



INTERNATIONAL FOOD POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE  
*sustainable options for ending hunger and poverty*

IFPRI

*Established 1975*



# EMPOWERING WOMEN AND FIGHTING POVERTY

## Cocoa and Land Rights in West Africa



February 2002

# WOMEN AND COCOA IN GHANA

Discrimination against women has persisted for centuries, often preventing half the population from enjoying the same rights and freedoms granted to men. In some places, these restrictions occur even today. Girls are kept out of school, or women may not be able to participate in elections, let alone hold public office. Throughout many parts of the world, women have not traditionally been able to own land. Without land rights, women are vulnerable, unable to take complete responsibility for their own well-being and that of their children.

In Ghana, women, on average, live 58 years and have at least four children. Four in ten cannot read. Although both men and women work the farms, land is traditionally owned by, and passed down to, men. If a woman's husband were to die, she would not automatically inherit his land - it is likely, in fact, that his male relatives would. The woman's ability to feed, clothe, and house her children would depend on his relatives' benevolence. Until recently, this perilous position was just an accepted way of life. Women's dependence on men, however, is beginning to change in Ghana. Long-standing traditions are being dismantled, and women are obtaining rights to land where none existed before.

Ghana, located on Africa's west coast, is about the size of the United Kingdom. It is home to 19 million people, and the average income is US \$400 per year. Roughly 60 percent of the population lives in rural areas.

Cocoa is a major cash crop here, though farmers also grow food for their families' consumption. Cocoa is an excellent crop for smallholder farmers because it can be grown on small plots of land. Because women are equally productive cocoa farmers, the demand for cocoa has created more employment opportunities for women in Ghana. Men are beginning to give women land rights

in return for their land on cocoa plots, and some are willing their land to their wives, who almost always work as their farming partners. These rights and opportunities empower women economically, socially, and politically, enhancing their status and long-term security.

Studies have consistently shown that, unlike men, poor women spend most of their additional income on their children. When a woman's income increases, benefits spread to the rest of the household. Food security increases and children's nutrition improves. Children, particularly daughters, are more likely to attend school. Better-educated girls tend to marry later and have fewer children. The economic security a woman gains has positive repercussions for generations to come.

Cocoa production is particularly good for female farmers. If they have the same access to inputs like credit and fertilizers, women are able to farm cocoa as well as men. Cocoa can be grown on marginal land and prevents soil erosion, making it an especially good crop for poor farmers who do not have access to fertile land. Poor female farmers are often in this position, and cocoa helps them make most of the land available to them.

Studies and household surveys conducted by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) show families and communities benefit greatly when women are involved in cocoa production in Ghana and other parts of West Africa, and that with government support, women's progress towards greater empowerment can have a dramatic and positive effect on reducing hunger and poverty. Government and societal restrictions still exist, however, and women must continue to push for more rights and greater control of their destinies.

COVER PHOTO: Women set out in the morning to work their farms in Ghana. Because of cocoa, women are gaining stronger property rights, which brings them more opportunities for income and greater economic security for their families.

## LEFT WITH NO SUPPORT

### One Woman's Experience

**A**ma Aidoo\* is a 60-year-old widow. She has already lived longer than most women in Ghana will, but old age has not brought her comforts and rest.

Twenty years ago, the Aidoo family was enjoying a period of financial prosperity, and Akwasi, her husband was proud of his success in providing for his family. He was able to hire workers to clear the forest on his land and help him begin cocoa cultivation. Akwasi also purchased mate-

rials to build a new house, a place for himself and Ama to grow old together.

Tragically, Akwasi died suddenly, tak-

ing Ama and the children's economic security with him. His brother claimed all the property, including the materials for the new house. Ama had not helped plant the cocoa on the land, so she had no rights over the property. She and her children were left only with a small plot of land Akwasi gave her on his deathbed. Ama could not afford to keep the children in school, and the family struggled to survive through subsequent years.

