



Gender transformation in the African Cashew value chain

Findings from the African Cashew initiative's qualitative gender survey conducted in Ghana and Burkina Faso

- Processing -

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1. Introduction: Gender in rural development and agro-processing

Women in general and in particular female household heads experience several disadvantages in rural environments. 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. 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 face many constraints with regards to attending school and are less educated than men or women living in urban areas (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.

These shortcomings are globally often reflected in women's engagements in agro-processing where women are disadvantaged and only find low-paid employment. 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). Here, women are mostly employees in the factories and do the hardest and time-consuming tasks while men take over management and leadership roles and control the markets and mechanization (Coles & Mitchell 2011, see also Duggan 2011). The results are male domination, exclusion and discrimination of women and unequal power relationships. Besides, since women's worker's unions lack organization and leadership skills, participation and empowerment is not facilitated for achieving greater gender equality.

In the household, women carry out demanding unpaid domestic activities such as preparing food, cleaning and child- and relative-care as well as carrying water and finding firewood. 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). 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 (e.g. Visvanathan & Yoder 2011). Therefore, 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 does not only consider women's rights and creates greater gender equity but does also lead to economic growth and higher productivity levels.

The aim of this research is to examine if these general findings from the academic and institutional literature hold true for the cashew sector and to what extent. This will be done after a short overview about the African Cashew initiative (ACi), the initiator of this survey, and how it approaches gender in its intervention.

2. The African Cashew initiative (ACi) and its approach to gender

The *African Cashew initiative (ACi)* focuses on organizing and supporting cashew producers and processors in five project countries (Burkina Faso, Ghana, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and Mozambique). It is expected that within four years (2009 to 2013), 5,500 new jobs – 70% of them for women – will be created in cashew processing and that 150,000 small-scale cashew producers will generate USD 15 million in additional income per year. Including the producers' family members, the targeted number of beneficiaries amounts to 1.2 million rural poor and therefore highly contributes to sustainably reducing poverty.

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 equal representation and participation along the African cashew value chain through mainstreaming activities. Moreover, since public and private partners are part of ACi, these sectors have a strong interest in gender as promoting women's talents and capabilities has a positive relation to a strengthened competitiveness and increased profitability of the cashew value chain.

The cashew industry traditionally relies on the participation of both women and men in production and processing. Women's involvement in farming and factory activities is

therefore not a new development and investment in the cashew sector offers simultaneously an excellent starting point for an intervention to achieve women’s empowerment and greater levels of gender equality. With regards to quantitative figures, successes can already be seen as the majority of jobs newly created in the processing plants through the support of ACi are for women as Fig. 1 illustrates.

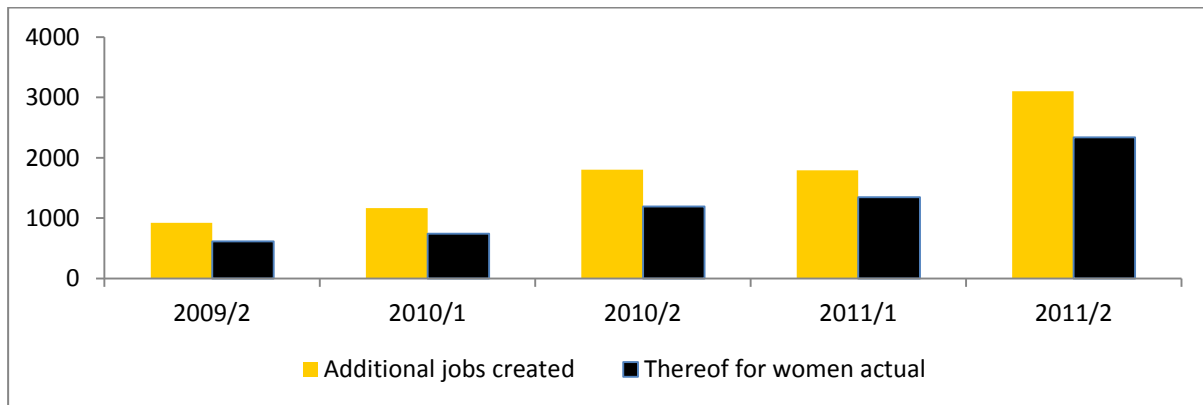


Fig. 1: Additional jobs created in processing (all project countries, excluding Mozambique)

Besides considering sex-disaggregated data and mainstreaming gender within all project interventions, ACi moreover implements specific activities especially targeting women for income-diversification such as beekeeping or nursery management and has various other instruments ensuring that gender holds a vital place in the project (see Fig. 3).

