



GHANA: Gender impact of promoting the cashew value chain

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Karin Gaesing

Gender impact of promoting the cashew value chain in Ghana

Cashew nuts have been at the top of the list of non-traditional exports in Ghana from 2021 up to now. Around 90% of the nuts are exported unprocessed to Asia. The vitamin-rich cashew apple, on the other hand, to which the nut is attached, is generally considered a waste product. The project „Market-oriented value chains for jobs and growth in the ECOWAS region“ (MOVE), implemented by Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), aims at strengthening the competitiveness of the cashew sector in Africa and at increasing the utilisation of the cashew apple. The promotion of women plays an important role in the project.

The majority of those employed in the cashew sector are women who are mainly involved in growing seedlings in the nurseries, harvesting the nuts and processing cashew products. MOVE's approach to this is primarily the implementation of a series of training events for its partner organisations and target groups. Gender aspects, in some cases also gender-transformative approaches and reflecting on gender roles, especially with regard to the cashew value chain, are integrated into all training activities. Also, a quota is being deliberately set for the participation of women at training measures.

The study of the gender impact of the promotion of the cashew value chain in Ghana showed that women generate their own income through the value chain, which they invest into their children's education, building houses, buying land, or into other income-generating activities. Many women start their own businesses as a consequence of the training received by MOVE and thus generate jobs for other women and, to lesser extent, men. These women serve as role models for others who are encouraged and enabled to emulate them through the training programmes provided by MOVE. The trainings as such do not have gender-transformative impacts, but they are well positioned to initiate them.

Cashew value chain, women, gender transformative impact, Ghana

Country and project background

About 34.58 million people lived in Ghana in 2024. The growth rate was 2.15% p.a., and on average one woman has 3.56 children. According to an estimate for 2023, more than half of the population (59.2%) live in urban areas. The urbanisation rate in the years from 2020 to 2025 was 3.06% p.a. Overall, around 71.3% of the country's population is Christian and 19.9% Muslim (CIA 2025).



The Human Development Index (HDI) for Ghana in 2024 is 0.628, which makes Ghana No. 143 out of 191 countries. This places Ghana in the category of countries with medium development, and the HDI has risen steadily since 1990 (UNDP 2025: 274ff.). Among the economic sectors, agriculture is estimated to have contributed 21.1%, industry 29.5%, and services 42.5% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2023 (CIA 2025).

After falling steadily since 1990, poverty rates have risen again since 2020 as a result of the COVID pandemic. According to estimates, the poverty rate is 31.5% in 2025. This is mainly due to limited growth in services and agriculture as well as to a price increase that cancels out the income growth of poor households (World Bank 2024). According to the Multidimensional Poverty Index, which takes into account people's living conditions (e.g. water supply, education, health services and access to energy sources), more people are living in multidimensional poverty (45.6%)

than monetary poverty (23.4%) (GSS 2020). It is also stated that multidimensional poverty is both a rural and a regional phenomenon. In 2020, 64.4% of the rural population suffered from multidimensional poverty, compared to only 27% of the urban population. Regionally, the highest rate of 80% was recorded in the northern parts of Ghana (GSS 2020).

After moderate to severe food insecurity had fallen continuously since 2016 (43.8% of the population) to 36.6% in 2021, it rose again to 39.4% in 2022. Here too, the northern regions are more affected than the rest of the country.



Ghana ranks 143rd on the Gender Inequality Index in 2025, falling five places compared to 2023. The still high maternal mortality rate (268 per 100,000 births) as well as women holding only 14.5% of seats in parliament counted among the reasons for the poor performance (UNDP 2025: 291ff.). With 16%, a relatively high proportion of young women are already married by the age of 18, compared to only 2% of young men. 3% of girls are married before the age of 15, in the northern parts of the country it is even 9.4% (GSS / ICF: 2022). The number of female-headed households is given as 36.6% for Ghana in 2022, a very high proportion by African standards, surpassed only by South Africa and Zimbabwe (World Bank Group, n.d.).

Women play a very important role in agriculture. According to Vitoh (2023), they make around half of the labour force and produce around 70% of the food, although their agricultural

productivity is lower than that of men. This is due to the interplay of a variety of reasons, such as limited access to land and financial services and a high workload due to domestic and care work. The Land Act of 2020 strengthens the position of women by requiring that land acquired during marriage be registered in the names of both spouses and that both must consent to transactions concerning the land. In practice, however, men still generally have the power of decision over land (Vitoh 2023).