Today, proud but tired, Ama is pleased to know her daughters will not have to suffer the same fate she endured. Today, she says, things are different. Not only is the land women receive from their husbands from helping to plant cocoa theirs to dispose of, but with the passage of the Intestate Succession Law, the rights of women and children to the husband's/father's land is now protected. Women's rights are more secure, she notes, so if a woman has to take care of herself and her children, she can.

*\*Names have been changed.*

**Ama and her children were left with only a small plot of land**

# BACKGROUND

## ON WOMEN AND LAND RIGHTS

Property rights in Ghana are evolving, and the changes bode well for women. Traditionally, land was communally owned, and the way to lay claim to a piece of land was to clear the forest on it. This is difficult, intensive work, and those who do it are rewarded with strong rights to the land they have worked. Traditionally, men cleared the land, and as a result, land rights were usually given to men. However, a man could not sell the land he was given rights to, nor was he able to transfer rights to his wife. Women were also not able to inherit land. If a man died, his extended family often had more rights to his property than his wife and children. An IFPRI study conducted in the area showed that a widow usually only obtained rights to roughly three percent of her husband's land.

In 1985, passage of the Intestate Succession Law changed the inheritance system to create greater secu-

rity for widows and children. According to this law, in the event of a man's death, one-third of his property would be given to his widow, one-third to his children, and one-third to his extended family. However, cocoa farming provides another opportunity for further increasing the financial security of a farmer's immediate family and the empowerment of women.

Cultivating cocoa provides women with economic security and a more secure way to gain rights to land. Under the traditional land rights system, land can be given to an individual who helps with tree planting. Women frequently help their husbands plant cocoa trees, and they can be given part of the cocoa-cultivated land in return for their help in planting the crop. Once land is given to a woman, it cannot be reclaimed by any family member, not even her husband.

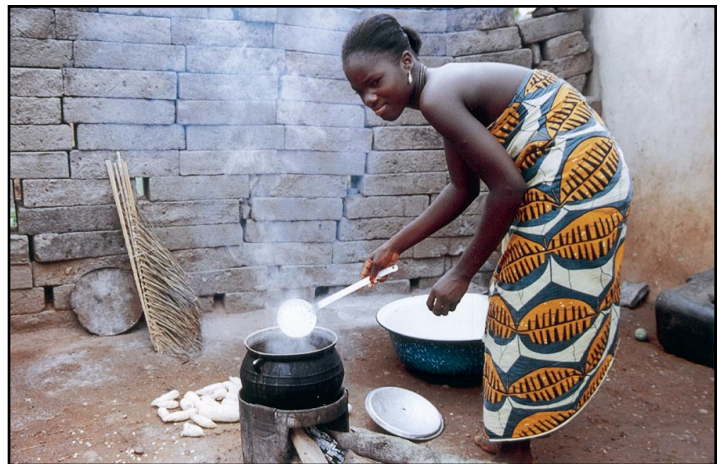
# HISTORY OF IFPRI'S WORK

## ON GENDER, PROPERTY RIGHTS, AND COCOA

In 1995, IFPRI began working in collaboration with the Institute of Land Management and Development at the University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, Ghana, to survey communities and households in Western Ghana. This work was undertaken in an effort to learn more about land rights traditions in the area.

The first part of the survey process involved more than sixty villages in Western Ghana, the area of the country where cocoa cultivation is most active. Village-level surveys were informative, but only provided a broad overview of men's and women's land rights and farming practices. To determine whether men and women were equally efficient cocoa farmers, it was clear that more in-depth research needed to be done. From the villages, researchers chose nearly three hundred households at random on which to conduct more intensive surveys. Members of the household were questioned about how much land they had rights to, how they came to have those rights, size of their families, and other factors. Through this process,

researchers learned from the women themselves the extent to which cocoa cultivation has changed their lives.



In Ghana, women are frequently responsible for cooking and taking care of the home, in addition to helping plant crops such as cocoa.

