



# WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN COCOA COMMUNITIES IN GHANA

## FINAL REPORT

### INTEGRATED LAND AND RESOURCE GOVERNANCE PROGRAM

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# LIST OF ACRONYMS

BAC	Business Advisory Center
COCOBOD	Ghana Cocoa Board
ECOM	Ecom Agroindustrial Corp.
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GALS	Gender Action Learning Systems
GAP	Good Agronomic Practices
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GEI	Gender Equity Index
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
GSP	Good Social Practices
IDIQ	Indefinite Delivery/Indefinite Quantity
ILRG	Integrated Land and Resource Governance Task Order
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
STARR II	Strengthening Tenure and Resource Rights II
SBCC	Social and Behavior Change Communication
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VSLA	Village Savings and Loans Association
WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment

## I.0 INTRODUCTION

Ghana is the second-largest cocoa producer in the world, with cocoa representing a vital part of the country's economy. Gender inequality is pervasive within the cocoa sector due to a combination of unequal access to productive resources and harmful gender norms at the household, community, and institutional levels. Although women are involved in nearly all the steps of cocoa production in Ghana, cocoa is largely considered a man's crop, and women's roles and contributions remain unrecognized, undervalued, and often unpaid. Land ownership is a key barrier; because women typically do not own or lease land on their own, they are not perceived as farmers by themselves, their families, communities, or other stakeholders in the supply chain. Commodity trading companies are responsible for procuring cocoa from smallholder farmers for major international chocolate brands. These companies not only interact with farmers on the technical aspects of cocoa production but also play a critical role in cocoa communities, often implementing social development initiatives in partnership with chocolate brands and international development funders and organizations.

In this context, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) partnered with [Ecom Agroindustrial Corp. \(ECOM\)](#), a global commodity trading and processing company, to promote gender equality and empower women in the cocoa value chain in Ghana. The goal was to increase gender-responsiveness in ECOM's internal policies and practices and pilot targeted women's empowerment activities in cocoa communities where the company operates. Working directly with a cocoa commodity trader provides opportunities for greater sustainability and scalability of USAID investments, as the company can replicate successful gender-responsive approaches in multiple cocoa-sourcing communities in Ghana and West Africa, particularly in future partnerships with chocolate brands. The partnership was implemented between 2020 and 2023 under the USAID Integrated Land and Resource Governance (ILRG) activity, a global mechanism managed by Tetra Tech. Preparatory work, including an initial gender analysis and project design, started in 2020 and was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Implementation of activities with ECOM staff and in cocoa communities began in mid-2022 and concluded in mid-2023.

The project was informed by an initial [gender analysis](#) that provided a better understanding of ECOM's gender equality practices and capacity, as well as the barriers and opportunities for women's empowerment, particularly related to access to productive resources and income diversification opportunities. The gender analysis found that although ECOM promoted gender equality within the company and in its work with cocoa farmers, it lacked clear policies, strategies, and expertise to guide and institutionalize such efforts. Women's representation in field positions was very low, and ECOM signed contracts with individual farmers based on their status as landowners, which meant most contracts were signed with men. Despite the company's attempts to provide men and women equal opportunity and access to resources, in practice, women's lack of land ownership led to less access to inputs, training and extension, technology, and financial services. Harmful gender norms affected the division of labor on the farm and in the household and limited women's benefit-sharing and decision-making power over income derived from cocoa.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES AND IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

The overall goal of the project was to increase ECOM's gender responsiveness and ability to reach and empower women. By enhancing this capacity, the project hoped to provide social and economic benefits for farming families and the company, ultimately contributing to a more productive and inclusive cocoa sector in Ghana. To reach this goal, specific objectives included strengthening ECOM gender equality

and social inclusion (GESI) capacity, promoting women’s economic empowerment (WEE) in cocoa communities through increased access to resources and shifts in harmful gender norms, and promoting income diversification and economic resilience for women. The overall vision, goal, and related outcomes are articulated in Figure 1 below:

**FIGURE 1. VISION, GOAL, AND OUTCOMES**

<b>Vision</b>	A more productive and inclusive cocoa sector in Ghana		
<b>Goal</b>	Key private sector actors in the cocoa value chain in Ghana are able to reach and empower women, leading to social and economic benefits for cocoa farming families and companies		
<b>Outcomes</b>	Gender equality and women’s empowerment are integrated into private sector policies and practices in the cocoa sector in Ghana	Women in the cocoa value chain have greater access to and control of land and other productive resources and greater decision-making power in the household and communities	Women in cocoa communities in Ghana have greater economic resilience and access to alternative livelihoods, including income diversification opportunities within and outside of cocoa

The project implemented activities with ECOM Ghana staff at the management and field levels (in coordination with global staff as needed) and in 37 communities in the Assin Fosu and Asamankese districts. Project activities, centered around three areas of work, aligned with the outcomes detailed above: strengthening ECOM’s internal capacity on GESI, promoting women’s access to resources and shifting harmful gender norms, and promoting income diversification and economic resilience for women in cocoa communities.

