Diversity among Ghanaian tree crop farmers in the Eastern Region

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Background

Policymakers and value chain actors are increasingly aware that ‘smallholders’ or ‘small-scale farmers’ and their households are not all the same. Different households face different opportunities and production constraints. Getting insight into this diversity is therefore key for effective policies and value chain collaborations that aim to improve livelihoods and create resilient and sustainable farming systems.

As a first step towards creating this insight, the inclusive VCC project team carried out a baseline study in both Ghana (Eastern region) and South Africa (Thulamela, Venda region, Limpopo Province) in February 2015. Aim of the survey was to gather data on households’ income sources; production objectives; access to land, capital, labour, information and services; and food and dietary diversity. In Ghana, 148 smallholders were interviewed and in South Africa 140. This info sheet presents the preliminary results for Ghana.
Study area
In Ghana, the baseline survey was carried out in the Akeymansa, Birim Central Municipal and Kwaebibrem Districts of the Eastern Region. A total of 148 cocoa and oil palm farmers were selected from 18 communities. The questionnaire was adapted from a more extended one developed by the Agricultural Research Council in South Africa.

Age
It is often assumed that notably cocoa farmers are an ageing group and that youth is under-represented in the sector. On average, the interviewed farmers were indeed 52 years old, and only few respondents (4%) were younger than 35 years (Fig. 2).

Landholding
Tree crop farmers in Ghana are predominantly smallholders. However, what a smallholder is in terms of landholding differs per region and may range worldwide from 0.5 to 10 ha or even more. For Ghana it is often assumed that a smallholder works up to 2 ha. Farmers in the survey owned more than that: an average of 7.3 ha (Fig. 3) divided over multiple plots (a mean of 4 plots, ranging from 2 to 14). This indicates that limited land size is not the only characteristic that defines a smallholder.

Diversification
Of the surveyed farming households, 66% engaged in multiple value chains, growing both cocoa and oil palm. Only 28% grew cocoa only and 6% solely oil palm. This is typical for the Eastern region; in other regions farmers may focus exclusively on cocoa (e.g. the Tepa District in the Ashanti Region) or oil palm (e.g. the Kwaebibirem District in the Eastern Region).

Tree crop farming is combined with food crops, notably cassava, plantain and cocoyam. In addition, most farmers own livestock, notably chicken (79% of households) and goats (66% of households). In terms of market orientation preliminary findings indicate that tree crop farmers may be commercial or mixed commercial/subsistence farmers, but that a pure subsistence orientation is rare. Tree crop farmers derive most of their income (92%) from farming, supplemented with small and medium enterprises (5%), petty trade (1%) wage labour (1%) and/or remittances (1%). Remarkably, nearly 70% of their income is spent on the education of their children.

Institutional support
Nearly 72% of the tree crop farmers receive support from the government notably through the free cocoa mass spraying and fertilizer distribution programmes of the Ghana Cocoa Board (Cocobod). Another source of support comes from outgrower schemes with oil palm companies and from NGOs (together 9% of the surveyed farmers) (Fig. 4).
Gender differences
Most interiewees were males (80%) because only heads of households were interviewed. Female respondents were from women-headed households. However, most of the farmers’ wives were also farmers: 51% of the spouses were engaged in fulltime farming of cash and food crops, while 36% were parttime farmers engaging in supporting businesses such as oil-palm processing or petty trade. Male household heads had significantly larger farm sizes compared to female farmers heading a household. A male farmer on average farms 8.1 ha whereas a female on average works 4.1 ha. There were no significant differences between male and female household heads regarding household size and number of farm plots. In later workshops both males and females claimed that there are no gender differences in the division of farming labour. “We all do it together as man and wife” and “It’s a joint venture”, was often heard (Fig. 5). Next year’s’ activities will delve deeper into gender relations and intra-household differences.

Food security and dietary diversity
The majority of interviewed farming households were food secure; 86% never or seldom worry about food insecurity. About 14% was not always able to buy their preferred food because they could not afford it. A small proportion of households (11%) indicated that they sometimes eat smaller meals because of food unavailability. “Sleeping on an empty stomach occasionally” occurs in only 3% of the households. Seasonality seems to play a major role: 40% indicated that there are months during which they struggle to get food.

