

**Gender transformation in the African Cashew Value Chain**  
**A qualitative analysis of ACi’s impact on women and vulnerable groups**

**1. About this research project**

Gender is an important component of the African Cashew initiative (ACi) with one of its main aim being to promote employment opportunities mostly for women in the processing sector and ensuring women’s participation in the African Cashew value chain through mainstreaming activities. These goals are highly consistent with the gender frameworks of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) and the Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung (BMZ) – the main donors of the project. In their strategy papers *Gender Impact Strategy for Agricultural Development* (BMGF) and *Development Policy Plan on Gender* (BMZ) both organizations recognize the potential of rural women and focus on women’s economic empowerment, gender equality and mainstreaming gender on all project levels. As outlined in the initial project proposal, the four implementing partners Deutsche Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit (giz) GmbH, Technoserve (TNS), African Cashew Alliance (ACA) and FairMatch Support (FMS) also follow these strategies and have made gender an essential component of ACi.

Since the research is carried out on behalf of giz, the projects contribution to three out of giz’s four central measures (see GTZ 2010) regarding gender will be analyzed: capacity development, awareness raising of participation by women and reducing discrimination against women in agriculture as well as analyzing value chains and helping to optimize them. The fourth central measure, policy dialogue, will not be examined since it is not a focal point of ACi’s intervention focusing to a greater extent on the micro level.

It is crucial to include gender issues in every part of the intervention and to effectively monitor and evaluate the project in terms of specific impacts on men and women. The following research will make a contribution and render a qualitative gender-sensitive analysis of the current ongoing intervention and of the situation of rural women involved in the cashew sector in general. This study will also find out if ACi’s intervention with regards to gender aligns with the gender approaches of the donor and implementing organizations as mentioned above.

**2. Brief literature review: Women in rural development and agricultural value chains**

Following the phrase “the African farmer and her husband” (Commonwealth Secretariat 2001: 10), the literature holistically agrees on women’s essential role in agriculture, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (African Development Bank 201; FAO 2011; OECD 2006; World Bank 2007; World Bank et al. 2009) and suggests implementing organizations to take gender-specific constraints in agricultural production and marketing into account.

Being mostly subsistence and small scale farmers, women produce two thirds of the world’s food and provide the majority of labor particularly for staple food crops; therefore women play an indispensable role in food security (World Bank 2007). Due to male migration, early death, separation and divorce there is a steady rise of female-headed households and many of these women are left behind without social capital and without effective decision-making power in communities.

Women in general and female household heads especially experience several other hardships in their engagement in agriculture<sup>1</sup>. They lack access to land, credit, information and other resources, often as a result of unequal social and cultural beliefs and male-favored policies in statutory and customary law (however there are societies where access to land stems from the female line and in this case male partners might be disadvantaged). Furthermore, women in rural communities are not able to find employment and – if they do – experience lower wages and other unequal treatment (FAO 2002; USAID 2009; World Bank 2007). In addition, women in rural environments face many constraints with regards to attending school and are less educated than men or women living in urban areas (World Bank 2007).

Not only has that negative consequences for agricultural work since women are not able to effectively negotiate with traders and buyers, also women in the processing sector are disadvantaged and only find low-paid employment, e.g. in agro-processing. Because of their lack of agency and low education levels, women do not participate in unions and organizations and are often exploited in these factories, face insecure and unhealthy working conditions, short-term contracts and long working hours (USAID 2009).

In the household, women carry out demanding unpaid domestic activities such as preparing food, sewing, cleaning and child- and relative-care as well as carrying water and finding firewood. In addition to these severe challenges women are moreover often not involved in decision-making and have no bargaining power so that they might not have control over 'their' income and share of the household revenues. Various research carried out concludes that this is counterproductive since it is evident that women spend money more usefully and sustainably than men and invest for example in food supply and children's education (Visvanathan & Yoder 2011). Time allocation studies demonstrate that women work more hours than men, have higher burdens and are therefore not able to attend community or organizational meetings (Sen & Ostlin 2011; USAID 2009). Besides, since women's worker's unions lack organization and leadership skills, participation and empowerment is not facilitated for achieving greater gender equality.

Coles & Mitchell (2011) argue that the aforementioned existing inequalities are likely to be reinforced in value chains. Here, women are mostly employees in the factories and do the hardest and time-consuming tasks on the farm and the household while men negotiate with traders and buyers, take over management and leadership roles and control the markets and mechanization (see also Duggan 2011). Again, the results are male domination, exclusion and discrimination of women and unequal power relationships. Moreover, as Mayoux & Mackie (2007) point out, women and men are mostly involved at different stages of the value chain and those areas where women contribute such as running the household are often less visible and ignored in analysis and development.