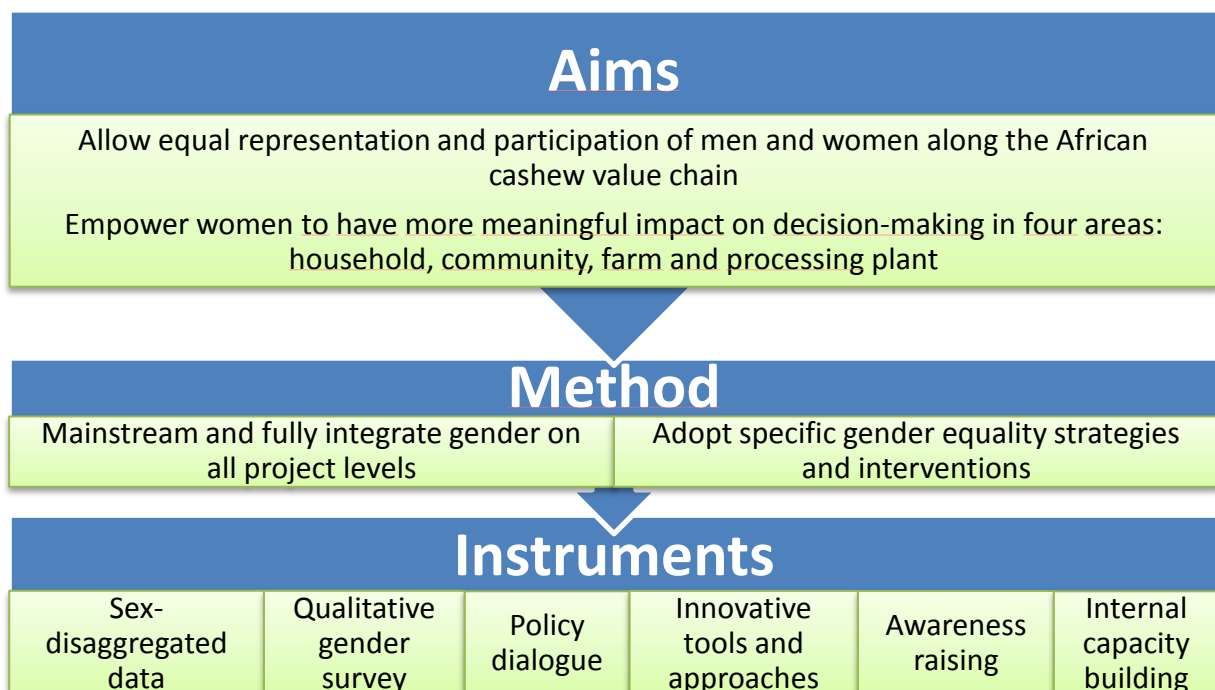


Fig. 2: ACi's gender approach

3. Qualitative gender survey: An overview

As part of ACi’s gender approach, this paper will present the findings from a qualitative gender survey. The research was conducted by ACi’s gender team with the support of the respective country staff in Ghana’s Brong-Ahafo region as well as in three regions of Burkina Faso (Cascades, Hauts-Bassins, and Sud-Ouest). In this regard, the employees and managers of two processing plants (one low scale, one high scale) in each country have been interviewed making it possible to compare shortcomings and successes and facilitate lessons learned and best practices.

	Ghana	Burkina Faso
Factory hands	12 (10 women)	12 (9 women)
Processing managers	3 (all men)	2 (one woman)

Table 1: Interviews conducted

Ghana and Burkina Faso were chosen since the countries represent very different socio-cultural contexts and population structures. This has led to different results and allows multiple starting points for comparison.

The main objectives of the research were to

- Examine the current situation of men and women¹ in the cashew sector (production and processing)
- Analyze ACi’s intervention on four environments: household, farm, community and processing plant



Picture 1: Interview in processing plant

Besides the specific research questions, two main hypotheses have been identified:

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

¹ The term gender applies both to men and women, in the context of rural development in Sub-Saharan Africa, women are the primary target group since they face more disadvantages.

The research also renders a contribution to ACi's internal M&E system which considers sex-disaggregated figures in its analysis but also needs a qualitative sphere not only to verify successes, identify areas for improvement and give recommendations but also crucially to include the beneficiaries and listen to their perception of the initiative.

The following section presents findings from the processing side – a different survey conducted with farmers shows the outcomes regarding production. If not stated differently, findings apply to both countries and the same or similar answers, statements or reasons have been given. Since the number of persons asked is limited and not all questions have always been asked (flexible character of interviews with open-ended questions) the study will not work with numbers and figures to verify findings but with statements from people and words like often, many, sometimes, few, etc. in order to give tendencies. It is furthermore important to note that findings have general character and do not always apply to all factories. At the end of most sections, limitations, recommendations and best practices are given to facilitate follow-up action.

4. Gender-related findings

Findings in the processing sector have not – unlike in production – been considerably different between Ghana and Burkina Faso. In the manual sections (shelling, peeling, sorting etc.) traditionally more women are employed since men often see the income as too low and perceive the work as being for women.



Picture 2: Research in processing factory

This is changing however and especially in the shelling section more and more men are employed. The average worker at the factory is single, young and low-educated – generally very poor people.

Finding 1: Employment in cashew processing provides an often essential and long-term income source for rural women

Revenues from the cashew-processing factories offer an important income source particularly for single, widowed or separated women who cannot count on the husband as the primary breadwinner. All respondents reported an increased income due to working in the factories where they work because of following reasons:

- Get money for sustained life
- Had no work before
- Low education hinders employment in other sectors
- Little economic opportunities in rural environments

“In this community you cannot get any other work” (Man, Ghana)

“After completing school there was no money so I decided to come and work here” (Man, Ghana)

“I work at the factory to help my husband with the expenses and as well resolve my own problems without the help of my husband” (Woman, Burkina Faso)

“I work in the factory to improve the standard of my life” (Woman, Burkina Faso)

“The money I earn at the factory allows me to eat three meals a day” (Woman, Burkina Faso)

Moreover, factory hands and especially women perceive work in cashew-processing as a long-term opportunity. Interviewed processing managers agree and point out the many applications they receive, particularly from women.

