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Cargill's Strategy for Gender Equity & Women's Empowerment in Cocoa Communities

Introduction

Cargill has worked for over a decade to address gender inequality in cocoa communities, promoting women's empowerment through various programs implemented across countries. Cargill continues to scale these programs and takes a holistic approach to addressing the challenges women face in the cocoa sector. This paper outlines Cargill's strategy for gender equity and women's empowerment (GEWE) in cocoa communities.

Background

Women are the social and economic foundation of many communities. They are farmers, entrepreneurs, and business owners, often taking the primary responsibility of children's education and family nutrition. Empowering women not only improves their livelihoods and that of their families, but it can also have a significant positive impact on communities at large. Women are key agents for achieving economic, environmental, and social change. Benefits include increased farm productivity, reduced child labor, food security, environmental protection, innovation, among others. In cocoa communities, women provide nearly half the labor on farms. Yet, women earn less than men, and have lower access to training, markets, and financing. This is the result of social disadvantages that women have faced historically. This can change by promoting gender equity, which is the process of ensuring fair treatment of women and men.¹ A focus on equity and women's empowerment through gender-focused programs can close the gaps in equality and contribute to broad societal change. Working on gender equity – on individual and societal levels – is therefore an important step towards making cocoa production the fair, sustainable, empowering industry it has the potential to become.

Global initiatives

Following the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, there has been a greater focus on the responsibility of businesses to promote gender equality within their companies and throughout their supply chains. Gender-inclusive business models not only have economic benefits, but they can also lead to business sustainability, innovation, and productivity. Doing business with a gender lens not only helps companies meet increasing requirements on human rights due diligence, but also contributes to positive social change. Both the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights² and the UN Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs)³ offer guidance on both the responsibility and benefits for companies in promoting GEWE.

Industry commitments and progress

In the cocoa sector, there have been significant efforts to accelerate GEWE in cocoa-producing countries and supply chains. There is increased recognition of the fundamental role women play in cocoa production and family wellbeing. This has led to an evolution of programs with a greater focus on women's rights and gender-sensitive interventions that aim to address structural barriers keeping women and girls from reaching their full potential. Calls for action - such as Oxfam's Behind the Brands campaign which challenged the cocoa sector to take specific measures to strengthen the rights of women cocoa farmers⁴ – have accelerated progress. This has led to increased efforts to meet gender commitments at company and industry levels. For example, the World Cocoa Foundation has contributed to the development of a comprehensive, industry-wide commitment on gender.⁵ Similarly, companies such as Mars, as part of its Cocoa for Generations strategy, are partnering with the KIT Royal Tropical Institute and are taking action to address the barriers women face in the cocoa sector.⁶

Cargill's efforts in cocoa communities

Cargill supports GEWE holistically and at scale through the Cargill Cocoa Promise, Cargill's program to enable cocoa farmers and their communities to achieve better incomes and living standards while growing cocoa sustainably. Empowering women is a key lever of change in cocoa communities and a crucial component of the Cargill Cocoa Promise, implemented in all the countries where Cargill sources cocoa: Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Cameroon, Indonesia, Brazil, and

¹ UNESCO, 2003, [Gender Mainstreaming Implementation Framework](#)

² UN, 2011, [Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#)

³ UN, 2021, [Women's Empowerment Principles](#)

⁴ Oxfam, 2021, [Behind the Brands Independent Evaluation on the Implementation of Gender and Cocoa Commitments](#)

⁵ World Cocoa Foundation, 2019, [Gender Integration Guidance Note](#)

⁶ KIT Royal Tropical Institute, 2020, [The Resilience Journey](#)



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Ecuador. Women can be key change agents for economic, environmental, and social good.⁷ Cargill supports women to become income generators on their own, as a coop manager, community leader or shop owner, to improve women's decision-making roles in communities and farmer organizations and increase gender awareness. Cargill continues to expand efforts to promote GEWE as part of the Community Wellbeing Strategic Action Plan, our roadmap towards achieving stronger, more resilient cocoa farming communities. These efforts are also aligned to Cargill's commitment to advance diversity, equity and inclusion across supply chains.