As examined in various research projects and outlined in the gender strategies of multilateral, donor and implementing agencies, investing in women's empowerment in rural contexts and agriculture does not only consider women's rights and creates greater gender equity but does also lead to economic and agricultural growth and higher productivity levels.

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<sup>1</sup> Here, it is important to mention that a generalization cannot be made and not all men exercise power or even violence over their women. The following information derives from research in multiple contexts and shows the challenges women often – but not always – face. Gender power relations are furthermore dependent on age and life cycle as well as related to economic class, race of caste (Sen & Ostlin 2011).

### 3. Relevance of the study

Recognizing the potential of women’s contribution to agricultural development and value chains gives one reason for carrying out this survey. As outlined in the literature section, women need to be empowered in production as well as in processing so that unequal power relations can be overcome and economic growth can be rendered. Within ACi, mainstreaming gender is a key target area and women are among the primary beneficiaries of the intervention. Given the importance of gender, as seen above, little has been done so far to collect qualitative data and to make dynamics and outreach of social and economic changes with regards to gender relations more visible. For this reason, it has not been further examined what role women play within the African cashew value chain, neither within the project nor on academic level. This gap is primarily the reason of lack of personnel solely responsible for gender issues, a former external Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system more focused on the essential quantitative data analysis as well as the higher importance of ‘getting the project started’ in the first two years.

Hence, it is now time for adding a qualitative dimension to ACi’s gender strategy. Quantitative data is necessary and has been previously gathered to get an overview of the reach of ACi’s intervention but meaningful M&E needs a qualitative sphere not only to verify success, identify areas for improvement and give recommendations but also to include beneficiaries and listen to their perception of the initiative. Regarding the aim of increasing women’s employment opportunities for example, M&E should not only look at the number of women’s jobs created but also at the quality of those jobs and who gets which work positions. The study is part of the ACi internal M&E strategy, to ensure that gender holds a vital place in the project as well as in the possible next phase of the project.

### 4. Aims and objectives

The objective of the survey is to complement the quantitative data and to evaluate the project impact with regards to the empowerment of women. The study is to identify women’s needs and opinions, recognize and assess any shortcomings of the project intervention and elaborate recommendations on follow-up action.

Mainly, two hypotheses will be examined:

- 1. Women are empowered, have a higher self-esteem and have more meaningful impact on decision-making in the household, community as well as in farm-based organizations**
- 2. Women and families spend their increased income more usefully and sustainably, e.g. on children’s education, health, food supply etc. improving the well-being of household members, and reducing rural poverty**

The study will look at how the project affects the wider family and vulnerable groups (children and the elderly) and, importantly, include men’s perceptions and roles in the analysis. Expected results will mostly assess gender equality at micro levels focusing on the impacts in the household, farm or processing plant.

## 5. Research questions

Besides the two main hypotheses, the study will identify and analyze other key areas of ACi’s intervention with regards to women and vulnerable groups, such as:

- **Women’s (or mixed) organizations and unions:** Are women (actively) participating in associations and unions? How well are these organized?
- **Child labor:** Do children work on farms during school time? Are children involved in hard physical labor or is it just a form of rather ‘harmless’ assistance?
- **Women’s workload:** What specific tasks are performed by men and women (sexual division of labor)? Has women’s workload (in the household, on the field, in the factories) stayed the same, increased or decreased as a result of the initiative? What are the impacts (e.g. physically and mentally)?
- **Impact on vulnerable groups:** What specific vulnerable groups are (positively or negatively) affected by the project? Have there been consequences for children and the elderly?
- **Social change:** Does the project impact on traditional norms and values (e.g. gendered division of labor, traditional and modern role of the women, customary law)? Have power relations and the social standing of women changed as a result of the intervention? How do men perceive these (attitudinal) changes?
- **Women’s rights:** Do women have equal access to land, credit schemes and resources (e.g. inputs, technology, and extension services)? Do women have a reliable and safe work space, work contracts, insurances and social security? Are the salaries fair and equal? Are women discriminated against or harassed?
- **Women’s role in the African cashew value chain:** Do women (actively) participate in every part of the value chain? Are women in leadership and management positions? Are female farmers linked to the market and able to negotiate ‘on eye level’ with buyers and traders?
- **Evaluation of ACi’s intervention:** Do women apply the good practices disseminated in the trainings? Do women regularly avail ACi’s services or are men overrepresented? Does ACi do enough in terms of promoting gender equality on all levels and are ACi’s interventions gender-mainstreamed?

## 6. Methodology and ethical information

Following USAID’s definition, this gender analysis will describe existing gender relations and find out gender-based constraints in the four environments household, farm, processing plant and community. It will furthermore collect qualitative “information about gender relations to clarify the importance of gender differences for achieving development objectives” (USAID 2009: 15).