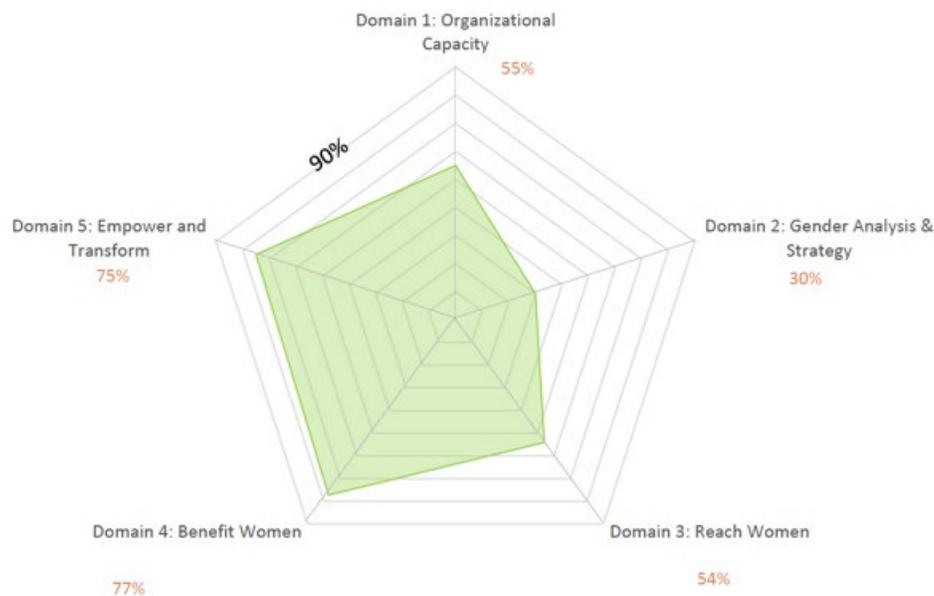
## 2.1 STRENGTHENING ECOM CAPACITY ON GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

ILRG supported ECOM to develop internal staff capacity and develop or revise policies and practices to better integrate GESI into standard business operations and farmer engagement practices. With USAID support, ECOM hired a Gender & Sustainability Specialist to lead coordination between ECOM global, in-country management, and field staff on GESI policies and oversee the implementation of GESI activities in cocoa communities. ECOM also engaged three women Field Officers based in the project districts who were responsible for delivering training and coordinating other activities with women and men farmers and local stakeholders. Three part-time women farmer promoters—women from the target communities engaged to support local outreach and training efforts—supported women Field Officers. Embedding the Gender & Sustainability Specialist and women Field Officers directly within ECOM, instead of having a separate ILRG implementation team, was intentional. This structure aimed to promote greater ownership and encourage sustainability, with the assumption that the company would take financial responsibility for the continuation of the positions after the project ended.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Other ECOM staff at the global, country management, and field levels also engaged in specific activities, which was an agreed-upon part of ECOM’s in-kind contribution to the partnership.

To better understand ECOM Ghana’s organizational weaknesses and strengths, ECOM used the [Gender Equity Index \(GEI\)](#),<sup>2</sup> a diagnostic tool developed by Equal Origins and leaders in the cocoa and coffee sectors. ECOM Ghana was one of the first companies to pilot the GEI, which is well aligned with ECOM’s global sustainability commitments to have 100 percent of its origin-sourced supply chains covered by GEI by the end of 2025. A survey that included GEI questions was sent to over 400 ECOM Ghana employees and completed by 85 (a 20 percent response rate); of these, 65 percent were men and 35 percent were women. The survey was followed by focus group discussions (FGDs) with employees across different levels and business units. ECOM Ghana had a GEI total index score of 60 percent (with 100 percent signifying strong gender equity across all areas of business operations). The GEI revealed areas of strength for ECOM Ghana’s efforts to empower women within their organization and supply chain, as well as areas that need to be prioritized for immediate and longer-term action. Scores across the five GEI domains are detailed in Figure 2 below.

**FIGURE 2. ECOM GHANA GEI RESULTS BREAKDOWN PER DOMAIN**



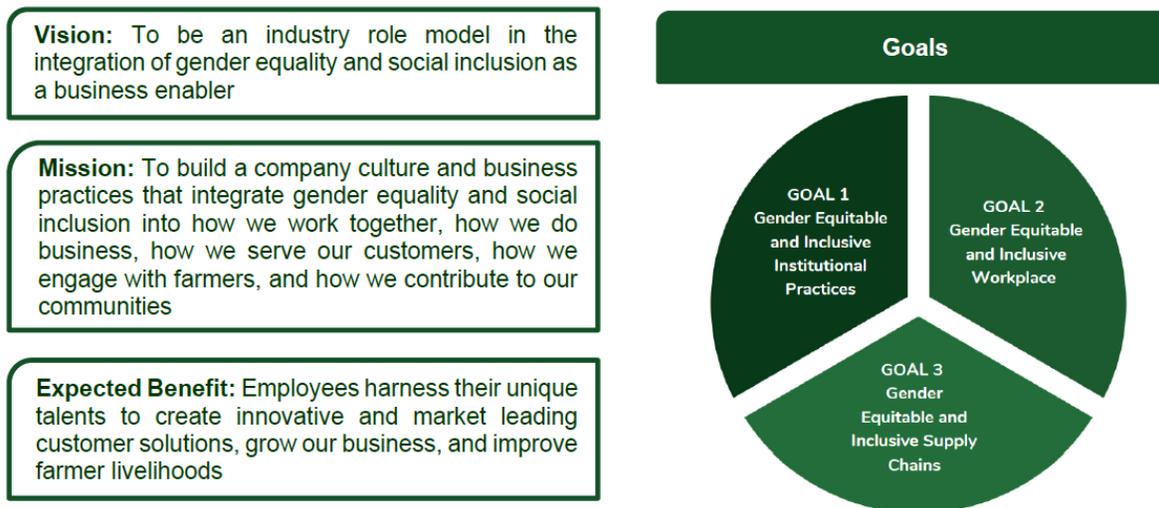
Based on these results, ILRG focused on supporting ECOM’s efforts to strengthen its organizational capacity on GESI by providing staff training and helping them develop a strong gender strategy. The ECOM Gender & Sustainability Specialist and the ILRG Gender Advisor developed comprehensive training programs tailored for management staff and field staff. Training content included key GESI topics, barriers and opportunities for women in the cocoa sector, the importance of GESI for ECOM’s business, harmful gender norms, gender-based violence (GBV), and best practices for gender-responsive and socially inclusive farmer engagement. Training included participatory exercises and handouts for future reference. In total, ECOM trained 21 management staff (14 men and seven women) and 159 field staff (114 men and 45 women), which represents ECOM’s entire field staff base. At the end of the project, ECOM was developing an online short asynchronous GESI training that will be required for all new hires and available as a refresher for existing staff.