Taking a holistic approach to empowerment

Cargill has developed a holistic approach to promote GEWE across cocoa-producing countries, integrating proven approaches and interventions. This approach addresses different gender dimensions in a more holistic way, looking at their relationship based on lessons learned from projects implemented over time in different countries. The figure below shows the main intervention areas: awareness raising on gender and providing access to resources for women with the goal to achieve concrete benefits for cocoa households. It also shows specific enablers.

Awareness raising on gender

- Increase women's recognition in cocoa farms

Cargill sources cocoa directly from around 240,000 farmers, of which 30,000 are registered female farmers (13%). Gender equality can only be achieved by engaging men, raising their awareness that improving women's opportunities brings benefits to both household wellbeing and farm productivity. Cargill is integrating gender awareness raising into farmer coaching programs, emphasizing the potential that can be achieved when men and women work together as equal contributors in cocoa farms.

- Mainstream gender in farmer organizations

Historically, women hold just a small percentage of leadership positions and don't have the same level of access to services provided by farmer organizations. More female cooperative leaders can lead to improved management, increased productivity, and better performance. Cargill has been working with the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and TechnoServe on the implementation of the Coop Academy program in Côte d'Ivoire⁸ to provide gender training to leaders of 140 cocoa cooperatives and promote women in leadership positions. Cargill has also started to work with women-led cocoa cooperatives to build their capabilities in management, production, and support to women initiatives in their communities.

- Drive awareness on gender in cocoa communities

Cargill promotes gender equity and empowers women by encouraging the inclusion of women in decision-making bodies and organizing gender dialogues. Working with CARE in the Ghana PROSPER I program, Cargill led discussions about gender dynamics in 57 communities. Gender action plans were created in those communities. As a result, more than 50% of women reported more participation in household decision-making and greater opportunities to engage in formal decision-making and as leaders within the community.⁹

Access to resources for women's empowerment

- Increase women's access to financing

When women have access to affordable credit, they can take steps towards economic stability within their households and independence by becoming income generators. Working with CARE, Cargill has introduced Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) enabling women to save money and take out loans. This has helped women to pay school fees or start or grow their own business. VSLAs also provide a platform to access informal financial services and training on financial literacy, business management, and income generating activities. CARE and Cargill have established 376 VSLAs with 9,034 members (6,853 women) in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. Those VSLA members have saved \$301,186 and distributed \$189,014 in loans.¹⁰ Cargill and Unilever are also providing cash transfers for women in programs such as 100Weeks, with weekly payments to 600 women. This supports the setup of income generating activities in food crops, soap production or

⁷ Cargill, 2021, [Changing Cocoa Communities by Empowering Women](#)

⁸ Cargill, 2019, [Cargill and IFC announce Coop Academy 2.0 to empower cocoa producing cooperatives](#)

⁹ CARE, 2020, [A Decade of Impact: Côte d'Ivoire & Ghana](#)

¹⁰ *Ibid.*



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crafts.¹¹ Similarly, Cargill is working with Nestlé in the income accelerator program providing equal cash incentives to farmers and spouses, while also setting up VSLAs and promoting the Gender Action Learning System (GALS).¹²

- Facilitate access to training and education for women and girls

Women and girls often face sociocultural barriers to access training and education to develop the skills they need to reach their full potential. Cargill works to upskill women through functional and financial literacy training and entrepreneurship programs, such as the Coop Academy in Côte d'Ivoire that includes a capacity building component for women. Working with IFC and Empow'Her, more than 1,300 women organized in groups have been trained and coached on entrepreneurship, financial and technical skills to start income generating activities with support of cooperatives.¹³ Cargill is also helping girls to go to school by addressing gender norms around education, supporting school infrastructure, and providing learning materials. As part of the Jacobs Foundation Initiative TRECC (Transforming Education in Cocoa Communities), working with the International Cocoa Initiative (ICI), TIDE Learning, and the Ministry of Education in Côte d'Ivoire, community schools have been setup with multi-grade classrooms using a technology-based learning tool that provides access to quality education both for girls and boys.¹⁴

