cultural challenges bordering on gender ills against women, there are other systemic challenges confronting these women. These include technological constraints, lack of finance, deficient strategies, leadership lapses, and the negligence of women's and youth's participation and contributions. Addressing the challenges would allow for the harnessing of the potentials of women and youths in cocoa farming as well as other economic activities in Ghana as a whole. The study charges stakeholders to empower women cocoa farmers, address the challenges they face, involve them in decision-making processes, and make the involvement of women in all sectors, including cocoa farming, more significant. Resources and opportunities should be made equitable among women and men alike.

### **References**

- Addaney, M., Buabeng, F. M., Yeboah, R. & Adam, I. (2022). Female cocoa farmers' access to agricultural land: Evidence from two districts in Ghana. *GeoJournal*, 1-20.
- Ahrin, H. (2022). *Gender analysis of Ghana's cocoa sector*. Oxfam.
- Anyanwu, E. A. (2023). Linguistic profiling of gendered roles in Mbaise and Afikpo. Unpublished PhD thesis submitted to Department of Languages and Linguistics, School of Post-Graduate Studies, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki.



- Awuah-Frimpong, G., Tawiah, E. O. & Awuni, A. (2023). Impact of radio on cocoa farmers' access to information and farm productivity in Ghana. In *Agricultural marketing and rural finance in Africa* (167-180). Springer.
- Barrientos, S. (2014). Gender and cocoa: A sweet deal for women? *IDS Bulletin*, 45(4), 91-98.
- Danso-Abbeam, G., Poku, K. & Boakye-Boaten, A. (2020). Does cooperative membership improve women's market participation and income? Empirical evidence from Ghana's cocoa sector. *Journal of International Development*, 32(1), 110-130.
- Dery, B. & Dongzagla, A. (2020). Gender disparities in cocoa production: Evidence from smallholder cocoa farmers in Ghana. *Sustainability*, 12(17).
- Dery, I. & Dongzagla, A. (2020). Gender analysis within the cocoa supply chain in Ghana [Research report]. SD Dombo University of Business and Integrated Development Studies, Wa, Ghana.
- Doherty, A. (2018). Women's empowerment and cocoa production in Ghana: A study of Kwaebibirem district. *Undergraduate Honors Theses*, University of Colorado Boulder.
- Donkor, E., Osei-Owusu, Y., Gyamfi, S. & Nyarko, B. (2022). Differential participation and constraints of female and male cocoa farmers in a rural community of Ghana. *Global Food Security*, 32, 100583.
- Egyir, I. S., Owusu-Ansah, F. & Sarkodie, M. A. (2018). Female-headed households and cocoa productivity in Ghana: A study of Sefwi Wiawso Municipality. *Journal of Social and Development Sciences*, 9(2), 42-54.
- Hill, R. V. & Vigneri, M. (2014). Labour, land and capital markets: Impacts on the lives of female cocoa farmers in Ghana. *African Development Review*, 26(3), 596-609.
- Jamal, M., Begum, S., Sarkar, M., & Kabir, H. (2021). Adaptation strategies for climate change by cocoa farmers in Ghana: A gender perspective. *PloS One*, 16(5), e0251653.
- Kaschek, A. (2021). Improving women's empowerment and gender equality in the cocoa value chain in Ghana. MSc Thesis, International Institute of Social Studies.
- Löwe, A. (2017). Creating opportunities for young people in Ghana's cocoa sector. *ODI Working Paper 511*.
- McCarthy, N. & Muthuri, J. (2018). Gender and value chain analysis in Kenya's horticulture and dairy sub-sectors. The Institute of Development Studies.
- Mondelez International (n.d). Emerging best practices of women's leadership within cocoa farming in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire.
- Osei-Owusu, Y. & Owusu-Achiaw, J. (2020). Highly hazardous pesticides use by cocoa farmers in Ghana: Health implications for female farmers. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(17).
- Tham-Agyekum, E. K. & Yamoah, C. F. (2023). Gender, pesticide use and food safety: The case of cocoa production in Ghana. *Journal of Agribusiness in Developing and Emerging Economies* (ahead-of-print).