ILRG and the ECOM Gender & Sustainability Specialist developed a draft GESI Strategy for 2022–2027. The strategy provides a direction and commitment for ECOM Ghana to ensure it is gender responsive

<sup>2</sup> Equal Origins developed the GEI self-assessment to measure organizational gender mainstreaming capacity and the current use of mainstreaming best practices. It was informed and modeled after the International Food Policy Research Institute’s (IFPRI) “reach, benefit, empower” framework.

and socially inclusive in how it operates internally and works with cocoa farmers and communities externally. It has three goals, with detailed focus areas, objectives, and actions for each (Figure 3).

**FIGURE 3. ECOM GHANA GESI STRATEGY OVERVIEW**



ECOM finalized and launched the GESI Strategy in December 2022 as part of a “GESI week,” during which messages on GESI themes and GBV were sent to all ECOM staff daily. Following the launch, ECOM carried out activities to promote the internalization and sustainability of the strategy, including meetings to socialize the strategy and GESI training refreshers. The ECOM Gender & Sustainability Specialist worked with different business units to develop a 2023 implementation plan for the strategy so that GESI considerations were integrated into all business units’ annual work plans. ECOM expects that 2024 business unit budgets, prepared in late 2023, will better integrate GESI activities. ECOM also developed standard operating procedures on gender-responsive and socially inclusive farmer engagement, covering farmer sensitization, farmer interaction, addressing practical and social barriers to participation, and gender-responsive data collection.

## 2.2 PROMOTING WOMEN’S ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND SHIFTING HARMFUL GENDER NORMS

ILRG supported ECOM to revise its Good Social Practices (GSP) gender training that the company regularly provides to farmers. The revised GSP training program integrates elements from tried-and-tested methodologies<sup>3</sup> to shift the main harmful gender norms that affect women’s land rights and their participation and benefit-sharing in the cocoa value chain. The training targets men and women from the same household (preferably couples) to promote equitable division of labor, control of resources, and decision-making, as well as discourage GBV. The training, which consists of six two-hour modules, is fully participatory and appropriate for people of any literacy level (Table 1). ECOM

### Why focus on harmful gender norms?

Gender norms are the unwritten or informal rules about what is typical or appropriate in a setting, based on biological sex and/or social perceptions of gender. Gender norms determine how people should or should not behave according to their gender and how people of different genders should interact. Not all gender norms are negative, but harmful gender norms can normalize and reinforce gender inequality and limit women’s access to resources and decision-making power.

<sup>3</sup> Including the Gender Action Learning Systems (GALS), Nurturing Connections, Empowered Entrepreneur Training, and others.

organized a three-day training of trainers on the revised GSP program for 26 field staff (nine men and 17 women) and five district stakeholders from the Department of Social Welfare and the Ministry of Agriculture (two men and three women).

**TABLE I. GOOD SOCIAL PRACTICES TRAINING OVERVIEW**

<b>Modules</b>	<b>Objectives</b>
<b>Module 1: Happy Family, Happy Cocoa Vision</b>	Support individuals and couples to develop their vision for a happier and better life and farming business
<b>Module 2: Gender and Cocoa Farming</b>	Create awareness of the difference between sex and gender and how harmful gender norms and stereotypes can negatively affect men and women
<b>Module 3: Division of Labor and Resource Control</b>	Reflect on the unequal division of labor and unequal ownership, access, and control of resources within farming households, despite women’s essential (yet often unrecognized) contributions
<b>Module 4: Decision-Making</b>	Understand inequality in decision-making within the household stemming from gendered resource control  Foster an understanding of the benefits when women are involved in household decision-making on land, farming, and income use
<b>Module 5: Power Dynamics and Gender-Based Violence</b>	Understand the different types of power and power hierarchies in the household  Create awareness around the different types of GBV and promote an understanding that violence is unacceptable and harmful to everybody in the household
<b>Module 6: Joint Vision for a Better Life</b>	Understand how gender norms can change and develop individual commitments to change  Revisit and refine joint household visions as cocoa farmers

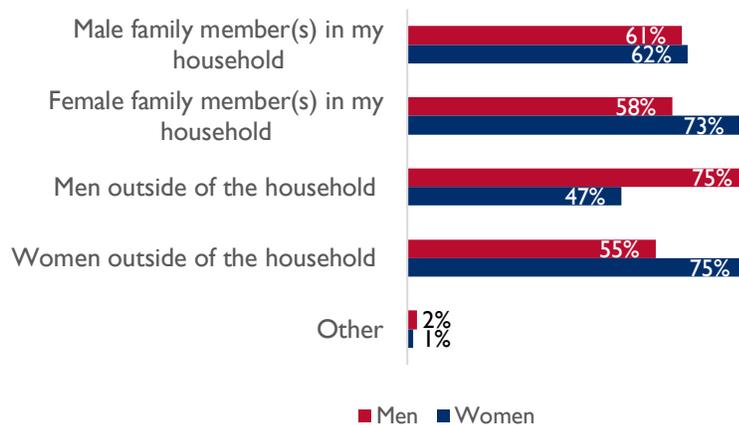
Before starting activities with farmers, ECOM held sensitization sessions in Asamankese and Assin Fosu districts to register farmers interested in participating in project activities. ECOM delivered GSP training to 2,646 farmers (1,213 men and 1,433 women) in 228 sessions in all 37 target communities. As access to and control of land is a critical issue for women, ECOM expanded the content from Module 3 on resource control and delivered training on land literacy and land rights to 1,973 farmers (847 men and 1,126 women) in 60 sessions.