- Improve women's land rights

Less access to land by women can be a result of customs, cultural norms, and unequal land-inheritance systems.¹⁵ For example, women's membership in coops in Côte d'Ivoire is affected by criteria such as land ownership. Also, with limited control and decision-making power on land, women struggle to generate their own income. Cargill has conducted a land rights assessment with the organization Meridia in all countries where Cargill sources cocoa to focus efforts where it's most needed. Our actions include community awareness raising on the role that women play in land management and providing access to financing through VSLAs for women to buy land or pay for land documentation. Cargill is partnering with communities, organizations, and women's groups to develop and implement programs to improve access to land for women. As a first step, gender disaggregated data will be collected on land ownership, quality, and management.

Benefits of promoting GEWE

- Increased income

When women have economic opportunities, the benefits are seen in more productive farms, increased household income, improved access to education for children, and enhanced health and nutrition. Cargill helps women to develop the leadership, business, and technical skills they need to start their own business. They also receive support to access inputs, land, financing, information, and markets. Women participating in capacity building programs have started various activities on cassava, poultry, plantain, vegetables, soap, crafts, among others. Market linkages are then created for women to sell their products in local or external markets. In Cameroon, Cargill is working with the Education and Health for All Foundation (EHAF) to help women start income generating activities in cassava by training them on the benefits of gender equality cassava crop cultivation, processing, packaging, and market identification.¹⁶ This program has been enhanced working with the organization LadyAgri with a stronger focus on capacity building for women and market assessments. Similarly, as part of its Hatching Hope Initiative in Côte d'Ivoire,¹⁷ Cargill is working with the NGO PROSODEC to increase the knowledge and resources women need to setup poultry farms and sell their products in markets.

- Improved nutrition

Women play a key role in the production and cooking of nutritious food as well as the adoption of nutritional practices in their families. Food security is linked to women's access to income, household decision-making and nutritional knowledge. To support healthy nutrition behaviors, Cargill is working with CARE to promote the consumption of diverse foods with cooking demonstrations, nutrition trainings, and the setup of household and community gardens. In Côte d'Ivoire, Cargill worked with CARE and IDH – The Sustainable Trade Initiative, in five communities to improve access to nutritious food and household diets by training VSLAs members on food production and consumption.¹⁸ Similarly, in the Ghana PROCOCO

¹¹ Unilever, 2020, [Support women cocoa farmers in Ivory Coast](#)

¹² Nestlé, 2022, [Nestlé announces innovative plan to tackle child labor risks, increase farmer income and achieve full traceability in cocoa](#)

¹³ Empow'Her, 2021, [Renforcer les capacités des femmes dans le secteur du cacao en Côte d'Ivoire](#)

¹⁴ TRECC, 2021, [Transforming Education in Côte d'Ivoire: Reflections, Lessons Learned, Next Steps](#)

¹⁵ OHCHR and UN Women, 2020, [Realizing Women's Rights to Land and Other Productive Resources](#)

¹⁶ EHAF, 2021, [Empowering Women: EHAF Builds Capacity on Cassava Transformation](#)

¹⁷ Cargill, 2022, [Hatching Hope Initiative](#)

¹⁸ IDH, 2020, [Cocoa Nutrition Innovation Program Company Learning Brief: Cargill](#)



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program, CARE conducted cooking demonstrations to promote nutritious recipes using locally available food that families can afford to buy or produce on their farms.

- Eradicating child labor

One of the most effective ways to address child labor is by empowering women. Women generally spend more income on children and family needs such as food, education, and health.¹⁹ Training for women can also help reduce child labor since more educated women usually earn additional income. Cargill is implementing a Child Labor Monitoring and Remediation System (CLMRS) to prevent, identify and address child labor across cocoa producing countries. The prevention and remediation activities include a focus on women through for example, literacy and numeracy classes, learning materials and access to schools for girls, and IGAs and VSLAs for women in households with child labor.