“Yes, I want to work here for a long time. It brings me money to take care of my children” (Woman, Ghana)

Limitations

Women often take up the work opportunity because of desperation and little economic opportunities in rural environments and not because they particularly like the job. However, women with low education and lack of agency also have to find a job and therefore cashew processing has a direct impact on the ‘poorest of the poor’.

“Due to my low education, this is the only job I could do. These factories have really helped those of us who did not attend school” (Woman, Ghana)

Differences Burkina Faso-Ghana

In Ghana, workers stated more often than in Burkina Faso that they see their future somewhere else, e.g. they want to further their education or save money from the work in cashew processing for a start-up business. In Burkina Faso, almost no employee wants to leave the job, not even in the long term.

“I have never looked for a different job since these opportunities are rare and it is not easy to get a job. This work God has given to me” (Woman, Burkina Faso)

“Before the burdens were hard for me but with the money from the factory I do not feel these so much anymore” (Woman, Burkina Faso)

Finding 2: Women are involved in the lower echelons of factory work

There are no differences in the gender division of labor for processing – illustrated in Fig. 3 – between Ghana and Burkina Faso.

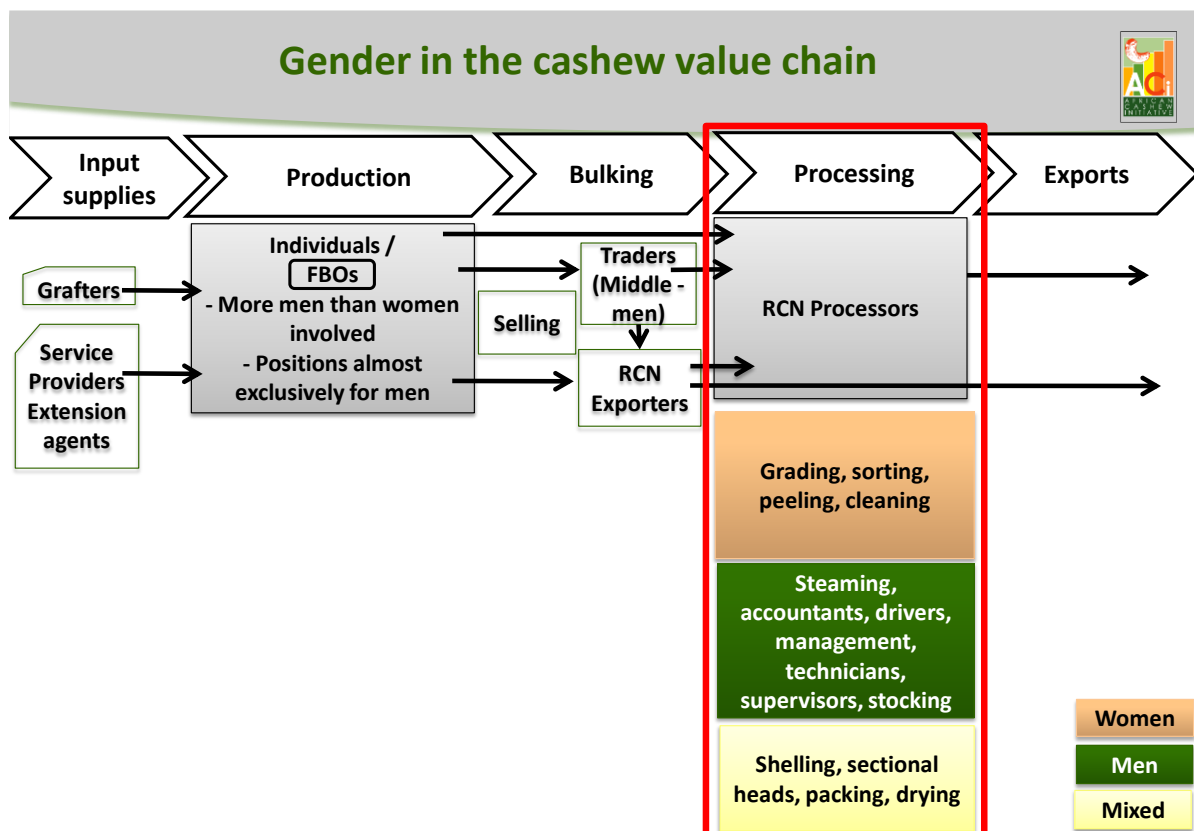


Fig. 3: Gender division of labor (processing)

As the figure shows, women mainly do the peeling, cleaning, grading and sorting.

