Farmer Impact Grant Learning – Learning Brief

Understanding how agribusinesses can promote visibility and financial independence on women farmers

Background & Context

Trading Up is a global blended finance partnership between Global Affairs Canada (GAC), Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA), Sarona Asset Management (Sarona), and The University of Waterloo (UW). Trading Up seeks to improve household economic wellbeing for women and men employees and smallholder farmers through advancing trade and economic growth of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) across Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Combining investment and technical assistance (TA), Trading Up seeks to maximize development impact. One of the TA components includes the Farmer Impact Grant (FIG), where MEDA partners with SMEs, farmer associations, and cooperatives to improve productivity, market linkages, and wellbeing of women and men smallholder farmers (SHFs). In this component, Trading Up has identified an opportunity to investigate the following problem statement:

The labor of women SHFs in high-value commodities (e.g., cocoa and citrus) is often under-recognized and their efforts yield disproportionate benefits from income-generated within these agricultural supply chains.

To understand opportunities of key actors to address the Project’s problem statement, Trading Up established a two-fold learning goal:

1. Increase the visibility of women SHFs involved in these commodities; and, as a result of this,
2. Promote greater control over income and increased financial independence of women.

Based on the learning goal, Trading Up conducted desk research and focus group interviews with some component partners—including Agritech businesses; input and equipment suppliers; and farmer associations—to gather insights and perspectives on women SHF roles, financial independence, empowerment, and potential actions the private sector can undertake to address these challenges. These insights led to key findings and recommendations described in the sections that follow.
Key Findings & Insights

The following key themes emerged from the secondary data research and interviews conducted by Trading Up.

**Women’s Roles (in high value commodities)**

In cocoa, key actors, including the [World Cocoa Foundation](https://www.worldcocoafoundation.org), report general trends on women’s participation and roles where women are often in the minority, tend to manage smaller plots of land, and, therefore, produce less coca—impacting their earning potential. Inheritance laws and norms have an important effect on power dynamics and women and men’s roles in cocoa farming.

Other sources, including the [Fairtrade Foundation](https://www.fairtrade.org.uk), share that cocoa in West Africa is “…the result of a system of labour and kinship relations, involving both men and women in dynamic and fluid roles. In these complex production systems, women (i.e., wives, daughters, sisters, and young girls) ” Despite their fundamental contributions to coca production, women face a lot more restrictions accessing resources compared to their counterparts (i.e., men). This ultimately hinders their ability to improve their economic reality and wellbeing.

From interviews, Trading Up team heard that, generally speaking, there are five (5) broad roles that women hold: farm hands/farm labor (majority); sharecroppers (majority); marketing (depends on crop); landowners (minority); and extension officers (minority). One respondent shared: “Women’s roles are recognized, albeit not as should be, and that is down to the culture. In the local setting, there is this adage that ‘when a woman buys a gun, it lies on the chest of a man.’” Another respondent shared that women do share crop (renting land), “… when the proceeds come, they share it with the owner, who are typically men. It is more or less a rule where you get the opportunity because men have led you into that role.”

“...women involved in cocoa production are far less visible in terms of research, policy and programme implementation, mainly because they tend to lack ownership of the land they farm.”
The Role of Money and the Gender Gap

A 2014 study on gender inequality in the Ghanaian coca sector found that:

- Women farmers experience income and productivity levels 25 – 30% below those of their men counterparts; and,

- Factors that contribute to this income and productivity gap include lower levels of access to training (25% less compared to men); poor access to finance (20% less likely to have received a loan and 40% less likely to have a bank account); and, with lower access to monetary resources, lower usage of technology and/or best agricultural practices (women are 30 – 40% less likely to use crucial inputs like fertilizers).