# BENEFITS OF COCOA PRODUCTION FOR WOMEN, THE POOR, AND THE EARTH

Cocoa is an important crop for poor farmers in West Africa, even more so for women farmers, because of the new opportunities it opens to them. Cocoa farming is transforming the traditional view and status of women in these societies. Research conducted by IFPRI on cocoa farming and women in Ghana reveals several direct and swift improvements women can make in their lives from their work farming cocoa. These improvements have broad, positive implications for societies and the environment. Though it is not a panacea for the problems smallholder farmers face, cocoa offers many benefits to the poor in general, and to women in particular.

## **Cocoa can empower women.**

- Physical differences and lack of access to cash and labor often keep women from being able to work farms as effectively as men. With cocoa, however, once the trees are established, and if women have the same access to inputs such as fertilizers and loans, women and men are equally productive farmers. As a result, opportunities for women to earn more income increase with cocoa production. Women's labor is especially important when the cocoa trees are young, since that is when they are cultivated with food crops, which are traditionally grown by women. The weeding labor that women provide is crucial for the growth of young cocoa. With the increased demand for cocoa, women's labor has become more valuable for the crop and to their husbands.

***When household assets are in the hands of women, expenditure on education and girls' health increases.***

Even when women can gain ownership of land, traditional gender disparities do not give them equal access to important tools and resources, such as fertilizers and loans. As a result, while the status of women has improved in societies where cocoa is produced, equality has not yet been achieved.

- Traditionally, women in West Africa have been denied rights to land. Women could not inherit land,

and it would only be temporarily allocated to them. However, by farming cocoa, women are obtaining strong rights to land, which in turn enhances their status and long-term security.

Land is being made available to women in two ways. First, women can now inherit land even if the husband dies without leaving a will. Since the passage of the Intestate Succession Law in 1985, women have been able to inherit a third of their husband's land by law. However, knowledge of this law is not universal, since many Ghanaian women can neither read nor write.

A second way for women to obtain rights to land is through "gifting." Husbands are giving their wives land in return for their help in cultivating it. This land cannot be taken from the women, which increases their financial security and provides them something to leave to their children. Additionally, women are also entitled to a portion of the land they help their husbands plant with cocoa, should the marriage end in divorce.

IFPRI research has also shown that when household assets are in the hands of women, expenditure on education and girls' health increases. Girls who are healthy and have had the opportunity to go to school are better equipped to be productive adults. The benefits of empowerment for women are passed on from mother to daughter.

## **Cocoa can reduce poverty and hunger.**

- Cocoa production has improved the lives of poor farmers – both men and women. Because cocoa is an important export commodity, returns on cocoa plots are much higher than those on food-cropped land. Farmers



are able to grow food to feed their families, and also produce a cash crop that allows them to purchase more food if what they grow is insufficient. They can also pay for things such as schooling for their children or better types of seeds or tools to improve their harvests and make their work easier.

Poor farmers, be they men or women, frequently own land that is marginal or less favored because it is all they can afford. Land can be less favored for a number of reasons. In some places, it is less favored because the land is in remote areas, making it difficult for farmers to get their goods to market. In other places, land does not receive adequate irrigation and is far from a water source. In Western Ghana, some less-favored lands are on hillsides, which are difficult to farm. Many crops cannot grow well on hillsides, but cocoa thrives in such places. Because it is a profitable cash crop, even poor farmers who own land that cannot support other crops can increase their income by growing cocoa.

- Increased income not only reduces poverty in the short term, but it also creates greater economic security for the future. As a result of this increased stability, households can better afford to educate their children. Studies show that when women work and have greater economic influence within the family, the household is generally more food secure, since women are more likely to allocate money towards

education and food. Putting control over income into the hands of women decreases ill health and hunger.

Educating women and girls is one of the best ways to reduce poverty and hunger. In fact, increased education for women was responsible for nearly half the decline in child malnutrition in the developing world between 1970 and 1995, according to an IFPRI study. By allocating money towards the education of her children, especially her daughters, a woman reduces the risk that her children and grandchildren will live in poverty.