“In the peeling sections only women are allowed because they have more patience and will not chew the cashew” (Man, Ghana)
“It is feminine; it is not for the men”
 (Man, Burkina Faso)



Picture 3: Women working in processing

Women were first reluctant to doing the shelling/cracking but now they are also engaged in it. This shows that women can also do tasks perceived as heavy or with machines so this could lead to more women being also involved in other formerly male-dominated activities. Shelling is the only real mixed manual section in the factories. Men are more involved in the steaming: Respondents shared that women have less power, cannot work at night, cannot carry heavy loads and show no interests in being employed in that section. Also, higher positions (supervisor, production manager, and director), further office jobs (accountants) or traditional male jobs (watchmen, driver, mechanics, and technicians) are occupied predominantly by men. Even in one factory visited which was established to create employment opportunities for women, where only women are supposed to work and where female directors are in charge these positions are held by men. This exemplifies that finding qualified and knowledgeable female personnel is rare due to deeper lying constraints in education and society. Hence, managers – even if female – often have no choice but to employ men for these jobs. Moreover, sectional heads (see Finding 5) who usually do not earn more but have a more powerful position in the group and factory are predominantly men.

Recommendations

To facilitate equal representation in all manual section, one manager interviewed lets the employees themselves decide where they want to work if spaces are available in different sections. Concerning the non-manual sections, incentives have to be created to engage women more in higher-paid jobs: e.g. more women in leadership positions and with decision-making power would encourage other women to participate. Quotas in higher job

positions might be a first possible step to achieve that: If the female leaders are successful, they do not only function as a role model for other female employees but men also realize their talents, values and work commitments so that these quotas may become obsolete.

Finding 3: Women's heavy workloads have increased through factory employment where working conditions are challenging

Women work long hours (up to 12 hours a day, 6 days a week) in the factory in order to increase their pay (factory hands are paid per kg they process in the respective section and not per hour). Additionally, they still do most of the housework they have done before. In a family, the older children might take over some chores however women have the full responsibility for the household chores and husbands do not help even when unemployed. If women are single they do all by themselves. Therefore, working hours for women have increased; women work much more hours than their partners and have multiple burdens such as work in factory, household, care, small business or on the farm during harvest season.

"I do all the work. The work of the man and the housework" (Woman, Burkina Faso)

Due to these tasks, women have limited free time and mostly stay at the house where they work once returning from the factory while the husband goes out more often but also only occasionally.

"I never have any free time. I'm always busy working in the factory or on the farm" (Woman, Ghana)

Work at the cashew-processing factories is challenging, tedious and tiring. Employees, especially women, report waist and body pains as well as swollen feet due to the sitting in the peeling section or the standing in front of the shelling machines. Moreover, workers report headaches, and skin rashes that occur if not using coconut oil in handling the cashew nuts which emit an acid liquid. Conversely, other mainly young interviewed employees do not perceive it as challenging and there are normally no serious injuries due to the work.

Processing managers state that there are no differences in work performances between men and women. It rather depends on the individual of how the tasks are carried out, e.g. how many kilograms they can process in one day. In one factory there was a list displayed with the Top 10 shellers and four of them were women.



Picture 4: Working in the shelling section

“I am proud to say that at the cracking station some women are better than men. They earn a lot of money a day” (Man, Ghana)

Recommendations

Workers could, under the lead of management, do gymnastics together before starting work or at lunch breaks in order to reduce body pains and be physically fit. In addition, better medical care needs to be provided (see ‘Other Findings’) and workers should be encouraged to report all injuries and pains immediately to the supervisors in order to get treatment. With regards to time allocation, availability of social amenities will reduce women’s time constraints: If tasks are reduced or made easier, e.g. water wells near the house, child care facilities in the community etc. women have more free time. However, also awareness has to be raised to the husbands in order to demand their help and educate them on their women’s burdens since men often do not perceive household chores as actual work.

Finding 4: Women are treated equally and have good relationships to their supervisors and co-workers

Factory hands – men and women – have good relationships to their supervisors, managers and directors and feel comfortable at the factory. Women in all four factories visited said that they can go home any time if their children or relatives are sick or if they have to attend a funeral. They can also come back to working in the factory after pregnancy – paid maternity leave is however not supplied. Supervisors and managers (mostly men) however have often paid leave days and are paid by the hour so earn higher wages. Workers feel

encouraged to approach the manager or supervisor with their demands, e.g. asking for a wage advance or a higher salary.

“My son was bitten by a snake and both the director and the manager came to visit me”
(Woman, Ghana)

“The manager makes us very happy. He is very easy-going and does not shout at us”
(Woman, Ghana)

“If a child is sick, you are allowed to go home early” (Woman, Ghana)

“If we need money before pay day, they give us loans and then deduct them from our monthly salaries” (Woman, Ghana)

“Yes I approached them for a loan to rent a house and it was given” (Man, Ghana)

“It depends on how you work. Persons who work more are treated better” (Woman, Burkina Faso)

Also the relationship to their co-workers is cordial and respectful and there are rarely major problems.

“I love my working mates. They are very friendly and we have a good working relationship”
(Woman, Ghana)

“Over here we have a written code: Do not come here if you feel uncomfortable, we do not like screaming at each other” (Man, Ghana)

“I work now 2 years at the factory and I feel very comfortable. We form a family at the factory” (Woman, Burkina Faso)

No cases of abuse, discrimination, harassment against women etc. have been mentioned. Also, men and women do not have problems working alongside and are treated equally by management.

