

Gender Disparities in Cocoa-Growing Communities: Female Farmers Limited Access to Resources in North Luwu and East Luwu, South Sulawesi

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Summary

Cocoa farming plays a crucial role in the economic development of North Luwu and East Luwu, South Sulawesi, contributing significantly to the region's output. However, women farmers face numerous challenges that hinder access to essential resources such as land, capital, training, and meaningful participation in community decision-making processes. These challenges stem from deeply entrenched gender disparities that overshadow the invaluable contributions of women in this vital sector. It is of utmost importance to engage in ongoing dialogues, critically evaluate implemented actions, and delve into the experiences of women in cocoa farming to address these issues.

Introduction

In Indonesia's cocoa-rich districts of North and East Luwu, women play a crucial role, contributing nearly as much as men in farm labour. However, despite their vital contributions, gender disparities abound. They earn less, own less land, and face limited access to training, credit, markets, and decision-making processes. This gender disparity echoes a global issue: in Ghana, women earn 25% less, and in Côte d'Ivoire, their income share is 21% despite comprising 69% of the workforce (Hiscox & Goldstein, 2014; African Development Bank, 2015).

These gender disparities in the regions are unfortunately quite challenging to deeply scrutinise as women's agricultural work in Indonesia is largely underreported. Women's work in agriculture tends not to be classified as work per se, making their contribution invisible. According to FAO (2019), this stems from traditional gender norms that assign women to domestic tasks while men do productive tasks. Hence, women's contribution to the farm is seen as secondary or merely helping their husbands as the primary breadwinners in the families. These gender norms were further embedded in the national system during the New Order Period and continue to influence contemporary social norms, fueling the disparities. d action.

The Role of Female Farmers in Cocoa-Growing Communities

In North Luwu and East Luwu, women's participation in cocoa farming is perceived as equal to men. They have actively engaged as early as selecting and planting seeds, harvesting, until post-harvesting management as well as marketing the harvested crops. The decision-making in cocoa farming is also nuanced, with not only husbands dominating the decision-making process. Together with their husband, women determine the type of crops to plant and oversee the farm and household purse. Women in North Luwu and East Luwu mostly dominate the financial decision-making and manage the household's income for farming and children's education (Bulkis et al., 2020).

"...women are the managers of the household's finances..."

- Masagena Farmer Group, Woman

"In the market, women determine where to sell and together with their husbands decide the price of the harvested cocoa."

- Sulawesi Community Foundation (SCF)¹,
Woman

Not only do they play a vital role in cocoa farming, but women are also primarily responsible for caring for their families.

¹SCF is an NGO that empowers Sulawesi communities. They partner with Save The Children to empower women and children in North Luwu and East Luwu through GrowHer project.

Women inevitably have to spend more time fulfilling their responsibilities as they have to juggle their reproductive tasks in the household with their productive tasks on the farm. Despite this, women have shown a notable contribution and commitment to cocoa production. Women are perceived as more cautious and aware of what is happening on the farm than their male counterparts. This aligns with previous studies showing that women often demonstrate remarkable productivity, increasing cocoa production and producing high-quality goods compared to men when provided with the necessary support (Chan, 2010; Marston, 2016).

However, women's contribution to farming is often disregarded. In North Luwu and East Luwu, men are perceived as the main contributors to agriculture, making women's roles secondary. Women's contribution is often seen as merely being a helper to their husbands. This perception is also internalised by women, who do not consider their contribution to farming as work. Moreover, cocoa farming is often viewed as a male-dominated sector due to the physically demanding nature of some tasks, which renders women's contributions less visible. The invisibility of women's economic contribution to cocoa farming further decreases their opportunities to access vital resources such as land, capital, and personal development, as well as being involved in the decision-making process.

"There are female farmers here, but they are not directly involved in the farm; they are just helpers."

- Chief of Association of Farmer Groups, Man

"... Many women feel like they are not the primary contributors to their farm although if we observe, women are the primary contributors as they are involved in seeding, cleaning, and sometimes fertilising the crops... However, when women were asked, they tended to say 'But, I am only helping my husband.' They do not count their contributions to the farm."

- SCF, Woman.

Women's Access to Land

The land is the key to agricultural production. Women with more access to land and secure land tenure could help their families escape poverty, strengthening household and community food security. Chan (2010) suggested that when women were given the same land tenure rights as men and more access to land, agricultural productivity increased, leading to improved economic development and reduced poverty within their communities.

However, women and men do not possess equal rights to land tenure. It is noteworthy that in Indonesia, the legal framework recognises the equal rights of women and men to land ownership through Agrarian Law No. 5/1960. However, women still own less land in practice than men (Siscawati, 2020). Women's land rights are largely constrained by the traditional division of roles, with men assuming the role of breadwinners for the families and as the head of the household. In contrast, women shoulder the responsibility as wives and caregivers in the family. These gender norms were further embedded in government-designed rural development programs during the New Order period and continue to influence current social norms and practices. Under this paradigm, the household was considered the building block of nations. Thus, land ownership was folded into the household unit and registered under the husbands as they assumed the role of the head of the household (FAO, 2019). This situation, combined with the traditional gender division of roles, not only restricts women's access to land but also other vital resources.