The cashew sector in West Africa has become increasingly important in recent years. According to internal GIZ project documents, 62% of the world's cashew nuts are currently produced in West Africa, the majority of them at around 1.5 million smallholder farms. However, for example in Ghana around 90% of the nuts are shipped unprocessed to Asia, primarily to India, which means that West African countries are missing a significant value creation potential.

According to the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA), 274,000 hectares were under cashew cultivation in Ghana in 2025. In addition to traditional export goods such as gold, oil and cocoa, cashew nuts have been at the top of Ghana's non-traditional export goods since 2021. In Ghana, the cashew tree thrives best in the transitional zone between rainforest and savannah, but it can also be grown in the savannah region. The nuts are harvested between December



and March. The cashew apples, on which the nuts hang (Fig. 3), are usually thrown away as a waste product. The cashew apple has around five times as much vitamin C as an orange (GIZ 2023). By way of training courses on processing options and the publication of a cookbook with recipes for cashew apples and nuts, MOVE promotes its use (ibid. 2023).

Goals and activities at a glance

The aim of the project „Market-oriented value chains for jobs and growth in the ECOWAS region“ (MOVE), implemented by Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), is to create income and employment opportunities along market-oriented and resilient value chains in this West African economic community. MOVE promotes the cashew and rice value chains in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone, with a planned duration from January 2022 to June 2027. This report refers to the gender impact assessment of the cashew value chain in Ghana in April 2025.

MOVE consists of five project components:

1. Selected companies have improved their ability to create value from rice and cashew processing in the ECOWAS region.
2. The economic and ecological sustainability of the agricultural business systems has improved
3. The marketing of regional products in the cashew and rice sector has improved.
4. Good practices in the promotion of inclusive agribusiness models are widespread.
5. Public-private cooperation for evidence-based, income- and employment-orientated policy-making is strengthened.

The promotion of the cashew value chain builds on the predecessor project „Competitive Cashew Initiative“ (*ComCashew*, 12/2015 – 01/2022). According to the MOVE project management and the gender team, the project aims at achieving the following gender objectives:

- greater and better representation of women overall in the value chain,
- more women in decision-making positions,
- more women who own or manage businesses in the cashew sector, and
- independent income for more women
- changes at the socio-cultural level.



Numerous indicators at project objective and output level call for an increased proportion of women, e.g. women-run businesses that have improved their conditions for value creation. Women and young adults are particularly emphasised in the description of the target group.

Each of the five components has a gender focal point, which makes up the gender team that is responsible for gender transformative approaches (GTA) throughout the project, i.e. in all six implementation countries.

MOVE works primarily by improving the capacity of public and private partner organisations, which in turn are often in direct contact with the target group of farmers or small and medium-sized entrepreneurs. MOVE supports its partners with adapting, updating or newly developing, institutionalising and disseminating the innovative education and training courses required to achieve the project objectives. The following three training programmes are particularly worth mentioning:

- The Cashew Master Training Programme (MTP) specifically addresses potential multipliers. The programme offers technical trainings along the value chain, from production and processing to commercialization and quality management in addition to a broad range of further skills training. These include public speaking,

writing CVs, negotiation techniques and techniques of personal development, and behavioural change. In a practice-oriented part the participants learn everything about the production of seedlings and the planting and care of cashew trees as well as the processing of cashew nuts and cashew apples on site at cashew plantations and at an agricultural research station. They also do practical exercises. A special module on gender aspects in the cashew value chain introduces many of the participants to the concept of gender for the first time and to the fact that gender roles are culturally different and may change over time. It begins with self-reflection on the part of all participants, to make them aware of their gender role and its implications. An analysis of discrimination and obstacles, especially for women, is followed by suggestions for gender-transformative changes.



- At the Farmer Business School farmers are trained in good agricultural practices that emphasise agroecological farming methods and climate adaptation. Gender aspects are also included here.
- Gender makes Business Sense+ (GmBS+) is aimed at small and medium-sized entrepreneurs in the agricultural and processing sector. The 5-day course teaches participants how to recognise and question cultural and

social conditions, expectations and obstacles, especially with regard to agriculture or agribusiness, and shows in a practical way how gender inequalities in the value chain can be overcome.

All events provide the opportunity for networking and peer-to-peer-learning, which is important especially for women, who are only rarely part of professional networks.