Limitations and recommendations

A few negative viewpoints have been stated, these are however normal in all companies and most workers stated no problems at all. These minor problems were mostly concerned with the attitudes of supervisors or little quarrels or gossip among co-workers.

“Whenever we tell them they say we are in the process” (Man, Ghana)

“The younger women here are disrespectful towards me. They also talk to me regardless of the fact that I could be their mother” (Woman, Ghana)

“Some of the peelers don’t do it well which makes sorting difficult” (Woman, Ghana)

Supervisors on the other hand reported the high absences of women who are missing a lot more often than men. This is however understandable since women carry out household tasks and are the ones who stay at home when the child is sick etc. In that sense, more awareness has to be raised and the issue should be mediated so that supervisors understand the reasons behind the absences and women know their rights and responsibilities.

Best practices

- One factory supplies rice to their workers from time to time
- Rewards (e.g. rice, eggs, soap) are given to hard-working factory hands to create incentives for higher work commitments
- Christmas or holiday bonuses
- Facilitate loans for workers who mostly have no other option to get credit in rural areas where banks charging high interest rates: Gives them the feeling of being trusted, enhances working commitments and relationships

Finding 5: Women benefit from memberships in sectional groups

At the factories visited, workers are organized within the specific section they work in. These sectional groups are lead by sectional heads who represent the group to management. Respondents stated following benefits that sectional groups offer:

- Space to solve conflicts, either by themselves or through reporting to the managers
- Sharing of ideas and information in meetings
- Management knows what people want due to meetings with sectional heads, e.g. pay workers through rural banks, establishment of canteen
- People can organize themselves for strikes (has happened in most factories): achieved higher kg-prices for increased salaries
- Access to loans and wage advances
- Know their rights and responsibilities
- Talk about how to improve work

“Yes, we have two representatives who take our concerns to management, e.g. when we need loans or when our machines get spoilt we tell them” (Woman, Ghana)

“If I have a problem at work or with my superior I tell it to the delegate who will convoke a meeting to decide on how to solve the problem” (Woman, Burkina Faso)

Sectional groups have a strong empowering character and women share their ideas and opinions and speak out during meetings. In rural settings, opportunities to be member of a group are rare especially for women. Political community meetings where no women are in high positions are of little interest. The factory is therefore mostly the only and first place where women are part of organizations. Additionally, women in sectional groups have access to social networks and social capital: In the groups they speak also about their private problems as well as give advice to improve their and their family’s well-being.

“Every woman tells her own story” (Woman, Burkina Faso)

“Yes we are well organized because we discuss our different problems in the factory and help us too in the workspace” (Woman, Burkina Faso)

“They have to speak. We ask them what is your contribution” (Man, Ghana)

“I share my opinion because if there is a disputation the sectional heads demand the opinion of all members therefore I share a lot and my ideas are often considered” (Woman, Burkina Faso)

Limitations and recommendations

Firstly, not all persons in the factories know what to do or who to approach if conflicts arise and moreover do not clearly know what their rights and responsibilities are in the workspace. Clearer dissemination is needed and women need to know that there is a person who facilitates their demand, a person they can approach and trust. In this sense, trainings in dispute resolution for sectional heads or the employment of a qualified HR manager – preferably a woman – are viable options. For anonymous complaints a suggestion box could be provided.

Secondly, sectional heads are predominantly men. Even if more women are employed in one section or if one section is mixed, men tend to be the sectional heads. In female-dominated sections women are naturally the heads. Most women said that they do not know why the

positions are taken by the men or stated that women have low leadership abilities and men are naturally stronger as well as more efficient and educated than women.

“The men have a higher position than the women. If the men speak, the women do not have the word any more” (Woman, Burkina Faso)

As observed and analyzed from the answers given it can be concluded that the women do not question this ‘status quo’ and do not show a lot of interest and incentives of changing it. In that sense, women-only groups could be stepping stones for women to gradually graduating into mixed-sex organizations. The leaders of these groups would – as seen in Finding 2 with women in higher-paid factory positions – function as role models to encourage the self-esteem and potential of the other female group members as well as to reduce deep-rooted socio-cultural beliefs of women’s inferiority.

“In Africa it is like this: The women are difficult in understanding issues, the men understand more than the women” (Woman, Burkina Faso)

This effect could be complemented with trainings and education for women and sectional heads in leadership, management, conflict resolution etc. Additionally, it would benefit the entire – predominantly female – workforce since women and their priorities are better represented in group decision-making.

Thirdly, at the factories visited there is no real union established which represents all workers. This group could articulate their concerns better to management in fixed meetings held regularly. There is strong management support for establishing a union and the directors actually want and encourage the workers to form one. In this regard, incentives to form a union need to be created as well as women as possible leaders should be identified. Workers should however still be organized in individual sectional groups which is a good approach as empowerment of women is rather facilitated in smaller groups where they do not fear voicing their concerns. However, the organization of these groups also has to be improved and regular meetings need to be held as well as clear roles of members and better group structures need to be formulated. In a possible union, the sectional groups can come together and discuss their concerns amongst each other. After an agreement and consensus has been reached the demands can be presented to management. A union would give the workers a stronger negotiation position and more bargaining power since all workers are behind it and all voices are heard.