ILRG supported ECOM to conduct a survey with training participants<sup>4</sup> that revealed that the most common reason for participation in ECOM training sessions was the usefulness of content for cocoa and non-cocoa activities, personal interest in gender equality content, convenient location/timing, and

<sup>4</sup> ECOM conducted a baseline survey with 490 farmers (216 men, 273 women, and one who opted not to identify gender) and an endline survey with 542 farmers (202 men, 339 women, and one who opted not to identify gender).

encouragement from ECOM field staff. Among those who participated in any training, an average of 13 percent of men and 16 percent of women reported facing challenges in attending, with much higher rates in Assin Fosu (22 percent of men and 27 percent of women) compared with Asamankese (10 percent of men and 11 percent of women). Most participants overcame these challenges with support from ECOM staff (79 percent of men and 81 percent of women) and from family members (63 percent of men and 71 percent of women). Recall of training content was very high (over 80 percent) for both men and women. Knowledge diffusion was also high, with 76 percent of men and 74 percent of women saying they shared information from training with others (Figure 4).

**FIGURE 4. SHARING OF KNOWLEDGE FROM TRAINING WITH OTHERS**



ECOM developed complementary activities to reach farmers who were unable to attend in-person training and reinforce positive shifts in gender norms in the communities. Radio stations broadcasted messages on GBV in 17 communities, reaching an estimated 2,550 people. ECOM organized a community cooking competition for men in the two districts to promote further reflections about the gender distribution of household tasks and encourage positive role modeling. A total of 202 community members including traditional, religious, and opinion leaders participated in the competition (81 in Asamankese and 121 in Assin Fosu). Community members remarked that the competition was a fun and educational way to motivate men to start sharing unpaid household tasks, like cooking, with their wives.



Participants of the cooking competition for men in Assin Fosu. ECOM

### 2.3 PROMOTING INCOME DIVERSIFICATION AND ECONOMIC RESILIENCE FOR WOMEN IN COCOA COMMUNITIES

Cocoa farming families are extremely dependent on cocoa income and often face economic hardship in the off-season. The situation is even worse for women, who have a limited say in how cocoa income is spent. Since cocoa is considered a man’s crop, men are responsible for cocoa sales; women are frequently unaware of how much was earned for that season. To support women’s economic security and income diversification opportunities, the project supported the establishment of Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs), provided training on empowerment and entrepreneurship, and supported the development of agricultural and non-agricultural alternative livelihoods.

ECOM supported the establishment of VSLAs to allow women to save and access credit to help them invest in other economic activities and increase resilience in the cocoa off-season. At first, community members were suspicious about the motives for the establishment of VSLAs due to earlier negative experiences with people forming similar saving groups and running away with money belonging to the group. However, support from ECOM provided credibility to gain people's trust, as the involvement of ECOM Field Officers reassured potential participants that the risk of misappropriation of funds was low. The initiative was highly popular: ECOM established 52 VSLAs in 36 communities with 1,283 women. In one community, men expressed that they felt excluded and asked ECOM to establish a VSLA for men, and 35 men joined.<sup>5</sup> VSLAs had an average of 23 members and elected 260 people for executive leadership positions (10 men and 250 women). The main motivations for joining a VSLA were limited or no prior access to credit (83 percent of men and 84 percent of women), access to better credit conditions (76 percent of men and 79 percent of women), and recommendation by ECOM staff (69 percent of men and 70 percent of women). The majority of women confirmed that their family members, including their husbands, supported them joining the VSLA. In total, the VSLAs have collected \$66,049.82 in savings to date (approximately \$1,270 per VSLA) and disbursed \$42,284.39 in loans for their members (\$813 per VSLA).

To support women with the financial literacy and socioemotional skills needed to manage their income and business ventures, ILRG developed a women's empowerment and entrepreneurship training consisting of six two-hour participatory modules covering the following topics:

- Self-awareness and self-confidence
- Socioemotional skills:
  - Communication skills (active listening and assertiveness)
  - Negotiation skills
  - Decision-making skills
- Financial literacy skills:
  - Financial goal setting
  - Income seasonality
  - Budgeting and record-keeping
  - Saving and borrowing

ECOM delivered women's empowerment and entrepreneurship training to 1,402 women in 37 communities. At the endline, recall of training content was very high at over 90 percent.

ECOM used the company's own funds to support women to engage in alternative crops such as chili and maize. To support non-agricultural economic activities, ECOM partnered with the Business Advisory Center (BAC)<sup>6</sup> to carry out a needs assessment to identify livelihood activities that interested women members of VSLAs and had a good market in the area. Following the assessment, ECOM and BAC delivered training to 849 women in 32 sessions, including on soap and detergent making (599 women), baking and confectionery (93 women), *garri* (cassava flour) processing (32 women), snail farming (50 women), and cosmetics production (79 women). Following training, ECOM procured starter kits with materials and equipment for women's groups to begin production of their selected product. Working in groups can increase accountability and allow women to pool resources to buy equipment and materials needed to start business ventures. To date, two groups (50 women) who were trained in snail farming received a snail pen, bowls, and snails to start production.

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<sup>5</sup> When consulted, both men and women expressed a preference for single-gender VSLAs, which reflects gendered roles, responsibilities, and norms related to use of income and access to credit.