- Addressing climate change

Women can play a key role in climate change mitigation and adaptation given their knowledge and experience in natural resource management. Community-based management of forests is being promoted working with women's groups, looking at equal use, access, and control of forest resources between men and women. Women are being supported to participate in agroforestry activities such as managing tree seedlings nurseries and beekeeping. Also, cookstoves for women are being distributed that produce less smoke and use less wood for fuel. In Côte d'Ivoire, Cargill is working with Empow'Her and PUR Projet promoting diversified incomes and climate-smart entrepreneurship for women. So far, 50 women have received trainings on personal development, entrepreneurial skills, and on gender equality, with 10 projects selected to start businesses in agroforestry.²⁰

Enablers for gender-transformative programming

- Collaborate with different stakeholders to enhance programming

Cargill partners with different organizations to positively impact the lives of women in cocoa communities. Diverse stakeholders are involved in the design, funding, and implementation of GEWE programs:

- Customers are interested in testing innovations, co-design programs, seek external funding and scale up proven approaches. In Côte d'Ivoire, Cargill co-designed the 100Weeks program with Unilever and the income accelerator program with Nestlé focused on innovating with cash transfers for women.
 - Donors are increasingly prioritizing GEWE in funding for dedicated programs in partnership with the private sector. For example, USAID funding for a VSLA program channeled through the World Cocoa Foundation (WCF) provided additional support to further scale VSLAs created with CARE in Côte d'Ivoire.²¹
 - Governments have mainstreamed gender across agencies, leading to more programs and services available for women. In Côte d'Ivoire, Cargill is working with ANADER²² trainers to raise awareness on gender.
 - Implementing partners play a key role to implement diverse programs that benefit women in different ways. There is a need of more collaboration between partners for joint programs and knowledge sharing. In Cameroon, LadyAgri is building the capacities of local trainers employed through Cargill's joint venture Telcar to support business skills development for women.
 - Input and service providers are needed to help women start their business, including seeds, fertilizers, equipment, financing, and mobile services. In Côte d'Ivoire, CARE is working with Bayer to strengthen the farming and business skills of VSLA members in the vegetable value chain, linking them to input suppliers (seeds, bio-fertilizer, irrigation equipment, etc.), technical support services (agro-coaching) and buyers.
- Integrate approaches for impactful solutions

There is a need to combine proven GEWE approaches and scale up innovative solutions working with best-in-class partners. A consistent delivery model is being developed by Cargill to be rolled out across countries, with a focus on equal access to opportunities for women. We expect this will have a positive impact to reduce child labor, increase income, improve health and nutrition and address climate change. In Côte d'Ivoire a new VSLA program started in 2022 with

¹⁹ The World Bank, 2012, [World Development Report: Gender Equality and Development](#)

²⁰ IDH, 2021, [Gender Empowerment in the Projet 'Beyond Trees. Towards a Better Income for Cocoa Farmers'](#)

²¹ USAID, 2021, [Mid-term portfolio performance evaluation of women's economic empowerment activities](#)

²² L'Agence Nationale d'Appui au Développement Rural



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CARE and 100Weeks to scale up the model of VSLA + cash transfer + IGAs for women, measuring the impact on income and improved livelihoods.

- Improve impact measurement

Further development of impact-measuring systems is needed to help inform program innovation and reach scale. The number of partners and projects has expanded considerably, which requires a standardized reporting process to measure impact consistently. Data coming from different partners feeds into Cargill's data platform to facilitate consolidation, impact analysis and reporting. Further investment in data analytics can help understand the long-term impact of programs such as measurement of income coming from women-led activities. For example, Cargill and IFC will conduct an income survey with a selected organization to collect data on additional income generated from activities of women participating in the Coop Academy.

- Mainstream gender in company's own operations and supply chains

Gender can be further mainstreamed across the cocoa supply chain aligned to Cargill's commitment to gender parity. Cargill has endorsed the UN Women's Empowerment Principles showing the company's commitment to promote gender in the workplace, marketplace and communities.