Best practice

In one factory where interviews have been conducted, the sections are divided into one women-only and one men-only group which are represented by a male and a female delegate. After they have met in separate meetings, they come together and discuss what they have come up with in the discussions. Women benefit from this system as they can talk freely in women's only groups, are equally represented and it is ensured that their voices are being heard. This approach might be a first step: For now there are still major misunderstandings and it might be better to have separate groups so that both can state their views and the women are not subordinated by the men. However, after the men have realized the women's potentials and capabilities as group representatives, a common group can be formed with equal representation and participation of both men and women.

Finding 6: Employment in cashew processing gives women their own income source and transforms their lives on many areas

If women do not have jobs and do not earn their own money it creates problems in the family, e.g. they always have to ask their husbands for money and the permission to buy something and cannot proceed if he says no. Earning their own money at the factories which they can keep in their pockets and decide on its use independently could therefore prevent problems and troubles in the family.

"My husband has always consulted me before making decisions. I can spend my money on what I want. My husband only asks me for some money when he is broke and needs some of the money for something" (Woman, Ghana)

"If you give it to your husband you are stupid. You gain it so it is your money. Why would you even give it to him" (Woman, Burkina Faso)

"Every one of us masters one's own income so we can both independently on what to spend the money on" (Woman, Burkina Faso)

Due to having their own income source, being responsible for themselves and able to provide for the family, women are empowered and gain considerable self-esteem.

"I can save some of the money for the unforeseeable expenses, the most important for me. I have enough, nobody needs to help me" (Woman, Burkina Faso)

Since wage-earning opportunities are rare in rural West Africa, the income is crucial for single, divorced, widowed or abandoned women who do not engage in farming. These women can take their decisions independently and provide for themselves and their children.

“I am now like a man and responsible for all the expenses and decide what is more important” (Woman, Burkina Faso)

“During the time my husband was alive we ate two times at day, nowadays we have three meals” (Woman, Burkina Faso)

Looking at two important environments of women’s well being, income from the cashew-processing factories considerably transforms women’s lives.

a) Household/family

As illustrated in Finding 4, women and men are equally treated in the factories. Therefore, women realize that they are not inferior, have an increased self-esteem and advocate for an equal treatment in the household as well.

“I contribute to the family not for my husband” (Woman, Burkina Faso)

“At the factory the men and women are treated equally but at the household the men are stronger” (Woman, Burkina Faso)

“My husband has always consulted me before taking decisions. However, he hardly contributes any money for our upkeep. I have to provide money for everything” (Woman, Ghana)

Female factory workers are often the primary breadwinner of the family – even when married – and might earn more than their husbands (unemployed, retired) and give them some of the share voluntarily. This transforms traditional power relations where the man is always the only breadwinner and the wife stays at home doing household chores. Women even send remittances to family members in more remote areas. If the husband also has an income source, often both partners have their own independent budget.

Women – unlike men – stated mostly that they work at the factory to be able to take care of their children and send them to school – especially single mothers pointed that out. Women’s spending patterns – preferably on social expenses such as for health, children’s education and food – therefore benefit the well-being of the entire family.

“I save some of the money I earn and spend the rest on the household” (Woman, Burkina Faso)

“I spend most of my money on my children’s education. We hardly buy food because of my farm unless it is something we do not have at home” (Woman, Ghana)

“I help my husband with the educational spending and as well with the social expenses” (Woman, Burkina Faso)

“It happens that I now pay the school fees for our children since my husband is always travelling so I can say that my income helps a lot regarding the social expenses” (Woman, Burkina Faso)

Usually the husbands do neither have objections that their wives work nor to the nature of their work at the factory. They are moreover confident and proud that their women contribute to the family income. If women are still young and live at home, their parents also support their work in the factories.

“He thinks it is good and gave his agreement. We as a family need someone to earn money” (Woman, Burkina Faso)

Limitations

Rarely husbands are against the work due to the following reasons:

- Jealousy
- Do not feel as the ‘men’ if women have higher incomes
- Wife has too much say in the household
- Wife does not do the housework and is always at the factory

The last reason however does not hold true and women do household chores before and after the work, some even close earlier to do the tasks. However, the women often continue to work and do not listen to their husband’s objections. The findings from this survey conclude that men are primarily convinced by the money the women earn and therefore do not oppose to their wives’ work at the factories – a majority of respondents stated that. A follow-up study with the husbands and other family members could however be helpful to identify if women’s work commitments and empowerment creates conflicts at the household and to what extent.

b) Community

Usually, women are not discriminated due to their jobs at the factories as many people from the community work here and it is considered a normal job. The opposite holds rather true and women who are jobless are stigmatized and perceived as lazy. In this regard, women gain respect in the community, from their relatives and friends due to being able to provide for their family. Moreover, community residents, friends and neighbors even ask if they could help them get employment at the factories.