<sup>6</sup> Business Advisory Centers are a government initiative that sits under the National Board for Small Scale Industry (NBSSI) to promote and develop the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME's) sector in Ghana.

## 3.0 KEY RESULTS

### 3.1 ECOM CAPACITY AND GESI INTEGRATION INTO BUSINESS PRACTICES

There were important positive shifts in ECOM’s capacity and institutional practices that indicate greater gender responsiveness in the short and long term. The implementation of the GESI Strategy had high buy-in at all levels of the company, likely resulting from the participatory and consultative nature of the strategy development. The management team expressed commitment to allocate human and financial resources toward the implementation of the GESI Strategy. At project closure, all departments were developing their annual budgets, and integrating financial requirements for implementation of GESI activities into budget considerations.

Pre- and post-training surveys and interviews with ECOM staff showed a marked increase in knowledge and a positive shift in attitudes and behaviors toward GESI and women’s participation in the cocoa supply chain. Overall, 95 percent of trained staff agreed they understood why GESI considerations are necessary for ECOM, and ECOM staff expressed the value and importance of the GESI Strategy as an essential part of ECOM’s core business of giving equal access and opportunities to both men and women for sustained results and impacts. Management also expressed the competitive advantage investments in gender equality bring to ECOM.

Institutional commitment from the top and improved GESI knowledge have led to increased confidence and positive shifts within the company. Indeed, several ECOM staff remarked that the project has been an eye-opener regarding the importance of GESI for the core business, and it has become second nature for all employees to be gender sensitive in their daily practices. For instance, ECOM staff mentioned that they have started to promote gender balance more intentionally during recruitment processes and business meetings and events. ECOM Ghana is consciously recruiting more women both for field and management positions. For example, the number of women internal inspectors in the Assin Fosu district has grown from two to 10 during the ILRG pilot period.

ECOM staff have also changed how they interact with farmers—particularly women farmers. This shift stems from having more women in field positions, greater GESI knowledge among all staff, and the implementation of gender-responsive farmer engagement procedures that were developed in parallel to the GESI Strategy. For example, a Field Officer in Assin Fosu acknowledged that “participation in the ILRG project has deepened the level of awareness on how to engage with women cocoa farmers on best practices for high-yield and income.” Some Field Officers expressed that before the ILRG project, they did not think about how meeting time might affect women’s participation; most meetings were held when women were cooking or engaged in household tasks. ECOM staff started to consult with women farmers before scheduling meetings, which increased women farmers’ participation in training programs and other field activities. Field staff started forming women’s groups and conducting FGDs for only women to ensure they have a safe space to share their ideas and needs.

The active involvement of women staff in farmer-facing activities has also positioned them as positive role models, encouraging girls and young women in communities to aspire to be like them. The three women Field Officers—who acted as gender leaders in the districts—rapidly became resource persons and role models in their respective communities. The Field Officer in Assin Fosu, for instance, now serves as a resource for the Government of Ghana’s Cocoa Board (COCOBOD) on gender-related issues in the district. As a result, community members now perceive ECOM as “walking the talk” in terms of giving equal opportunities to men and women.

### “I am a gender champion”

When I joined the project, I had little knowledge about gender and related concepts. I felt that certain positions like Field Officer were for men. However, the training gave me the confidence that it is possible for a woman to succeed in a male-dominated industry and that I could make an impact in the lives of the farmers, especially women. Training farmers in Good Social Practices and women’s empowerment has been the best because it has helped farmers to get to a better level in life. During one training session with farmers in Tabil, I was observed by an officer from COCOBOD, who admired the confidence and in-depth knowledge I exhibited. I was invited to facilitate a session on gender-based violence for the whole community during a meeting organized by COCOBOD. I have been able to build the capacity of the farmer promoter whom I work with, and I feel confident delegating responsibilities to her. I am proud that I have developed the skills to become a better team player and a team leader, which serves as motivation to my farmers. I appreciate USAID and ECOM for the opportunity to work on this project. With the knowledge that I have acquired I am now and always will be a gender champion.

**Milicent Boatemaa, ECOM Field Officer in Assin Fosu**



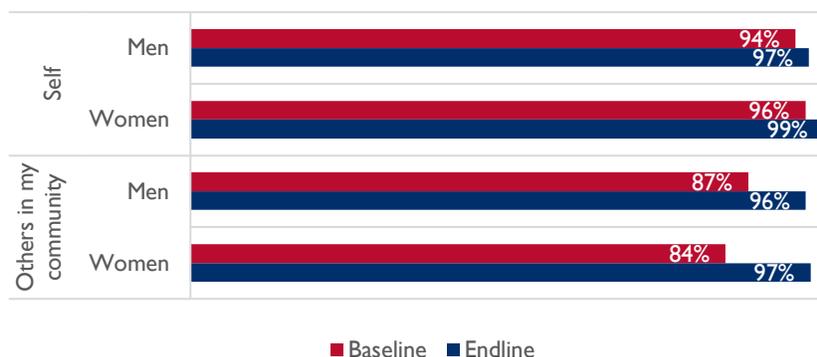
Milicent Boatemaa (left) with Evelyn Nuvor (middle, ECOM Gender & Sustainability Specialist), and Christiana Tseyo (right, farmer promoter who has been mentored by Milicent). Photo: ECOM



Milicent (standing in the green shirt) delivering training on harmful gender norms to men and women farmers in Assin Fosu. Photo: ECOM

Greater gender responsiveness has improved ECOM’s relationship with farmers. Men and women cocoa farmers report that they are comfortable working with ECOM staff of any gender because they treat men and women farmers equally and without discrimination. The share of women who feel that ECOM extension agents speak with women and men when they visit their farm increased from 61 percent at baseline to 76 percent at endline—an impressive change in less than one year. A survey with 202 men and 339 women farmers revealed that most respondents had positive views of ECOM at both baseline and endline, but there were significant increases at the endline indicating a better company image in the target areas (Figure 5).