- Develop internal capacity and expertise on gender

The expansion of the portfolio of programs across cocoa-producing countries requires more capacity for project management and deeper expertise on gender issues to develop more integrated approaches and scalable solutions. Community wellbeing is a broad thematic area with multiple topics, a deep analysis and engagement on GEWE programs requires dedicated resources. Cargill is working more with gender experts and women's organizations that bring their expertise and provide recommendations to improve programs.

- Promote integration of gender across sustainability pillars

Gender is a cross-cutting issue that can be integrated across Cargill's five cocoa sustainability goals: Farmer Livelihoods, Community Wellbeing and Protect our Planet. Further engaging women as rights holders and adding a gender-lens into programs can promote innovation, improve performance, and attract investments. There are some examples of joint projects integrating gender across pillars such as the Beyond Tress project to promote women's IGAs in agroforestry and Nestlé HIA equally dividing cash incentives between women and men.

Gender Action Plan

The following gender action plan sets out the objectives and activities aligned to the Theory of Change. Its main objective is to advance the understanding of gender-responsive approaches and inform the implementation of programs across cocoa-producing countries.

Goal	Promote gender equity and women's empowerment holistically and at scale in cocoa communities across cocoa-producing countries	
Outcome	Activities	Expected results
Priority areas		
Gender equality in farmer organizations, cocoa farms and communities	Gender awareness raising for all producers	All producers in the Cargill Cocoa Promise are receiving gender awareness raising and review content of training
	Support women-led coops	Integration of women-led coops in the Cargill Cocoa Promise network
	Increased number of women cocoa farmers and in leadership positions with equal decision-making power	Review criteria of farmer organizations for registration of women as cocoa farmers and provide support with requirements
	Communities engage in gender activities	Gender activities such as couple dialogues, gender action plans, and gender committees



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Increase women's access to resources	Increase women's access to financing	Increased number of VSLAs/women's groups created with most women members
		Increased number of women that receive direct cash transfers
	Facilitate access to training and education for women and girls	Increased number of women participating in training
	Support initiatives to give women equal rights to land	Increase percentage of women that own land
Women's empowerment leads to benefits on income, nutrition, child labor and climate adaptation	Support income generating activities for women	Creation and growth of collective and individual on- and off-farm income generating activities
	Improve nutrition through women's empowerment	Nutrition actions at community level such as cooking demonstrations, trainings, food gardens
	Reduce child labor	Prevention and remediation activities to reduce child labor focused on women
	Address climate change through gender equality	Women-led actions focused on agroforestry IGAs
Enablers		
Collaborate with different stakeholders to enhance programming	Closer collaboration with current partners and more integrated relationships	Co-design and investment of GEWE projects with customers
		Funding from donors for GEWE programs
		Partnerships with Ministries on GEWE projects in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Cameroon
Integrate approaches on GEWE	Combine proven approaches and scale up innovative solutions working with partners	Greater collaboration between implementing partners
		Assessment of programs and scaling up of impactful solutions
Improve impact measurement	Develop impact-measurement systems to provide consistent data and information for impact assessments	Improved data collection from partners with standardized processes
		System for data collection on income from women IGA
		Invest on impact assessments of programs
Mainstream gender in supply chains and company	Gender is mainstreamed across supply chains aligned to Cargill's commitment to gender parity	Gender is mainstreamed in household and communities, as well as in company country and global levels
		Coordination between business and corporate commitments
Promote integration of GE/WE across sustainability pillars	Gender as a cross-cutting issue is integrated into more sustainability programs	More joint projects that also contribute to our other cocoa sustainability goals (women-led agroforestry, IGAs for living income)
Develop internal capacity and expertise on gender	Expand capacity of Cargill teams and bring expertise on gender issues to develop more integrated programs and scalable solutions	Work with gender experts and women's organizations to transfer more capacity at country level