The majority of the households eat diverse foods. Over 50% of the farming households reported having eaten staples, cereals, roots and tubers, vegetables, fish, legumes, oils and fats the day prior to the interview. Less than 50% ate fruits, meat, insects or worms, eggs, diary, sugar and beverages. However, it should be noted that eggs, diary and fruits are not commonly part of Ghana’s food culture. Further research will be conducted to generate more insight into the situation of the less food secure and dietary diverse households and the role of gender and seasonality.

Fig. 5. Farming as a ‘joint venture’ of spouses

Fig. 6. Typical Ghanaian dish: fufu with oil palm soup and bushmeat

Farmers’ perspectives on different profiles
Following up on the baseline survey, participatory scenario workshops were held with farmers from the study villages in the Kwaebibrem District in the Eastern Region (Figs. 1 and 7). In a general discussion, the researchers asked the farmers to identify relevant farmer types, after which sub-groups delved deeper into the features and future prospects of each of these. Self-identified groups were location-specific and comprised cash crop and mixed income farmers, constrained land owners, small farmers under sharecropping (abunu/ abusa) arrangements and entrepreneurial farmers.

Entrepreneurial farmers resembled the mixed income farmers identified in another workshop. Having multiple income sources distinguishes them from the other groups. They combine several cash crops (oil palm and cocoa) with livestock and non-farm jobs. These included processing palm oil, running a provision store, petty trade and working in an oil-processing company. For all groups farming was the main income source, but the entrepreneurial and mixed farmers felt they were better off than those depending on cash and food crops only. This was
because they could fall back on different income sources, whereas their additional businesses allowed them to invest in their farm. This was reflected in the yields of cocoa and oil palm per acre, which was higher than for the other groups.

Constrained farmers were generally starting farmers in the early stages of accumulation – dependent on government for seeds and fertilizers and developing their land through hard labour. They were struggling because their trees were not yet in full production, because they had no additional income or government support to start up or further develop their farms, because the fruit market had collapsed or because they had suffered the loss of a spouse.

In Tepa District (Ashanti Region) an interesting group were the sharecropping farmers. Although these are generally considered a vulnerable group because they don’t own the land, they turned out to be a proactive group of farmers who used sharecropping arrangements as a deliberate strategy to gain access to land, develop a farm, and eventually become a landowner. As long as they have productive trees they are entitled to use the land. Some even have a tenant agreement for 99 years.

Propects for the future
Farmers expect the cocoa sector to remain important. They consider their cocoa farm as an asset which allows them to invest their children’s future. Their children will inherit the farm, but not become cocoa farmers themselves; farmers expect them to have better jobs and leave the farm to a caretaker. All aim to further develop their farm, but face challenges to make the proper investments. These challenges differ per farmer profile. Age, gender, access to land, land size, and financial resources seem to be the most important variables.

Oil palm is considered “a young man’s cash”. It does not play a role in farmers’ prospects for the future.

Conclusions and implications
• Preliminary outcomes confirm that tree crop farmers are generally of advanced age, but surprisingly their estimated farm size seems to be larger than generally assumed.
• Farmers self-define different farmer categories which differ per region. Cash crop farmers, mixed income farmers, constrained farmers, entrepreneurial and small innovative farmers emerged as categories. More in-depth research is to lay a firmer basis for farmer typologies, probing more deeply into gender differences. Particular attention will also be given to differences in farmers’ capacity to effect change (agency).
• Gaining further insight into differences among farming households is important for better match-making between farmers’ needs and VCC goals such as innovation and improved service delivery.
• Further research will examine differences between cocoa and oil palm farmers, especially considering that the latter may lose autonomy when engaged in outgrower schemes.
• Most farmers claim to be food secure. Further research is to shed more light on the role of gender relations and seasonality.

Fig. 7 Outcome of participatory scenario building with a mixed income group in the Eastern Region