**FIGURE 5. FARMERS WITH A POSITIVE VIEW OF ECOM**



## 3.2 WOMEN'S ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND SHIFTS IN HARMFUL GENDER NORMS

Gender norms are deeply rooted and closely connected to individual beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. As such, shifting harmful gender norms is a long-term process, and short-term projects like this are unlikely to promote in-depth changes. However, short-term interventions can be powerful to pilot approaches and rapidly assess if initial changes in beliefs, perceptions, and behaviors occurred, which can lead to shifts in gender norms over time.

ILRG assessed shifts in gender norms using proxy measures such as changes in perceptions of gender equality and women's role in cocoa that were captured through a survey with men and women farmers at baseline and endline. This data was complemented by qualitative data obtained through interviews and FGDs with men and women farmers to identify examples of initial changes in attitudes and behaviors. As expected for an 18-month project with 10 months of engagement with farmers, ILRG did not see shifts in gender norms at the macro-level. However, the qualitative data suggests that some behavior changes are occurring among couples who attended GSP training, particularly related to women's access to resources such as land, division of labor in the household, and joint decision-making. While these micro-level changes are not yet present in the broader community, they may represent the potential for larger shifts in the medium to long term with prolonged engagement.

### 3.2.1 ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OF LAND

Gender norms related to land ownership and control are deeply ingrained and complex to shift. Indeed, ILRG's assessment found little change in women's perception of land tenure security from baseline to endline. The share of women who are confident they would not lose access to land in case of spouse death remained static at 63 percent, whereas women who feel confident they would not lose access to land in case of divorce increased from 52 to 57 percent. However, ILRG and ECOM observed some initial anecdotal change in both districts that may indicate a foundation being laid for future progress. Some men have informally allocated portions of their land to their wives to farm cocoa, retaining the land in their own name. This increases women's access to land, but not their ownership or control over the land, leaving them vulnerable in case the husband changes his mind or in case of divorce or spouse death. However, there are a small number of men who have transferred ownership of one of their parcels of land to their wives or are in the process of doing so. They indicated that they made this decision after attending the GSP training, which made them realize that their wives are equal contributors to the family cocoa farming business and capable of managing the business independently. These women are very motivated to do more as farmers and are proud to hear their husbands speak highly of them.

Some women mentioned that after training they became more aware of how their land tenure situation was insecure and discussed with their husbands how it is important for them to also own land, especially in case the man is no longer able to provide. Some husbands were initially resistant to change, and men discussed their concerns, with one man in Assin Fosu saying, "I thought she wanted to override me. I thought that once women have land, they don't respect us [men]. The training changed my mind." Although this is limited anecdotal evidence of a shift, it shows that bringing men and women together to discuss harmful gender norms and land rights can lead to new behaviors that strengthen women's land rights. This is extremely important for women because land ownership is intertwined with being perceived and



Samuel Duah and Augustina Sam have been farming cocoa for 18 years. After the GSP training he decided to have one of the family's parcels of land in her name.

THAIS BESSA/ILRG

recognized as a cocoa farmer, which unlocks access to other resources like commercial contracts, training/extension services, and credit.

### 3.2.2 GENDERED DIVISION OF LABOR

Across communities, farmers shared the belief that men have more opportunities to be successful in their cocoa farming business than women, revealing an increased ability to identify and reflect on gender barriers. They acknowledged this was because of competing demands on women's time, as unpaid household tasks are mostly considered to be women's responsibility. Likewise, there is a perception that economic provision for the household is the responsibility of men. After the introduction of the GSP training, there was an emerging change in beliefs and behaviors related to the division of labor in the household, with a growing acceptance of the idea of husband and wife doing things together. The survey with men and women farmers showed that agreement that household tasks are mainly a woman's job decreased from 38 to 28 percent among men and from 41 to 33 percent among women. The rate of people saying they equally share household work and childcare with their spouse increased from 65 to 82 percent for men and from 53 to 70 percent for women.

As a result of the GSP training, many of the men farmers started to perform various household chores, proudly talking about how they now cook and take care of the children, noting this has reduced the burden on their wives, which the women confirmed. Similarly, women started to acknowledge their role in supporting the family financially to reduce the burden on men. Several families reported that a more equal distribution of both household and cocoa farming tasks was a positive change, improving harmony in the household and improving productivity. Some cocoa farming families shared that better division of labor in the past season led to increased yields, in a few cases doubling the number of cocoa bags produced compared to previous years.

Some men said they experienced negative remarks from their family members and other men in the communities for taking on additional household tasks, but they chose to ignore these as they were living happier lives at home than before. Men also remarked that their peers were beginning to admire, accept, and in some cases imitate them. Many women expressed how other community members complimented their increased efforts in cocoa farming. They note they have seen more women take an active role in farming this past season, perhaps encouraged by their example. Women claim stereotypes are shifting; there has been less name-calling toward women who perform male-dominated tasks and men who do household chores. It is important to note that these initial shifts have been observed among couples who attended GSP training but have not been widely seen in the broader community. Even among couples who have adopted new behaviors, these shifts may not represent deeper changes in gender norms around men's and women's work. Indeed, men still referred to "helping their wives" or doing "women's work" by taking on additional household responsibilities, and likewise, women said they were "supporting their husbands" with cocoa farming activities. This shows how gender norms related to women's and men's roles and responsibilities are still pervasive and will require time to shift more broadly.

