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Diversity among Ghanaian cocoa crop farmers in the Ahafo-Ano North District, Ashanti Region

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Background
Policymakers and practitioners believe that reconfiguring the relationship between smallholders and private sector actors into true partnerships is essential to achieving sustainable and resilient smallholder farming systems (Ros-Tonen et al., 2015). However, the opportunities and challenges of smallholder production are quite different from one farmer to another and context specific (Ataa-Asantewaa and Ros-Tonen, 2015). Hence, getting insight into the diversity among smallholder farmers is key to effective policies and value chain collaborations that aim to improve livelihoods. Based on the results of a baseline study among cocoa farmers in the Ashanti Region (Ghana), this infosheet aims to shed light on this diversity.

Study area and methodology
The baseline survey was carried out in the Ahafo-Ano North District of the Ashanti Region in December 2015. Sixty smallholder cocoa farmers were purposefully selected, proportionally representing gender and the six communities in the study area – Tanokrom, Mfenibu, Nkyensedanho, Manfo, Camp and Achina. The study used purposive sampling to make female cash crop farmers more visible. They are usually under-represented in most studies due to (a) the household focus of most studies as a result of which the male head of the household is interviewed, and (b) the unwillingness of female farmers to participate in such studies. The majority of the wives of the male-headed households (56.7%) were also cash crop farmers, but often not willing to speak on behalf of the husband who is considered to be the head of the household.

The questionnaire was adapted from the baseline survey carried out in the Kwaebibirem District in the Eastern Region of Ghana in February 2015. Data was analysed using the statistical package for social science (SPSS).

Gender and age
The age of farmers interviewed ranges from 23-78 years, with an average of 54 years, with only a few respondents (5%) being younger than 35 years (Fig. 1). This is quite similar to the group of cocoa farmers interviewed in the Eastern Region where the average age was 52 years, with about 4% under 35 years (Ataa-Asantewaa and Ros-Tonen, 2015). This confirms the general picture that cocoa farming in Ghana is dominated by ageing farmers.

The 24 female smallholder cocoa farmers in the survey (representing 40% of the farmers interviewed), mostly come from female-headed households, as these were the women who were willing to participate in the survey. The age range (23-78) was similar to the sample as a whole, while the average age of female farmers was slightly higher than that of males (55 vs 53 years).

Landholding and tenure
Contrary to the notion that smallholder farmers farm up to 2 ha (World Bank, 2007), the size of landholdings among the households in the sample ranged from 1-55 ha. Farmers in the survey owned an average of 8.23 ha (Fig. 2). It should be noted that the larger landholdings often contain several plots of small sizes, prejudicing efficiency in farming.
The average landholding size is substantially larger compared to that in the Eastern Region where the size of farmers’ landholdings ranged from less than 1 ha to 48 ha with an average of 7.3 ha.

A male farmer in the Ahafo-Ano North District had 10.28 ha on average, compared to 5.14 ha of land for female farmers. This implies that gender is an important factor determining diversity among smallholder farmers, which is strongly reflected in landholding size. Bundling smallholder farmers as farmers who farm 2 ha or less, therefore, obscures gender-specific constraints.

Livelihood diversification

All the farmers interviewed grow cocoa and the majority (86.7%) are solely cocoa farmers (Fig. 3). Six percent were multiple cash crop farmers, cultivating both cocoa and oil palm. This contrasts the situation of farmers in the Eastern Region who are more often engaged in multiple cash crop value chains, with 66% growing both cocoa and oil palm (Ataa-Asantewaa and Ros-Tonen, 2015).

Tree-crop farming is combined with food crops either as an intercrop or on separate plots of land. The food crops grown are mostly cassava, plantain, yam and cocoyam. However, farmers prioritise cocoa and plantain as the most important and second most important crops respectively due to the relatively high income they generate. In addition, the farmers interviewed owned livestock (61.7%), chicken (46.7%), sheep (26.7%) and goats (23.3%). On rare occasions, a household had cattle and donkeys, but none had pigs. The combination of food crop production and animal rearing with cash crop farming was also prevalent among smallholder farmers in the Eastern Region.

In both districts, farmers showed a mixed commercial/subsistence orientation. Pure commercial tree crop farmers were rare. The main source of income for farmers is farming (98.3%). This is often supplemented with non-farming income, with the majority coming from trade (30%), small and medium enterprises (13.3%), remittances (11.7%) and pensions (6.7%). Other sources included wage labour, government grants for old age, children or disability, and selling forest products. Of the farmers interviewed, 19% had no supplementary source of income.

Farmers spend 56.7% of their farming income on the education of their children, followed by family upkeep (alimentation, clothes, etc.) before farm investment. This aligns with the results of the survey in the Eastern region: farming is the main source of livelihood for smallholder tree crop farmers and they prioritise spending farming income on education, with re-investments in the farm barely being a concern (Ataa-Asantewaa and Ros-Tonen, 2015).