“If you want to seek advice, it is better to get that advice from somebody who works” (Man, Ghana)

“The people think it is good that a widow can take care of her family independently and without the support of anybody. I am even congratulated by my neighbors” (Woman, Burkina Faso)

“People always commend me for working hard to support my children. My husband is away so I always have to work really hard to support them” (Woman, Ghana)

Limitations

Only a few negative voices remain and people sometimes perceive the work as too hard and physical for women. Female factory hands are however not bothered by that and continue to work.

“The people think that the factory work is not a profession for women, it is for men but I do not consider that” (Woman, Burkina Faso)

“The people have different opinions about the work. Some encourage me and often wish that I can get them a job at the factory. Others think that it is tiring and not well-paid” (Woman, Burkina Faso)

Recommendations on awareness-raising for gender equality and women’s empowerment

- Gender sensitivity: education on women’s needs, rights and responsibilities, how to involve and encourage women and realize their value in cashew production (husbands, factory directors, sectional groups)
- Establish local gender units and gender focal persons in processing factories and provide training for them on gender issues

- Talk to women: What do they want? Are they satisfied with their situation? How can it be improved?
- Gender awareness for community members to clear the wrong perception of gender (as being negative for the men and taking influence and power from the husbands), male household heads do not know the concept of gender and what it is about
- Render trainings for women: Money management, conflict mediation, leadership etc.
- Raise awareness on the work the women do in the factories to diminish negative perceptions, e.g. invite husbands to the factory and create flyers on the work

5. Other findings

This section will take a closer look at what has been mentioned by the workers and has no direct gender dimension.

5.1 Application process

People hear of the work in the factory mainly through word of mouth from friends, neighbors or other community residents. Moreover, newspaper advertisements cause the attention of the workers. Employees have to write a formal application letter stating their motivation etc. in order to apply. Factory hands do not need to submit a CV in most factories, for supervisors and other higher-paid jobs it is required. Once invited to the company, the possible new worker has an interview with the manager. There are not many selection criteria, preferred are young employees who have to be physically fit and capable of doing the challenging work. Prior to working in the factories, no tests or practical work trainings have to be passed. Women are generally more interested in the factory job than men who prefer doing farming or other employment activities.

5.2 Trainings

Before starting to work, employees are trained by the supervisor or technician in their respective work area, e.g. on how to use the machines or to increase the amount of kg processed. These trainings are often repeated from time to time to refresh the knowledge for the individual or for all. In this regard, ACi has trained supervisors and management who

pass the knowledge on to their employees, e.g. in hygiene, food safety, good practices in processing etc. Some of the advantages of these trainings stated by supervisors and managers: workers wash their hands, clean the tables and working materials as well as wear protective clothing. However also supervisors benefitted and learned how to communicate adequately with the employees, what their rights and regulations are, and have recognized the importance of food safety.

“What ACi does is a good thing. We have benefitted immensely. Food safety and hygiene is important and has had a direct impact in our work. We became more enlightened and disseminate the good practices to our workforce” (Man, Ghana)

Best practices

In one factory, employees went together on a trip to another factory to see how they work and to exchange knowledge. This can be especially useful for small processing companies to learn from the big ones in e.g. mechanization of the processing or improve quality of nuts, but also the big companies can learn something from the small ones, e.g. work ethics, comfortable work atmosphere. In this regard, a platform and regular meetings in a specific factory could facilitate knowledge-sharing and learning best practices to apply in their own workspace. Following the example of one factory visited, companies could offer ‘extra-curricular’ activities in e.g. alphabetization, hygiene, leadership, book keeping and money management for their workers – these trainings would make the employees more knowledgeable and they could apply the skills at their workspace.

5.3 Facilities

Mainly due to lack of financial means, there are several shortcomings with regards to the facilities in the processing plant, especially in smaller plants. The machines for example are very old and without good quality (nuts break easily, machine itself breaks). Employees also expressed the wish of having chairs with back support. Often however the workers do not perceive the facilities as inadequate and are comfortable working with them.

“We have very hygienic sanitation facilities. There is always water to wash your hands and even before we start work, we wash our hands” (Woman, Ghana)

“We are provided with everything. Are there any safer machines out there?” (Woman, Ghana)

In most factories there is a company bus picking up workers who live far away. Since it has not been practice before, it really helps employees who are tired after walking long distances.

Concerning equipment, workers have reported that there are no hair caps, mouth and heat protectors. Gloves are often not immediately replaced when broken. Workers also sometimes do not use the provided coconut oil and end up with wounds on their hands. Here, better control need to be emphasized and strict regulations must state the necessity of using the oil.

Child care facilities are not provided in the factories, often they are however constructing one or planning to construct one and employ caretakers. Therefore, problems arise and often the children wait for their mothers outside the gate with their older siblings since there is no one to take care of them. Some factories provide a canteen for their staff which is very welcomed by the factory hands. Also, separate bathrooms are usually provided, are however not always equipped with tissues and soap.

Further shortcomings reported (do not apply to all factories):

- Bad ventilation in the factory, too hot
- There are not enough toilets
- No earplugs to reduce the noise

5.4 Medical services

The supply of medical services could be improved in the factories visited. There is often only basic medical treatment with basic first aid kits (plasters, tape etc.) and no medicine or doctoral advice is given. Moreover, medical check-ups prior to working or from time to time are not provided for the workers. Given the regularity of incidences at the factories – however minor in nature – such as wounds or body pains as well as the smoke from the oven and the oil of the nuts affecting their health, a better treatment is seen as definitely necessary. If a person is seriously sick however, she/he is taken to the hospital.

