

WOMEN IN COCOA SECTOR

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Introduction

The productive role and contribution of women in agriculture gained momentum in the recent years with participatory research and gender analysis by institutes under Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). Gender analysis examined the activities, responsibilities, opportunities and constraints in women's life. Women in many parts of the world receive almost no agricultural training, yet they perform upto 60 per cent of all farm work, including planting, cultivating, harvesting, storage, food processing and raising livestock. In India 48% of total population is women and 78% of economically active women are in farming. Among them 20% are cultivators, 38% are agricultural labourers and 29% in livestock and forestry sector. Although women have access to less education than men, they have the major share of responsibility for the education of their children and the health and welfare of the family by gathering and utilizing food, fodder, fuel, fibre and medicinal plants. In rural areas, the conservation and use of plant genetic resources begins with women.

Cocoa producing nations especially the African countries have the largest share of women in cocoa industry as per Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO, 1996) data. The participation of women in cocoa production is remarkable and enormous in Ivory Coast and Ghana with its small holder cocoa sectors and Brazil with Agroforestry systems. Worldwide, women are considered as invisible farmers. Feminization and diversification in agriculture encouraged women to escape from the drudgery of field crops. Cocoa as a remunerative and commercial plantation crop harbors women in both the producing/ consuming countries. In India, contribution of women in spices and plantation industry is worth mentioning (Elain Apshara, 2005, 2006; Elain Apshara and Rajagopal, 2005). In this paper, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of women in cocoa sector are discussed.

Activities of women in cocoa farming

Nursery: Women involved in cocoa planting material production, which is the foremost part in any crop cultivation. Women contribute their effort for potting mixture preparation, bagging, arranging them under shade net, seed treatment, sowing, budding, grafting, raising rooted cuttings, watering, weeding, removing diseased/ ungerminated seedlings, unset grafts/ budlings, loading and transporting.

Farm: At the farm level they engaged in planting, mulching, shading, hose irrigation, checking drippers, fertilizer application, spraying, chupon removal, weeding and composting farm wastes.

Industry: Women's role in the pre and post harvest handling is important, since it contributes much to the industrial value of the end product. Harvesting pods at correct maturity, bean extraction by breaking with wooden hammer or striking at floor, keeping for fermentation, turning the bean mass every day, cleaning sweatings, processing, drying of beans, grading, shelling and chocolate making are the areas where women are involved themselves enormously in cocoa producing countries especially in small holdings.

Role of women in cocoa sector

Bioversity International recognized women as biodiversity conservers who protect the traditional varieties, land races and native species and indirectly contributed much to the food security. In rural areas, the conservation and use of plant genetic resources begins with women (Hawkes, 1983). As smallholding farmers, women are involved in all areas of the crop cycle from seed selection to planting, harvest, storage and processing. Within the household, women are responsible for food needs and welfare of the

family. In these roles, women often determine which plant resources to conserve and use, which seed to select, which crop varieties to grow, which food products to keep for home consumption and which to sell at the local market.

In Andes (NRC, 1989), rural women have a special interest in the diverse and multiple uses of plants and other biological resources owing to their varied and complex responsibilities in rural households. In Peruvian highlands 70% of the cocoa farmwork is done by women. Experiences in the northern mountain region of Peru show that in traditional communities, it is clear that the duties of seed selection and storage belong exclusively to women. In the peasant communities of southern Peru, the harvest work in communal fields is shared by all family members, but women are in charge of the selection and administration of obtained products. This includes separating products for food necessities, selecting them for selling and choosing the seeds for the next season. They are experts in storage practices and women of all age groups involved in farming.

The traditional knowledge and skill pass on to next generation by dutiful women, securing the continuity of technological traditions, which are essential for the survival of the farming family. It is interesting to know the ways in which women learn about seed selection, distribution and storage which is mostly by “observing and doing” and by helping mothers. In Papua New Guinea, 75% increase in cocoa farm production noticed with women participation (Curry *et al.*, 2007). In Malaysia and Indonesia along with coconut and oil palm, cocoa farming is looked after by women. In India, women participation is in processing, by-product utilization and confectionaries in production of cocoa based products.

Gender Issues

Gender refers to the social difference, which are learned, changeable and may vary widely within and between cultures. Gender is not the same as sex, which refers to differences between men and women which are both biological and fixed (IBPGR, 1991). Gender roles are learned behaviours in a given society, based on social conditioning about which activities are considered appropriate for males and which are appropriate for females. Gender roles are not fixed, they can and do change in response to changed societal conditions. Gender analysis is a tool for discovering useful data about the characteristics of a sample population. It works by examining the activities, responsibilities, opportunities and constraints in the life of each member of the sample. Gender analysis draws on social science tools especially economics, geography, sociology and anthropology. When it is used properly it can increase the accuracy of scientific outcomes. Gender analysis is about understanding and recording the different roles of men and women. It looks at what people know and do, their needs and opportunities.