Among cocoa-growing communities in North Luwu and East Luwu, women actively cultivate cocoa and other crops within the cocoa farm under their husband's name. In some cases, women might be recorded as land proprietors if their land holdings surpass 2 hectares. This is a requisite categorisation designed to secure government subsidies for fertilisers to aid their cultivation endeavours.

Women's Access to Financial Services

Women's limited access to vital assets such as land further constrains their ability to access financial services, particularly when collateral is required. This difficulty hampers women's efforts to develop their cocoa business or initiate a new venture, which is crucial for the prosperity of their families. Given the constraints in accessing financial services, providing women with financial services that do not necessitate land certificates for collateral is imperative.

Another factor impeding women's access to credit is the lack of financial literacy. Most women in cocoa-growing communities in North Luwu and East Luwu are hesitant to access loans, primarily to avoid risks. In recent years, the perceived risk has heightened due to climate change impacting cocoa production, instilling fear in women about the uncertainty of harvest schedules and the threat of crop failure. As a result, women often prefer to borrow money from their extended family, deeming it less risky than applying for a loan from financial institutions.

"However, female farmers here are actually aware that they can access credit or loans, but they worry about the risks. Only 30% of female farmers eventually access credit, while the remaining 70% decide against taking the chance due to fears of risks, such as the quality of the harvested crops or decreasing selling prices. Hence, they opt not to take the risk and choose to use their own resources as much as possible or borrow from their families, which is considered less risky."

- *Advancing Cocoa Agroforestry Towards Income, Value, and Environmental Sustainability (ACTIVE)²'s team, Woman*

Women's Access to Training

Agricultural training is crucial for farmers to acquire skills and knowledge about good agricultural practices and newer production techniques, ultimately enhancing yields and income. However, female cocoa farmers face a notable disparity in accessing training and extension education compared to their male counterparts.

The impediments to women's access to training are complex, encompassing unequal rights in land tenure, limited representation in farmer groups, and dual roles undertaken by women. These challenges underscore the failure of agricultural training initiatives to recognise and address the specific barriers faced by women, perpetuating gender divisions in cocoa farming.

While agricultural training programs in these regions officially welcome both men and women, most participants are men. This imbalance arises because most smallholder farms in the area are headed by men, who are often the default point of contact for participating in these programs. Men additionally benefit from active involvement in established farmer groups, providing them with greater access to government and company-sponsored training. In contrast, women usually depend on their husbands to convey knowledge from these programs, which may not cover all the information needed. In some instances, women attend the training on behalf of their husbands, who are unable to be present, further illustrating the reduced likelihood of women benefiting from training and extension programs.

"We use MARS's farmer database. However, there is a challenge regarding the lack of representation of female farmers. Approximately 98% of MARS's farmer database consists of male registered farmers in the cocoa farmer groups. Thus, we encourage farmers to invite their wives and perhaps their daughters who are old enough to participate in the program."

- *ACTIVE's team, Man*

"... there are no programs specifically targeted for women, but we do have some training activities in the cocoa sector ... some of them (women) also occasionally represent their husbands who are unable to attend the programs."

- *Department of Agriculture, Man*

While husbands often support their wives by attending training and extension education for increased farm production and income, challenges persist. Women must complete domestic tasks before attending these programs. Moreover, cocoa farming is commonly perceived as male-dominated due to its physically demanding tasks, leading to the assumption that training programs are exclusively for men.

²ACTIVE is a project implemented by the Institute for Development Practice (I4DI) and MARS Inc., funded by USAID to enhance farmer resilience when facing climate change, for producing sustainable cocoa and improving livelihoods.

Women's Access to Farmer Cooperatives

Farmer cooperatives in various regions have significantly aided farmers in overcoming obstacles and barriers that constrain their access to agricultural resources for cocoa production. However, female farmers are poorly represented, including in North Luwu's and East Luwu's cocoa-growing communities. Farmer cooperatives do not explicitly discriminate against women. In fact, they are commonly open to all farmers. However, in practice, women tend to refrain from joining cooperatives and let their husbands participate. The scarcity of women in farmer cooperatives is closely related to the invisibility of their work in agriculture. As mentioned earlier, traditional role divisions have led women's work in agriculture to not be considered as employment per se but rather seen as secondary to their husbands. Hence, only men are considered farmers. Moreover, farmer associations are mostly registered with men, who are typically the heads of households or landowners, or both.

"In farmer groups, specifically in cultivation, commonly, the registered farmers are males as the heads of households."