- When cocoa plants are young, they can be grown alongside food crops. In this way, poor farmers can use their small plots to grow cocoa *and* food for their own families at the same time.

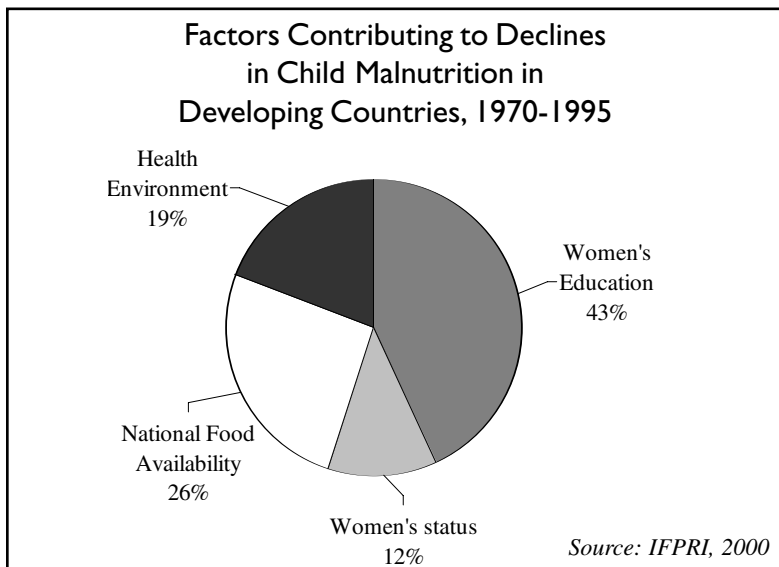
***Growing cocoa is an opportunity for even poor farmers to increase their income.***

### **Cocoa can help the environment.**

- Much of the forestland of West Africa has been cleared for agriculture. However, since cocoa is a shade crop, farmers plant seedling trees with their young cocoa plants. As the trees mature, they restore some of the biodiversity lost when the forests were leveled.

- Cocoa can be grown on marginal lands that cannot support many other types of agriculture. Not only does this make good use of less favored land, but it also helps to protect the soil. For example, on hillsides, fertile soil is often washed away by rain. However, cocoa can be grown on steep hillsides, protecting soil from erosion.

- According to the International Cocoa Organization, cocoa is the most environmentally-friendly of all tropical cash crops, when grown on small plots.



# IFPRI's RECOMMENDATIONS ON WOMEN AND COCOA FARMING

Cocoa production provides women farmers in West Africa the opportunity to take control of their lives and improve their situations in unprecedented ways. There is a limit, however, to how much these women can do without the support of their governments, their male counterparts, and relatives. IFPRI researchers make the following recommendations based on their research in the region and interaction with the women caught between the opportunities of cocoa production and the limitations of policy and traditions.

- **Governments should help women make the most of the opportunities cocoa farming provides by ensuring that women have the same rights to own and inherit land as their male relatives and by educating them about their rights to land.**

Very recently, Ghanaian women became protected by law if their husbands died without leaving a will. However, many widows may not be aware of their land rights due to high levels of illiteracy. Governments should educate women about their legal rights so they can claim them in courts of law.

Recently, women have also begun to own land through "gifting." Wives can be given land, and individualized rights to the land, for helping their husbands establish cocoa farms. However, women need to meet certain requirements before they can acquire land as a gift. To acquire land in this way, a woman must have planted between 40 and 50 percent of the crop on that land. Men acquiring land through the same procedure can do so if they have planted only 20 to 25 percent.

In addition to these disparities in land ownership policies, women frequently do not understand what their land rights are. There is no established system for passing on this information and, as a result, women landowners are frequently unable to take advantage of the benefits that come with being a landholder. Governments need to level the playing field so that women have equal opportunities to acquire land, and equal support in understanding how to exercise their rights.