Nursing mothers participating in the trainings are offered childcare for their young children, and training courses are also offered to women at a reduced price.

Project impacts achieved so far

This good practice study on the gender impact of the cashew value chain in Ghana is largely based on the author's research stay, a staff member of the Institute for Development and Peace (INEF) of the University of Duisburg-Essen, in Ghana in March/April 2025. The research along the cashew value chain included visits to two agricultural research stations, private nurseries and cashew plantations, cashew nut processing factories and cashew apple processing plants in different parts of the country. In the course of all these visits, a total of 10 focus group discussions (FGDs) and 30 in-depth interviews were conducted primarily, but not exclusively, with women who were involved in the value chain in various functions and activities. In addition, discussions were held with the MOVE team, the Directorate of Crop Services and the Women in Agricultural Development Directorate (WIAD) of the MoFA as well as the country director of the GIZ. A video conference was organised with Olam Food Ingredients (OFI), a global food supplier and project partner.

The analysis of the project's gender impact according to the Reach-Benefit-Empower-Transform concept showed the results presented below:

Reach: The target group, including women, is reached through the project's public and private partner organisations which in turn are linked to cooperatives, organised women's groups and the likes. Small farmers and entrepreneurs are addressed through this range of organisations. An important measure that appears to be necessary to have more female participants is the establishment of quotas for female and youth participants in training events, conferences and workshops. Without the quota of 50% women required by MOVE at such events, a number of interviewees said that it would primarily be men who would be sent there.

Benefit: The training courses primarily provide women with the knowledge and skills they need to run and manage a business as part of the cashew value chain. In addition to the technical knowledge, numerous male and female graduates of the MTP stated that the course had increased their confidence in their own abilities and thus given them more self-confidence.

The establishment and operation of cashew plantations, nurseries and processing plants for cashew nuts and apples creates jobs. At the private nurseries surveyed, an

average of five workers, most of them women, worked on the grafting of cashew rootstocks with scions. The cashew apple processors (exclusively small women enterprises) also employ three to five women each during the season, at first in harvesting the cashew apples and then in processing them.



The two large cashew nut processing companies visited employ 73 (65 of whom are women) resp. 60 (43 of whom are women) permanent workers who receive a regular income above the minimum wage for their work. The minimum wage is currently 450 Ghanaian cedi (GHS) per month (equivalent to around 38 Euros in June 2025), with the factory paying a starting wage of 820 GHS. Part from the mandatory social security, the factories offer other benefits such as childcare for small children at the company's own daycare centre and, in one case, free bus transport between the workplace and the home of the ma-

jority of workers. The harvesting of cashew apples and the collection of cashew nuts in the fields is carried out almost 100% by female workers. They are usually paid 50 GHS per working day. The cashew value chain therefore not only provides an income for the farmers and processors themselves, but also generates jobs and provides an income for numerous other people.

Cost-benefit analyses were carried out with cashew apple processors and a female farmer, and they were asked to disclose their accounts.

- In the case of one processor, seasonal expenditure of GHS 13,700 is offset by income of GHS 27,600. In addition, the woman earns around GHS 15,000 from the production and sale of soap and GHS 6,000 from the sale of her cashew nuts.
- Three processors working in the group stated that they each earn up to GHS 5,000 per harvest season from the processed products. Each of the women has her own cashew plantation and additionally earns between GHS 6,000 and GHS 7,500 from the sale of the nuts, depending on the size of the plantation.
- One woman farmer owns 10 acres of cashew and receives around 120,000 GHS per harvest season for the sale of her unprocessed cashew nuts. This compares with around GHS 6,600 spent on labour to maintain the plantation and harvest the nuts.

Empower: A general distinction is made between four types of empowerment (e.g. Friedman 1992), all four of which are achieved by the project. The men and women trained by the project attest to the MTP training in particular as a game changer, but also as an eye-opener for the gender issue. Their participation in the training made them more self-confident and, in addition to the necessary know-how, allowed them to develop enough self-confidence to start businesses, pass on the contents of the cashew value chain to third parties as trainers, take over management functions, etc. (*psychological empowerment*).