The gender gap in agriculture is well studied. For example, Sophia Huyer, a Gender and Social Inclusion Research Leader with the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), notes the substantial gender gaps in access and control in six key resources and inputs for agriculture: i) land; ii) labour; iii) credit/finance’ iv) information; v) extension; and, vi) technology. This is also perpetuated by interrelated factors, illustrated by the following ongoing cycle:

Key actors’ interviews cemented additional insights related to the role of money and the gender gap in agriculture:

1. Preliminary research suggests men typically control income & farm proceeds;
2. Women request money from their spouses for household and/or education expenses;
3. Whereas some couples decide how to spend money, husbands maintain control of the actual funds;
4. Women with supplementary income can practice autonomy on how to use their money;
5. Social norms and structural inequalities contribute to women lacking collateral which, consequently, inhibits access to formal credit.
Empowerment of Women Farmers

The Women and Cocoa Report by the Fairtrade Foundation outlines the importance of data collection efforts that are sensitive to “...intra-household power relations and ensure women with different roles in the household (i.e., senior wife, junior wife, girls sent to help with household chores) feel comfortable to disclose data.” The Foundation also notes that women’s participation in research and data collection should consider the timing and location, so that hard-to-reach women are not excluded. Beyond data collection, the Report also recommends a “gender-responsive market systems analysis” to identify gender inequality and empowerment opportunities at different levels of market systems: macro, meso, and micro levels.

Building on the topics of gender-sensitive data collection and gender-responsive market systems analysis, the interviews revealed how partners perceive empowerment:

Organizing women’s groups are a vehicle & strategy to empower women as leaders and members, leading to positive impact and community outcomes

Empowering women, while the goal and focus of closing the gender gap in agriculture, should also involve men to promote buy-in and support in the community

Women should be at the center of solutions to increase financial independence – their voice and unique needs are crucial to success
Trading Up explored the theme of “empowerment of women farmers” from the perspective of private sector key actors. Specifically, we explored the role incentives play in increasing the visibility and financial independence of women farmers in high value agricultural supply chains. In Investing in Women along Agribusiness Value Chains, the IFC presents the business case for closing gender gaps in agriculture through improved market linkages, transparent and reliable supply chains. This emerges from improved production, increased yield, improved quality, reduced losses, strengthened supplier bases, concentrated supply bases, and new markets.

Through interviews to investigate these desk research, Trading Up research revealed the following incentives and motivations for targeting women based on the business opportunity and the business model of each partner:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Access to farmers (as customers, members)</th>
<th>Supply needed inputs or technology</th>
<th>Other incentives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td><strong>Agtech business</strong></td>
<td>Access to more farmer customers</td>
<td>Support women with alternative off-season income generating opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td><strong>Input &amp; equipment supplier</strong></td>
<td>Opportunity to identify women (new customers) who are performing well as cocoa producers</td>
<td>Identify ways to support with inputs they need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td><strong>Citrus farmer association</strong></td>
<td>Attract new members or solidify trust with existing members</td>
<td>Support of women members with training and access to equipment (both are key)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recommendations & Next Steps

For agribusiness key actors—including Agtech companies, input suppliers, cooperatives or farmer associations, license buying companies, etc.—Trading Up recommends the following:

- **Gender-sensitive training:** in the design and delivery of training for target customers, ensure the content, location, and timing of the training are gender-sensitive and appropriate for both women and men participants.

- **Sex disaggregated data:** if the company does not already collect and analyze sex-disaggregated data, consider embedding this in your data collection and analysis efforts to uncover customer segments, behaviours, and to develop outreach strategies for women and men based on their unique needs and preferences.

- **Community champions:** identify and invest in women and men “champions” from the target farming communities, to establish brand awareness and trust among key individuals.

- **Financial diaries:** This Project suggests further investigating the use of agricultural income and farm proceeds by building capacity of households in monitoring their income and spending using financial diaries.

- **Market linkages:** Interventions aiming at improving economic wellbeing of women and men smallholder farmers should include a market linkages component to facilitate access of SHF to market information and private sector actors. The improved market linkages could help women SHFs to get competitive price for their produce as well as help them understand market priorities.

References


- World Cocoa Foundation, “Empowering Women Cocoa Farmers in West Africa.”

- Michael J. Hiscox and Rebecca Goldstein (2014), “Gender Inequality in the Ghanaian Cocoa Sector.”

- Sophia Huyer in Gender, Technology and Development (2016), “Closing the Gender Gap in Agriculture.”


Contributors

Paulin Bossou
Elvis Brenya
Yasir Dildar
Daniel Fuentes
Clara Yoon
Creating business solutions to poverty

Offices in Canada, the United States and around the world. Visit our website for a complete list.

1-800-665-7026

www.meda.org

meda@meda.org

Head Office
595 Parkside Drive, Suite 2
Waterloo, ON Canada
N2L 0C7