Best practices

- Invite medical staff from town for medical check-ups and blood tests as well as to provide them with health cards for regular visits
- Trainings on emergency regulations with an appointed safety manager in each section

5.5 Contracts

Factory hands have – unlike main staff – usually no pensions or paid leave days. Employees have automatically access to social security and health insurance programs. Findings show that there are a lot of shortcomings in contract matters. Often, there is even no written contract provided for factory hands who expressed the wish of having one and which is necessary due to ensure transparency of the hiring and working process. Again written contracts are only provided to supervisors or in higher-paid jobs. Hence, employees do not know their concrete labor rights and responsibilities in the factory. There are two reasons for that and firstly workers might not be very interested in contract contents, e.g. employees expressed that they have no time to read or deliberately did not read the contract so did not understand the conditions. On the other hand however, it can be noted that contents are not clearly explained to the workers who did not understand amongst others:

- The technical terms of the contract
- The process of deductions (how much, when) for social security programs
- What to do and who to approach if there are contract violations
- The process of leave days and if they are paid or not (leave days are usually seen as the break of the factory due to the temporary nature of the job)

5.6 Child labor

The research team has not seen any children working in the factory visited. Interviewed managers and employees state the same. Managers pay close attention to this issue and do everything they can to prevent employing underage workers, e.g. employees have to provide an ID card before starting to work and it is strictly prohibited that children of workers enter the factories. Given the delicacy of this topic and incidences in the past, these

measures should be kept and eventually be extended, e.g. asking the workers clear questions about their life, education and backgrounds since ID cards can also be faked.

Problems have been identified regarding the children of employees: They often have no relatives at home to take care of their children and day care centers in the remote villages are very rare. Moreover, it has been seen that outside the factories sometimes children might pick and sell the raw nuts which fell off the truck as well as sell water, juice etc. Since the area is outside the factory, the managers are not responsible and liable for these, however maybe solutions can be found together with the children and their parents in order to get a better perspective in life.

5.7 Further recommendations and best practices

“We have to do everything that helps Ghana’s cashew industry to move on” (Man, Ghana)

- Have a credit system established at the factory to get workers access to micro loans with lower interest rates than in rural banks; the company would also benefit from reimbursements and higher motivation of workers
- Motivations to increase work performances: Employee of the month with gifts, top 10 lists etc.
- Apply and register with food standards (Ghana or Burkina Faso Standards Board, ACA Seal etc.) but also with social standards of work ethics regarding the working conditions: regular social audits and controls
- Talk to the workers or do employee surveys to find out how they perceive the work and what could be done better, what support they need etc.
- Workers demand more salaries: No empty promises from management, make standpoint clear and explain the situation, regular staff talks to clarify the issue
- Form a stakeholder platform to facilitate knowledge-sharing of best practices and information between the companies (what can small companies learn from big ones and vice versa) and project countries

- Facilitate learning as well from other functioning cashew-processing countries (Brazil, India)
- Regular updates and news of the cashew business and market to directors and managements
- Support also local schools and crèches financially to take on more children of workers
- Tell the workers the complaint process, e.g. who to approach, when will it be handled etc. and the process on doing mistakes, e.g. what the sanctions are, how many mistakes can be made etc.

6. Conclusion and perspective: Gender pays off

As argued in the introductory paragraph and found out in the findings, employing women and having more women in leadership positions does not only have a 'social' effect regarding gender equality and women's empowerment but also an 'economic' impact as it does lead to economic growth.

Firstly, creating jobs for women in processing benefits the economy: Cashew processors with women in higher positions widen their talent pools. This is due to the fact that neglecting women's capabilities results in having less adequate and qualified candidates for a certain position. Companies in these competitive times cannot afford losing these talents. Moreover, the diversity of opinions, viewpoints and new ideas that women bring to the discussion enriches decision making and stimulates ingenuity.

Secondly, the concept of corporate social responsibility becomes more and more important: Consumers and investors are increasingly looking for social, ethical and environmental standards in their suppliers. Facilitating women's empowerment and equal representation of women and men in the factories is a huge part of this concept so if cashew-processing companies want to reach new and more consumers, they have to put greater emphasis on that. Additionally, also donors and governments pay greater attention towards measures of gender equality and if the companies consider that, they are more likely to be rewarded with funds, partnership possibilities (Private-Public-Partnerships, PPPs) or other beneficial interventions.

Thirdly, cultural and social norms might change more quickly and adapt as the economic returns from women working become evident and men accept and respect women more due to being able to contribute and provide for their families.

Lastly, as seen in the findings, the stories behind the numbers are hugely encouraging. If jobs are created for women they do not only have their own income source but it also transforms lives, household relations and empowers women to take care of their own needs. Ultimately reach the next generation is reached through women's spending patterns benefitting their children and the well-being of the family.

“This place has really helped me with my financial problems. Before I came here, I did not have much to spend, now I can get enough to feed my family“ (Woman, Ghana)

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