The researcher will conduct fieldwork in two of ACi’s project countries, in Ghana’s Brong Ahafo Region and in the Southwestern part of Burkina Faso. Both actors in production and processing will be interviewed. Since the conduction of the study is carried out by the internal M&E system, there might be a possible bias of the researcher to overemphasize project success and neglect negative outcomes. However, as the main researcher is an intern who is not firmly attached to the organization, impartiality and independence is ensured. Additionally, the researcher has consulted the executive directors and it was commonly agreed that also negative findings will be honestly and transparently displayed and disseminated so that these shortcomings can be detected and effectively tackled.

Empowerment and well-being, the primary contents of the survey, are not easy to measure and combine different and complex economic, social and political indices. For this reason, quantitative data is not used in my limited and short-term research. I will moreover focus on qualitative data analysis and conduct semi-structured interviews with pre-elaborated questionnaires to assess the situation of women and vulnerable groups and to examine their experiences to create a more comprehensive overview of their (changed) situation in rural agricultural societies.

The method of a semi-structured interview is chosen since the purpose of the interview is “to find out what kinds of things are happening rather than to determine the frequency of predetermined kinds of things that the researcher already believes can happen (Lofland 1971, cited in Fielding & Thomas 2008: 247). Moreover, topics and questions which may not be covered by the questionnaire can be addressed and discussed in the course of the interview which will have a flexible and open character.

Thus, the questions designed to get answers to this complex issue will mostly be very open-ended and are beside a few exemptions not standardised to discuss the issue in all its contexts and relations and in order to encourage the interviewees to talk about their experiences, recommended amongst others by Fielding & Thomas (2008). Furthermore, the absence of standardisation will allow the interviewee a free expression of opinions without any external limitations or being stuck to the guiding questions, a so called “narrative interview” (Sarantakos 2005). During the interview, the interviewed person may share several personal experiences with regards to the researched topic and therefore provide a very comprehensive and illustrating own viewpoint of the situation. This is considered as a key technical element of qualitative interviewing in order to “communicate underlying attitudes, beliefs and values” (Fielding & Thomas 2008).

In addition, as Sarantakos (2005) points out, the interviewer will not control but rather engage in the talk and allow the interviewee at all times to add and talk about issues the interviewee considers as relevant. In the research it will therefore be assured that the interview is not repeating the interviewer's point of view or influencing the interview with respect to what the researcher already knows about the topic and what he wants to hear and expect from the interview. Guiding questions are however necessary in order to give the interviewer a clear structure and to get the interview ‘back on track’ to examine the hypotheses and research questions.

Methods of prompting and probing, which for example Sarantakos (2005) or Fielding & Thomas (2008) point out, will be used lead and encourage, but not directly influence the interview and the interviewee's response: Questions like: “I have read about...” “Can you tell me more about...?” or “What is your opinion on...” facilitate the interview but do not state an opinion or guide the respondent to an already given statement which may be or may not be agreed on. Attention will be paid “to get a response without putting words in the respondent's mouth” (Fielding & Thomas 2008). However, follow-up questions will be asked after the respondent has answered the questions to fill gaps, go deeper into an interesting aspect or clarify uncertainties.

Lastly, gestures, body language and facial expressions will be used to encourage the respondent in her/his answers (for example nodding as understanding what the respondent means). Non-verbal behaviour by the interviewee can show not only that the person feels comfortable talking about the topic but also that she/he is really excited to share her/his knowledge and state her/his opinions about the different aspects, especially in terms of critically reflecting on the life experiences. The research will take these issues into account.

Interviews will not only be held with the women themselves but also with the different actors in the respective setting who may contribute to their well-being, e.g. supervisors, household members etc.

Since rural women are a very vulnerable group, ethical consideration is very important in this study. It will be made sure that the interviewee is aware of voluntary participation in the interview at all times, a key consideration in ethical questions according to de Vaus (2001). Furthermore, de Vaus (2001) argues that an informed consent must be given to and agreed on by the interviewed person. The respondents need to sign this informed consent in order to allow the researcher to conduct the interview; much attention will be given to the explanation of the consent in an appropriate and understandable local language. Additionally, it is assured that the answers will be used confidentially and anonymously so that the person cannot be identified as the source of the given information (de Vaus 2001). The interviewer will take notes but it will be clarified that the answers will not be given to second persons, be published with mentioning the name of the person or used in any harmful way differently than indicated.

Power relations need to be taken into account since the relationship between researcher and respondent may be considerably different in terms of social background, gender, race, ethnicity, age and personality (Sarantakos 2005). Therefore, the research will be done in cooperation with experienced staff from the African Cashew initiative which will provide support and information about cultural sensitivity, ethical considerations and the nature and methodology of the interview. In this regard, the researcher will be accompanied by local personnel who will help in the translation of questions and facilitation of the interview. Due to some gender sensitive questions, the interview will be carried out together with a female resource person. Interviews will take place where the women feel comfortable or 'home' which may in this research either be in a quiet and comfortable room in the processing plant or in the house of the interviewee. Important is the informality of the atmosphere and that the women feel relaxed and not intimidated. Furthermore, also claimed by Sarantakos (2005), the interviewer will avoid judging or disbelieving answers of the respondents and furthermore be a neutral researcher who will show interest in the things the respondents will say, give them full attention, encourage the interviewees to state their honest opinion (by using body language such as smiling, nodding etc.) and to talk freely about their experiences in life without any repercussions.