"I used to allow my wife to do all the household chores, but today, I support my wife, which has brought peace and harmony in my household."

*Man farmer from Asamankese*

### “We are one now”

Emmanuel Oboery was one of the winners of the cooking competition for men organized by ECOM in Asamankese. “It is not that I didn’t know how to cook, but I had this mindset that cooking was women’s job. I can cook, but I thought she should do it. With the competition I asked myself, ‘If I can cook, why am I not doing it?’ It was a mindset shift.” Now he cooks every day and is influencing his four sons and two daughters. “When I am in the kitchen the children help and ask questions, I have more interactions with them. My sons will grow up seeing that helping the wife is good.” Emmanuel and his wife Baby Kpoamah said family life has improved after training. He is now looking for land to register in his wife’s name. Better division of labor and collaboration has helped with cocoa production as well. “Before, with only me working in the farm, I would make 2 or 3 bags per season. Now working together we can make 5 or 6 bags. Before each of us was in their own separate path, we are one now.”



Baby Kpoamah and Emmanuel Oboery at their house in the Asamankese district. Photo: Thais Bessa/ILRG

### 3.2.3 HOUSEHOLD DECISION-MAKING

Traditionally, men are considered heads of households and sole decision-makers in target communities. Men are responsible for decisions on buying or selling land, what should be cultivated, and how household income should be used. Men sell cocoa to companies like ECOM and frequently keep information on how much their wives earned. A survey asked farmers how much say they have in various household decisions: on land acquisition/disposition, land use, cocoa sale, and use of income. There was relatively little movement between the baseline and endline. Scores differed by district, though; there was relatively strong growth in decision-making power among women in Assin Fosu and a slight loss in decision-making power among women in Asamankese. Qualitative data did not provide any insights into these district level differences.

Qualitative data from interviews and FGDs with farmers in both districts did, however, reveal emerging shifts in decision-making power in households as a consequence of attending GSP training. A key message from the GSP training was that the whole household benefits when there is greater equality and collaboration between husbands and wives, including in decision-making and management of household income. One tool used to advance this message was the visioning exercise, adapted from the GALS approach, which allowed men and women to devise individual and joint goals and outline the steps needed to achieve them. Post training, men and women reported that men had started to engage their wives in joint decisions. Indeed, the majority of men and women surveyed at the endline reported that they make joint decisions with their spouses about household income and expenditures (93 percent of men, 79 percent of women), crop production (95 percent of men, 80 percent of women), and land (96 percent of men, 81 percent of women). Couples started to be more transparent



Couple working on their joint vision during a GSP training session. THAIS BESSA/ILRG

with each other regarding income earned, and some started to pool their incomes together—which is uncommon in target communities in Ghana. Many farmers expressed how this shift toward joint decision-making has been beneficial, bringing more peace and harmony to the family and allowing them to better navigate economic hardship during the cocoa off-season.

“I thought cocoa farming was for only men but now I have different thoughts. I thought it was only the responsibility for men to provide for the house, but I think differently now.”

*Man farmer in Assin Fosu*

In addition to a greater say in household decision-making, the project has increased women’s financial literacy through participation in VSLAs and support for alternative livelihoods. According to participants, this has contributed to women feeling more confident about their input in decisions and men showing increased trust in women’s judgment. Survey results showed that the share of women who feel recognized as equal contributors to household income increased from 69 percent at baseline to 88 percent at endline.

As with incipient shifts in other gender norms, this change toward more balanced decision-making is still limited to families who attended GSP training. Although their example can be a powerful role model for others in the wider community, achieving critical mass for a sustained change will take time and continued support. Considering the persistence of unequal gender power dynamics, it is important to assess whether couples pooling their financial resources together can have unintended outcomes for women in the long term, potentially leading them to lose full control over their own earnings and widening the financial gap between men and women in rural communities.

### 3.2.4 RECOGNITION OF WOMEN AS COCOA FARMERS

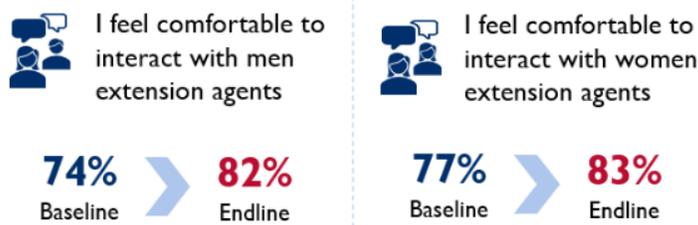
Before the project, women often did not view themselves as cocoa farmers and were not recognized as cocoa farmers in their households and communities. In less than one year between baseline and endline, there have been changes in the perception that women can actively engage in all stages of the cocoa value chain and lead cocoa farms, with large shifts among men and smaller shifts among women (Figure 6). However, views that activities like pruning, spraying, and harvesting are not appropriate for women persist.

**FIGURE 6. PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN’S ABILITIES IN COCOA FARMING**



With this recognition and a more gender equitable division of labor in the household, women’s confidence and social mobility also increased. Women’s increased confidence was demonstrated by greater comfort in interacting with Extension Agents/Field Officers of both genders (Figure 7). At baseline, 70 percent of women said they could attend training and farmers’ meetings without seeking permission from anyone, and this increased to 90 percent at the endline. The share of women who said household and childcare responsibilities did not prevent them from attending training increased from 74 to 90 percent.