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Key performance indicators		
Activity	Description	2021 KPIs
Awareness raising on gender	Gender awareness raising as part of coaching of all cocoa producers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Producers trained on gender: 244,364 (100% of producers in 5 sourcing countries) Increased decision-making for women; more than 50% of women interviewed
Access to financing	Village Saving and Loan Associations (VSLAs) providing access to financial services for women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> VSLAs: 686 in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana VSLA female members: 11,359 in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana
Training & Education	Entrepreneurship training provided for women in Coop Academy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women trained: 687

Cargill Gender Equity and Women's Empowerment in Cocoa Programs

Country	Partner	Project	Duration	Description
Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Cameroon, Brazil, Indonesia	Multiple	Gender awareness raising	Every year	Gender awareness raising sessions are conducted through coaching, Farmer Field Schools and Farmer Training Days reaching all producers in supply chain
Côte d'Ivoire	CARE	PROCOCO	2015-2018	10 communities reaching 4,619 women, creating 64 VSLAs and promoting IGAs for farm diversification and nutrition
Côte d'Ivoire	CARE	PROSPER I & II	2019-2022	23 communities creating 191 VSLAs with 3,351 women members, linking VSLAs to finance, promoted IGAs, couple dialogues, and gender committees
Côte d'Ivoire	CARE, IDH	PROSPER I nutrition	2019-2020	5 communities focused on malnutrition referral systems, pre/postnatal visits for women, VSLAs trained on food production for household consumption and WASH
Côte d'Ivoire	100Weeks (Unilever)	Cash transfers for women	2020-2023	3 coops reaching 600 women members of VSLAs with unconditional weekly cash transfers for 100Weeks to start IGAs for diversification
Côte d'Ivoire	ICI, KIT, RA, IDH (Nestlé)	Household Income Accelerator	2021-2023	Cash incentive divided between male and female heads of household, including VSLAs creation, Gender Action Learning System (GALS) and IGAs
Côte d'Ivoire	CARE (Starbucks)	VSLA Program	2021-2023	Plans to establish 100 VSLAs linked to 10 coops with 2,500 members (2,000 women) and 100 IGAs including gender sensitization and couple dialogues
Côte d'Ivoire	Empow'Her / IFC	Coop Academy Capacity Building for Women	2019-2022	Entrepreneurship training and coaching program for women groups linked to 30 coops reaching around 2,000 women to start IGAs with support of coops
Côte d'Ivoire	Rainforest Alliance (Unilever)	Gender training	2021-2022	Develop and test training modules to coops on gender equality and gender requirements of Rainforest Alliance standards (gender assessment and committees)



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Côte d'Ivoire	Empow'Her / PUR Projet	Beyond Trees	2020-2023	Empowerment of women through training and technical support for the development of agroforestry microenterprises
Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana	ICI	Community Development (dual approach) + direct remediation	2018-2023	As part of child labor remediation activities, VSLAs are created and collective and individual IGAs are supported to create income to prevent child labor
Ghana	CARE	PROCOCO	2013-2016	110 communities setting up 108 women's groups with 4,105 members focused on microenterprise training, cooking demonstrations, nutrition discussions, and gender dialogues
Ghana	CARE	PROSPER I & II	2016-2022	156 communities creating 352 VSLAs with 5,801 women members, organized gender dialogues, good nutritional practices
Ghana	Oxfam	SIWEE (Systems Innovation for Women's Economic empowerment)	Engagement since 2019, pilot under design	Address financing/credit, market, social and cultural barriers for women economic empowerment in cocoa supply chain. Pilot being designed in 2 communities.
Cameroon	EHAF	Cassava project	2019-2021	Technical and entrepreneurship training for women to start IGA on cassava processed into by products (including grinding machines)
Cameroon	LadyAgri	Women's Economic Empowerment	2021-2022	Leadership, business and technical training for women groups to start income generating activities for 500 women from households with child labor in Centre Region.
Brazil	Imaflora	Women's Economic Empowerment	2021	Technical and entrepreneurship training for women to start a fruit pulp microenterprise for income diversification and agroforestry activity in Pará state.