- **Governments should also provide legal support to women's attempts to enforce their legitimate claims to land.**

Women are entitled to land willed to them. However,

family disputes may still arise over a deceased relative's land. In these situations, the woman is frequently at a disadvantage. Tradition, lack of government support, and little or no understanding of their rights work against women. Governments should offer legal support to women trying to assert their rights to land willed to them. In doing so, governments help support women's rights and empowerment.

- **Women need equal access to credit and other inputs.**

Although women's access to land is improving, they are prevented from obtaining some of the key resources needed by land owners. Despite changing laws, secure land rights are still difficult for women to obtain. Without secure rights to land, women are denied access to credit, rendering them unable to take out small loans to improve their farm and increase its productivity. Without these loans, women cannot access seeds and fertilizers, while men who can secure loans are able to purchase such things. Lack of access to loans reduces women's profit, contributing to increased poverty and decreased food security in the home. As a result, these women might be unable to send their children to school, and the children might have to work earlier in life to help support the family. Lack of education continues the cycle of poverty.

Traditionally weaker land rights, and a lack of education to help them understand new laws, places women at a disadvantage to men. Women do not enjoy the same access to tools that could improve their ability to make their farms prosperous. Their families become more susceptible to continued or increased poverty and hunger.

Governments need to help women understand their land rights, and offer a support network for them within the

legal system. Only in this way can women have the same access as men to loans and credit, seeds, fertilizer, and other farm inputs. With equal access, women farmers will have equal opportunities to provide for their families.

- **Governments should review cocoa pricing policies to ensure that cocoa farmers are not being unfairly taxed.**

In an attempt to stabilize domestic farm-gate prices, governments frequently impose hefty taxes on farmers for their export crops. This dips into the farmers’

incomes, and leaves farmers with less profit to care for their families, pay their workers, and make improvements to their farms.

For smallscale farmers, these taxes can be the difference between feeding their families and going hungry. For those who do not have much to begin with, every bit that is taken away hurts. Many cocoa farmers work only small plots of land, and the money they make from farming cocoa is what gets them by year after year.

Governments need to review taxing procedures for cocoa, especially as they pertain to smallscale farmers. Otherwise, efforts to regulate those who have much more will unjustly penalize those who have very little.

## A Legacy For Her Children

**T**hirty years ago, Esi Yarney’s\* husband, Fiifi, cleared some of his land to grow cocoa. For years, husband and wife worked together to plant and care for the cash crop. They also grew food crops to feed themselves and their four children. During this time, Fiifi designated some of his land just for Esi to use. He also had the foresight to give her some land as a “gift,” knowing that otherwise, she would be left dependent upon his relatives if he were to die before she did.

Fiifi’s thoughtfulness paid off for Esi. When he passed away, three-quarters of his land was taken by his brother. The rest was given to Fiifi’s children, but not his wife. However, no one could lay claim to the land given to Esi by her husband for her help in planting and cultivating the cocoa.

At age 70, Esi still holds sole rights to that land. While she has the right to sell it, she plans to will the land to her children. Her brother-in-law and his family already claimed so much of the land she and her husband worked, Esi says. The rest should belong to the children.

*\*Names have been changed.*



Women in Western Ghana looking after their children and tending to household chores.

Photo credits: Cover, Top: © International Cocoa Organization; Cover, Lower: © World Bank/Curt Carnemark; Page 3: © IFPRI/Philippe Berry; Page 7: © World Bank

Copyright © 2002 International Food Policy Research Institute. All rights reserved.



**INTERNATIONAL FOOD POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE**

2033 K Street, NW, Washington, DC 20006-1002 USA

PHONE: +1-202-862-5600 • FAX: +1-202-467-4439

**IFPRI**

EMAIL: [ifpri@cgiar.org](mailto:ifpri@cgiar.org) • WEB: [www.ifpri.org](http://www.ifpri.org)