## 7. Timeline

The research project will be carried out from November 10, 2011 to March 27, 2012 (the day of the final presentation). In the presentation, the panel will agree – based on the recommendations made – on follow-up action to be implemented and how to measure and monitor success. The two phases for field work will take place from December 4, 2011 to December 16, 2011 in Ghana's Brong Ahafo Region and from January 22, 2012 to February 06, 2012 in Burkina Faso. (See Annex for detailed information)

## 8. Perspective

The data and participant’s assertions gathered will be highly valuable for beneficiaries, project staff and donor organizations and can be used in a multiple way improving the results and outcomes of ACi’s intervention.

First and most importantly, the beneficiaries themselves will benefit as their voices are heard, they can take part in the project and share their insight. This information will be used to write recommendations on follow-up action. Based on their evidence, the finalized study will provide valuable perceptions and opinions of the target group giving ACi ‘real life’ experiences in order to identify women’s needs, up-scale successes and assess and react towards shortcomings.

Secondly, in liaison with the communications department, case studies, fact sheets and other relevant material can be elaborated which may be published and/or be part of the newsletter and the website. This material can disseminate success stories to project staff, donors and the wider audience to raise awareness and understanding for gender issues within the intervention. In addition, gender concerns would move into focus and receive the importance initially outlined in the project proposal.

Finally, the questionnaire design and the conduction of the survey in two countries provides baseline data and the methodology for potential further studies in the other project countries Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and Mozambique. This will facilitate comparisons between the different project countries and allows identification of lessons learned and good practices which can be applied with consideration of the regional context.

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## Annex: Timeline

| Date                    | Activity  |
|-------------------------|---|
| 10.11.2011 – 24.11.2011 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading of policy papers, gender strategies and background documents</li> <li>• Preparation of document presenting the need for the study and communicating the conduction to donors and partners</li> <li>• Organization of field trip to Brong-Ahafo Region</li> <li>• Expert interviews</li> <li>• Meeting with Mareike Zenker (giz gender expert)</li> <li>• Preparation of questionnaire, methodology and confidentiality form</li> <li>• Testing of questionnaire</li> </ul> |
| 25.11.2011              | Presentation of questionnaire, methodology and confidentiality form with feedback session   |
| 26.11.2011 – 29.11.2011 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finalization of questionnaire, methodology and confidentiality form</li> <li>• Organization of field trip to Brong-Ahafo Region</li> </ul>   |
| 04.12.2011 – 16.12.2011 | First field work phase in Brong-Ahafo Region  |
| 05.12.2011 (half day)   | Meeting in ACi’s Sunyani office (discussion of survey and expert interviews)  |
| 07.12.2011 (half day)   | Feedback session in ACi’s Sunyani office  |
| 07.12.2011 – 16.12.2011 | Second field work phase in Brong-Ahafo Region   |
| 22.12.2011              | Presentation of findings in cashew house  |
| 03.01.2011 – 16.01.2012 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of data gathered in Brong-Ahafo Region</li> <li>• Evaluation of field work (lessons learned)</li> <li>• Reading of policy papers, gender strategies and background documents</li> <li>• Organization of field trip to Burkina Faso</li> <li>• Expert interviews</li> <li>• Preparation of adjusted questionnaire, methodology and confidentiality form for Burkina Faso</li> <li>• Testing of questionnaire</li> </ul>  |
| 17.01.2012              | Presentation of questionnaire, methodology and confidentiality form with feedback session   |
| 18.01.2012 – 21.01.2012 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finalization of questionnaire, methodology and confidentiality form</li> <li>• Organization of field trip to Burkina Faso</li> </ul>   |
| 22.01.2012 – 24.01.2012 | First field work phase in Burkina Faso  |
| 25.01.2012              | Feedback session in ACi’s Bobo Dioulasso office   |
| 26.01.2012 – 06.02.2012 | Second field work phase in Burkina Faso   |
| 07.02.2012 – 04.03.2012 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of data</li> <li>• Evaluation of field work</li> <li>• Preparation of final study</li> </ul>  |
| 05.03.2012              | Submission of study (first draft)   |
| 13.03.2012              | Presentation of draft and feedback session  |
| 14.03.2012 – 26.03.2012 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finalisation of study</li> <li>• Elaboration of publication material</li> </ul>  |
| 27.03.2012              | Final presentation and agreement on recommended follow-up action  |