- Department of Agriculture, Man

Additionally, although women in some regions might have engaged in farmers' associations, they appear to be absent in leadership roles and the decision-making process. The study by Jones, Petrin and Scott (2017) among cocoa-growing communities in Lampung and Soppeng, South Sulawesi, found that none of the female farmers registered in farmer groups reported being a leader. Even if women hold some positions in the hierarchy of farmer organisations, these positions are mostly related to administrative work, such as treasurers or secretaries. Unfortunately, these roles tend to have limited power when it comes to determining the priorities and needs of the organisation. Women continue to face obstacles to participating in the decision-making process due to their dual roles, which is time-consuming, hindering them from fully participating.

The situation worsens because decision-making meetings in the community are often held at times when women are busy with domestic work or at night when women are usually restricted from attending due to safety concerns or their responsibilities in reproductive tasks.

"...some might also hold positions in the organisation board, typically as treasurer, because women are known to be good at managing money."

- Extension Service Worker, Man

"It is possible for women to be leaders, but safety concerns arise when they have to hold meetings at night. Meanwhile, men can attend without worry..."

- Extension Service Worker, Man

Given the underrepresentation of women in farmer cooperatives, various entities, including the Government of Indonesia and Non-Governmental Organisations, have established efforts to encourage and ensure women's participation in farmer cooperatives. For instance, the Government of Indonesia established Kelompok Wanita Tani (KWT), a women farmer group that enables women to identify and organise their own needs and priorities to significantly impact their lives and communities.

Kelompok Wanita Tani (KWT)

As men usually dominate farmer groups, Kelompok Wanita Tani (KWT) or the Women Farmers Group, has developed as a forum for women to be more innovative in the field of agriculture. In contrast to the typical farmer group, KWT focuses on establishing food security at the household and community level through self-sufficiency by planting staple food and horticulture. Moreover, KWT has also been the centre for raising awareness of health issues, such as preventing stunting by eating fresh and chemical-free food.

Some KWTs in North Luwu and East Luwu, such as KWT Malimbu and KWT West Pepuro, have achieved impressive results. Not only have they become self-sufficient in meeting their daily needs, but they have also managed to generate additional income for their members by selling their horticultural crops, including long beans, spinach, chilli, tomatoes, and eggplant. They mostly sell their crops to local people or neighbouring villages.

However, KWTs have encountered various challenges, with KWT Malimbu being unable to sell their products due to a lack of marketing and capital. Additionally, geographic factors such as less fertile soil conditions and erratic rainfall have hindered their progress. Another obstacle KWTs face is the lack of knowledge among the members on how to become an effective member of the organisation.

*"...most of them just gathered; they did not know the purpose of organising."
-KWT Malimbu, Woman*

The Need for Comprehensive Support

Given the limited access women face to vital resources, a more holistic and gender-sensitive approach in all aspects of development that acknowledges the specific and unique constraints, needs, issues, and priorities of women is crucial. Here, we propose recommendations to address the specific challenges:

1. **Sex-Disaggregated Data.** There is a prevalent lack of sex/gender-based data within the regions. To rectify this, it is imperative to improve data collection methods and regularly analyse sex/gender-based data.
2. **Financial Inclusion.** Design credit programs for women without land collateral and offer financial literacy training.
3. **Tailored Training.** To ensure the highest rate of participation by women, it is imperative to develop programs that specifically invite women as participants. The training should be accessible with flexible schedules that accommodate

the needs of female farmers, taking into consideration their busy schedules and potential domestic responsibilities.

4. **Leadership Development. Empower** women through training and mentorship while advocating for flexible and safe decision-making spaces.
5. **MSME Support and Business Assistance.** Women in this area have been leading the development of local Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) but face challenges in expanding business, marketing, and distributing products or services. Thus, there is a need to support women's initiatives through technical training, financial aid, access to technology, business mentorship, and assistance to promote, market, and distribute their products and services

Conclusion

In conclusion, the gender disparities faced by female farmers in cocoa-growing communities, particularly in North Luwu and East Luwu, South Sulawesi, are deeply rooted in societal norms and practices that perpetuate the undervaluation of women's labour and the restriction of their roles to secondary contributors. Despite playing pivotal roles in both productive and reproductive tasks, women's contributions to cocoa farming remain largely invisible, limiting access to vital resources such as land, credit, and training. The dual burden women bear, balancing domestic responsibilities with farm work, further exacerbates their challenges in accessing opportunities for personal development and participation in decision-making processes.

The urgency of addressing these issues is paramount, considering the vital role of cocoa farming in the economic development of North Luwu and East Luwu. The substantial contributions of women to cocoa production and their integral roles in decision-making processes underscore the need for a paradigm shift in policies, programs, and societal attitudes. There is a pressing need for comprehensive reforms to empower female farmers and promote gender equality in cocoa communities.

Disclaimer

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