When women earn their own money through their work in the cashew value chain, they often mention as an achievement: „We help our husbands.“ The families are large (e.g. due to polygamy), and it is not easy for the husband to provide for all family members. If the woman earns her own money, there are fewer conflicts in the family because

she does not have to ask her husband for money for the children, who usually approach her first with their wishes, and for everyday needs, but she can pay for these expenses herself. In addition, the frequent disputes about the amount of household money (*chop money*) that the husband regularly gives to his wife or wives would become obsolete. On the one hand, having their own income makes women more independent both financially and in their decisions, but on the other hand it also allows their husbands to partially withdraw from their economic obligations to their families, which is certainly a controversial issue.



A stronger role in family related decision-making is also an effect of women's own employment. Their status in the village community also increases, especially when establishing their own business or participating in a group organising themselves for an income-generating activity. As a group, these women often approach the village *chief*, the Church, the agricultural office or the local parliament (*district assembly*), asking for support for their activity, e.g. in the form of land, money or premises.

For example, in the Langbinsi area in the north 420 women farmers received land from their husbands to plant cashew trees with the support of the local NGO Z-Treebiz - in a region where women are normally not allowed to grow permanent crops. For legitimisation, the handing over of the land was witnessed by the village *chief*. This ensures that the land cannot be taken away from the women even in the event of divorce or widowhood. The head of the NGO is a graduate of the MTP, who was very impressed by the gender content of the MTP training and implemented it immediately.

The managers of the two cashew nut factories visited have set themselves the task of employing (single) young women and mothers in particular who have often dropped out of school, in order to enable them to find regular employment with social insurance contributions etc., which they do not receive in informal jobs. The young women are also educated about family planning - taboo subjects in local society (*social empowerment*).

All women interviewed individually or at FGDs stated that they could decide for themselves how to use the money they earned, whether from self-employment or waged labour. The money is often invested into children's education and household expenses, but also into their own further education (e.g. one woman used it to finance her school-leaving certificate and a Bachelor's degree in business management),



into building a house, into buying or renting land or into an additional income-generating activity. The majority of the women interviewed is also organised in one of the *Village Savings and Loan Associations* (VSLA), i.e. a savings and loan group. This enables women not only to put aside the money they have earned but also to obtain loans through the VSLA (*economic empowerment*).

In the cashew value chain women organise themselves into groups and cooperatives and manage them themselves. Among other things, they have been encouraged and empowered to do so through the training courses offered by MOVE. They also occupy leadership positions, e.g. at the private company OLAM Food Ingredients (OFI) (30% women in leadership positions), although this should be further promoted (*political empowerment*).

Transform: The project achieves gender-transformative effects primarily where women run their own businesses and / or organise themselves. Many women who have received one or more trainings through MOVE pass on their knowledge and this way become role models for other women (and men). The trainings aim at having a gender-transformative effect, i.e. at changing socio-cultural norms and power structures. However, the actual effects are often further steps into this direction, contributing to a transformative effect in the longer term.

Challenges and conditions for success

► One of the challenges with regard to the gender-transformative effects in the cashew value chain in Ghana is the widely practiced customary land law which does not allow women to own land, at least in patrilineal societies. It is therefore a significant and gender-transformative innovation when women in northern Ghana receive land from their husbands for the cultivation of cashew trees and this cannot be reclaimed by the family-in-law even in the event of divorce or the death of the husband. This is made possible by the involvement of the *chief*, as an agreement with witnesses, concluded at the *chief's* palace, cannot be contested.

► The managers of the cashew nut processing factories struggle with the fact that the young women they employ as workers are often absent from work for several days on important social occasions such as funerals. In addition, during the cashew harvest season they are also required as labourers by their fathers or husbands at their own

plantations. The obligations of the women in the family are clearly prioritised over their paid work, and the young women's right to have a say is very limited. The management of the factories reacts to this with various measures, such as relocating the factory to an area where cashew is not grown or giving preference to hiring people who do not come from the immediate neighbourhood. Other solutions proposed by the factory owners include running a daycare centre, setting up a bus service to the workplace or paying per working day instead of a monthly wage. In order to fundamentally change the situation, the factory owners also hold discussions with the workers and their families, which should lead to more value being placed on formalised waged labour (including social insurance).

► While the MOVE trainings are considered very beneficial by the graduates, they complain that although they are given the knowledge and contacts, they have neither the start-up capital nor the necessary inputs to start or expand a business. The credit conditions in Ghana (between 30 and 48% interest p.a. with relatively short terms) are unattractive for small and medium-sized enterprises and women farmers. The loans provided by the community savings

groups allow for small investments in the current season but not for larger expenses such as the purchase of a juicer or a small van (*tricycle*) for transporting cashew apples.