Gender in participatory plant breeding and farming system research

The CGIAR’s participatory research and gender analysis programme (PRGA) was created to assess and develop methodologies for gender sensitive participatory research and to promote their use in plant breeding and in crop and natural resource management. Women in developing countries play a central role in agriculture, in genetic resources management, crop improvement and in family nutrition. As a result they have specialized knowledge and preferences often complementary to that of men that they used in their selection and adoption decisions (Altieri and Merrick, 1987). This expertise often benefits the entire community as in the case of Maria a woman farmer of Namibia, who developed a pearl millet composite that now serves as the base of her country’s national breeding programme. When cocoa plantations were devastated by Witche’s broom disease, CEPLAC (Executive Commission for Cocoa Development Plan) and Cocoa Research Centre (CEPEC) taken up community based developmental programmes which are mostly women dominated. They involved in finding out resistant sources from traditional varieties, native species and conserved in their natural habitats around Upper and Lower Amazon basins, Peruvian highlands and Mexico. Curry (2003) and Curry *et al.* (2005) studied the

different stages of cocoa crop stand, immature, mature and senile gardens for yield profile, labour input, pest and disease management and harvesting strategies. In the young cocoa stands, most of the wet bean harvests are usually carried out by members of small families especially by women and children. In the matured gardens, grass slashing, harvesting and dry bean processing are done by women.

SWOT analysis of women in cocoa sector

Strengths

- Chocolate is world's favourite food both for young and old people. Market demand increases day by day with Indian chocolate industry and so more area should be brought under cocoa to meet out the demand.
- Increase in population, knowledge about medicinal and nutritional benefits of chocolates, health consciousness of people encourages more production. There is a solid demand for dark chocolates, cocoa confectionaries and cocoa based toiletry products.
- Availability of high yielding varieties, scientific cultivation practices and advanced technologies provide a scope for improvement.
- Post harvest management, processing, drying, storage, grading, value addition, product diversification in cocoa sector are women oriented which develops entrepreneurship. Self Help Groups will be the booming facility for these aspects.
- Marketing/ buy back facilities by CAMPCO and Cadbury, schemes by Directorate of Cashewnut and Cocoa Development (DCCD), Kochi with National Horticulture Mission will facilitate cocoa farming.

Weaknesses

- New and introduced crop in India, so people are little hesitant in taking up cocoa farming.
- Limited acquaintance to the processing technologies, price fluctuations, competition, conflicts in partnership, access to land and other resources, credit and decision making weaken the progress of women in this sector.
- Influence of customary and social/ religious factors, discrimination, illiteracy and ignorance still limit women to come forward in farming.

Opportunities

- Women specific research and development activities by ICAR, Directorates, Commodity boards, State departments, KVK's, National Research Centre for Women and NGO's.
- Trainings and credit facilities for establishment of units for planting material production, farm waste utilization through vermicomposting and farm level processing.
- Loans, assistance, grants by Govt. and shares for girls in family property.
- Women co-operative units and self help groups.
- Women scientists, teachers, extension workers are approachable for women farmers.
- Girl students in horticulture curriculum equally perform well with boys, in all crop cultivation practices.

Threats

- Unstable prices and incidence of devastating pests and diseases.
- Difficulty in processing beans during rainy season.
- Cost of fertilizers, chemicals, non-involvement and non-cooperation of spouse and family members.
- Fragmentation of family endorses enormous work load to women.
- Dependency on male, disparity in wages for equal amount, quality and time of work.

Needs

- Documentation of role of women in farming activities, technology dissemination process and gender related issues like assessing the critical gender dimension and knowledge, skills and practices of women in cocoa farming.
- Imparting knowledge and skill through women specific trainings.
- Easy equipments which reduce drudgery, posture and temperament of women.
- By guaranteeing payment of labour, mobilisation of family members and neighbours.
- Valuing and recognizing the contribution of women in cocoa farming, respect, record, protect and promote communities involving women in conservation and management of genetic resources and ecosystems.
- Govt. should establish plans to increase the proportion of women involved as decision-makers, planners, managers, scientists and technical advisers in the design, development and implementation of policies and programmes for sustainable development.
- Women's traditional roles should not be marginalized as a result of the introduction of new management systems. Adopting integrated management systems compiling indigenous and advanced techniques will be effective.
- Countries should create databases, as well as information systems, based on women's experience and knowledge regarding the administration and conservation of natural resources.
- United Nations organizations, ICCO and CACAONET programmes should take appropriate measures to integrate the values, concepts and knowledge of women in policies and programmes related to cocoa and should pay attention to the reinforcement of the role of rural as well as urban women.

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