Institutional and private sector support

More than half of the tree crop farmers (53.3%) receive support from the government through the free cocoa mass spraying and fertiliser distribution programmes of the Ghana Cocoa Board (Cocobod). Another source of support came from private sector companies especially through farmers’ collaboration with the Lindt Cocoa Foundation through Armajaro Ghana Limited (AGL). A few farmers (1%) received support from Care International, a non-governmental organisation (NGO).

All farmers acknowledge collaboration with AGL but only 43% received training or another form of support from AGL during the last 12 months. None had received training or support from the government within the last 12 months.

AGL has trained farmers in plantain sucker multiplication and some farmers mentioned receiving inputs on credit (Fig. 4). Government support was higher among farmers in the Eastern Region (72%), but the
Food security and dietary diversity

The majority of farming households surveyed were food secure. Seventy-five percent of households never or seldom worry about food insecurity. About 28% occasionally or regularly have to forgo their preferred food because they were not able to afford it. Twenty-three percent regularly or occasionally eat smaller meals because of food unavailability. Sleeping without food for a day due to a lack of money only happened occasionally or regularly in 3.4% of the households interviewed. However, the majority of households (65%) experienced food shortages or struggled to get food during some months in the year. This usually occurred between December-early April and June-July attributed to the drier periods. This is similar to the Eastern Region, where 40% of households reported struggles with food during similar months in the year. Food insecurity, therefore, seems to be seasonal among tree-crop farming households.

Root and tubers, cereals, vegetables and oil which form part of Ghanaian staple dishes such as banku, fufu and ampe were consumed daily. At least 90% of households reported having eaten these staples the day before and on the day of the survey. Poultry, meat and fish (dried/fresh) also formed a major part of households’ diets with 60%, 57% and 90% of households having consumed poultry, meat and fish respectively on the day of the survey or the day before. Sixty-five percent of households also had eaten eggs on the day of the survey or the day before. Less than 40% of households ate fruits, dairy products, sugar, beverage or insects/worms. These items were included in the survey for comparison with South Africa, but not commonly part of Ghanaian food culture.

Diversity among smallholder farmers – How farmers profile themselves

Prior to the baseline survey, participatory scenario workshops were held with farmers in Manfo and Nkyensedanho, two of the six communities where the survey was carried out. In a general discussion, farmers were asked to identify different farmer types, after which sub-groups delved deeper into the features and future prospects of each of these farmer types. Self-identified groups were location-specific and comprised (i) cash crop and mixed-income farmers, (ii) constrained land owners, (iii) sharecroppers (abunu/abusa) and (iv) entrepreneurial farmers.

Sometimes, labels assigned to a particular farmer profile were different, but the characteristics of the two groups quite similar. For instance, entrepreneurial farmers in Manfo resembled the mixed-income farmers in Nkyensedanho. Multiple income sources, as well as access to own land and that of others, distinguished farmers from these two groups from other farmer types. Farmers self-identified as mixed-income farmers in Kwaebibirem District showed similar attributes (Figs. 5 and 6). Farmers in these groups were land owners and engaged in sharecropping. They combine several cash crops (oil palm and cocoa) with livestock and non-farm jobs. These include palm-oil processing, 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 farms.

In the Ahafo-Ano North District (Ashanti Region) an interesting group was that of 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.

Prospects for the future

Cocoa production is at the centre of farmers’ livelihood in the Ahafo-Ano North District and farmers expect its production to remain important for their children. Ninety-seven percent of farmers expect to grow cocoa in the future. They consider their cocoa farms as insurance for

![Fig. 4 Institutional support for tree-crop farmers](image-url)
the old age and as an inheritance for their children. However, they expect their children to do white-collar jobs when they complete their education in which they invested a lot of their cocoa money. The farmers aim to increase their cocoa production, but face challenges to make the proper investments.

These challenges range from old age and gender to limited or no access to land, inputs and financial resources. Farmers considered oil palm as a very tedious crop to grow and maintain. Sixty-seventy percent of farmers will never consider growing oil-palm even when given land for such purpose. Similar results were found in the Eastern Region where farmers expected oil-palm production not to rise in the future and for cocoa to take over.

Conclusions and implications

- These preliminary outcomes confirm the results obtained earlier in the Eastern Region that tree-crop farmers are generally of age.

- Smallholder farmers differ in terms of landholding size. Smallholder farmers can therefore not be defined based on having 2 ha or less.

- Large landholdings often contain several plots of small sizes. A relatively large farm can, therefore, be very fragmented.

- The study showed that a substantial proportion of cocoa crash crop farmers in the Ahafo Ano North District is female.

- Small-scale cocoa farmers are not homogenous. They differ with respect to gender, geographical location, landholding size, and the crops they cultivate. Their challenges and opportunities vary accordingly.

- Unlike the Eastern region, farmers in the Ashanti Region focus more on cocoa and show little interest in oil palm production.

- Most farming households claim food security and high dietary diversity, but with seasonal challenges. Further research is needed into the reported seasonal shortages.

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References