► Both the agricultural research centres visited and the MoFA confirmed that women are more efficient than men in grafting and growing cashew plants and are therefore preferred as workers. They showed more skill and patience for the work at the nursery as well as more attention in the planting and care of cashew plantations than men.

► In the FGDs and interviews the role of the *Cashew Council Ghana* (CCG), which consists of three associations (cashew processing, cashew production, cashew trade and export), was repeatedly emphasised. Some of the interviewees were members of one of the associations and thus benefited e. g. from the purchase of planting material and scions, polythene bags and growing soil for their cashew nursery at a reduced price, and from the sale of grafted seedlings through the organisation. The processors of cashew nuts and apples, on the other hand, obtain information about processing machines, financing options and new customers through their organisation.



► Particularly when it comes to the processing of cashew apples, women reported their own innovations with regard to the processing products of the apples. One woman, for example, uses activated charcoal against snake bites, to which she would add cashew powder because of its greater effectiveness. Others referred to adding it to sauce for school lunches because of its vitamin content or were interested in ethanol production from cashew apples. Producers are also innovative when it comes to the marketing of their products. They use social media, radio and the widespread and networked Church groups to promote and distribute their products.

Conclusions for development cooperation in general

► Economic benefits for women do not automatically lead to structural benefits. This requires explicit measures. In northern Ghana, WIAD has been implementing the *Gender Model Family* approach (see also Rosenberg 2025) and the *Gender Champions* approach propagated by CARE for around five years with good results, both of which aim at achieving gender-transformative effects by sensitising and advising men and women and by activating role models as multipliers of gender-transformative measures. The *Gender Champions* reflect critically on gender roles, question cultural norms and power dynamics in the family and society and endeavour to pass on gender-transformative approaches to those around them through discussions, training and themselves as role models. It is advisable to combine such approaches with other projects (e.g. agriculture, water supply, health) in order to achieve greater and sustainable gender impact.

► If possible, MTP graduates who want to train other people and/or invest into their own business should be given start-up capital in return for submitting a business plan. This can be done, for example, on the basis of a revolving fund, which must be repaid into after a period of time to be determined, so that other people can also benefit from it.

► In a society that usually benefits men with regard to nominations, the setting of a quota for the participation of women in training events, workshops or conferences is a meaningful measure. The childcare guaranteed by MOVE for small children during such events is also to be welcomed. These and other women-friendly measures often make the participation of women possible in the first place.

► School meals could be an interesting means for publicising the use of cashew apples for nutrition to broader sections of the population and making it „palatable“, thus promoting the business for women. Experience has shown that both the colleagues responsible for school meals (in Ghana the *matrons*) and the schoolchildren would like to have home-cooked meals that they enjoyed at school (cf. Gaesing et al. 2024).

► The issuing of formal land titles creates security for farmers in the long-term cultivation of their land and thus also has a decisive influence on their investments into the land. The formal land law often treats men and women equally regarding land, but its implementation in practice is often challenged by strong customary practices. In this case, locally binding regulations such as the conclusion of a (verbal) agreement at the *chief's* palace, which is binding for all „contractual partners“ and cannot be seized, can also provide women with the necessary land security.

► To track gender-transformative effects, indicators should go beyond measuring the participation of women or marginalised groups in trainings or events and instead measure the impact of the training or event. Instead of a quantitative indicator, a qualitative one can be chosen here.



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Illustrations

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Fig. 9 by MOVE, all other photos by Karin Gaesing

Project characteristics*

B5 – Processing intensity by research team

G1 – Gender identifier

P3 – Participation

A7 – Target groups Identifier

* For an explanation see Good Practice handout or www.uni-due.de/inef/inef_projektreihen.php

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INEF – Research Project

The research project aims to develop recommendations for state development cooperation. The aim is to identify measures that can better reach poor, vulnerable and food insecure population groups and efficiently support them in improving their living situation in a sustainable way.

We examine the interdependencies of poverty, vulnerability and food insecurity as well as gender transformative activities and impact in order to identify both blockages and success factors for development cooperation.

Based on literature analyses and surveys of professional organisations at home or abroad, successfully practised

approaches (“good practices”) are to be identified and intensively analysed within the framework of field research. In addition to a socio-cultural contextualisation, the gender dimension is consistently taken into account throughout. The local investigations focus on the participation of the affected population in order to capture their perception of the problems and ideas for solution.

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