**FIGURE 7. WOMEN'S CONFIDENCE IN INTERACTING WITH EXTENSION AGENTS**



There is increasing acceptance that women can be equally successful in cocoa farming with the necessary resources and technical knowledge. ECOM provides Good Agronomic Practices (GAP) training for cocoa farmers to learn the necessary knowledge and skills to improve their cocoa farming. Women initially expressed that they did not find the GAP training relevant for them because of their perceived inactive role in cocoa farming. Due to shifting perceptions about women’s role in cocoa farming, ECOM has reported that more husbands and wives have started to attend GAP training sessions together.

“ECOM officers are always proactive, and their confidence alone has really energized me that as a woman farmer I have to build my confidence in whatever I do.”  
*Woman farmer in Asamankese*

### 3.2.5 GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The initial gender assessment found that GBV was prevalent in the target areas, especially in the form of physical violence and socio-economic violence in the household. Because GSP training promotes more collaboration and less conflict within households, several farmers reported that GBV has decreased in the communities. The survey showed that the share of people agreeing that there are some instances where husbands are justified to use violence against their wives decreased from 16 to 5 percent for men from baseline to endline, and from 17 to 7 percent for women from baseline to endline. In interviews and FGDs, both men and women frequently recalled the GSP module on the four types of power and GBV, and they expressed a high level of consciousness about the negative consequences of GBV for families and communities at large. Several participants mentioned how they changed their approach to conflict resolution, now opting for dialogue, but remarked that this understanding is not widespread in their communities and GBV persists in some households. The respondents’ understanding of GBV was more focused on physical violence compared to other forms of violence such as socio-economic, psychological, verbal, and sexual. However, the results above suggest that initial changes in behaviors, such as some men registering land in their wives’ names and men sharing decisions with their wives, can have an impact on reducing economic GBV.

The emerging changes in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors detailed above are promising, but it is important to note that they are still at the individual level and not yet at the collective level—i.e., not yet shifts in prevailing gender norms. Given the short-term nature of the project, with less than a year of training and activities at the community level, ILRG did not expect to observe changes in gender norms at the macro level. However, changes in individual behaviors related to gendered access to resources, division of labor, and decision-making can be a significant first step to catalyze shifts in the harmful norms that limit women’s participation and benefit sharing in the cocoa sector.

Some project participants observed positive outcomes and behavioral shifts, but these changes have not necessarily spilled over into the broader community. Although some non-participating community members may observe positive role modeling among ILRG participants, a broader change in behaviors and accepted gender norms will take time. Continued GSP training and social and behavior change communication (SBCC) strategies such as the radio messages on GBV developed by ECOM can help sustain shifts in harmful gender norms and promote women’s access to resources throughout

communities. As seen in the above data, training has the potential to reach more than just attendees, with strong rates of knowledge dissemination, and role modeling can be a powerful tool for diffusion and the creation of a critical mass for sustained change.

### 3.3 WOMEN'S ECONOMIC SECURITY AND ACCESS TO ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOODS

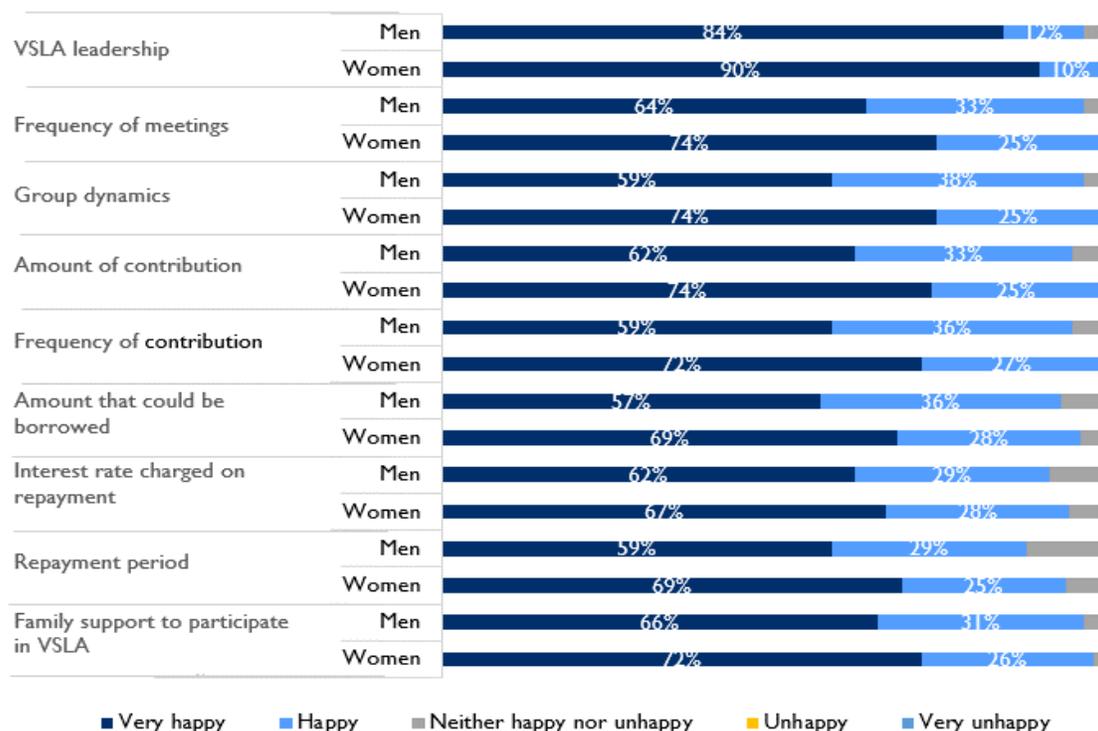
#### 3.3.1 VSLAS AS A PATHWAY FOR ECONOMIC SECURITY



Women cocoa farmers who are members of a VSLA in Takorase, Asamankese district. THAIS BESSA/ILRG

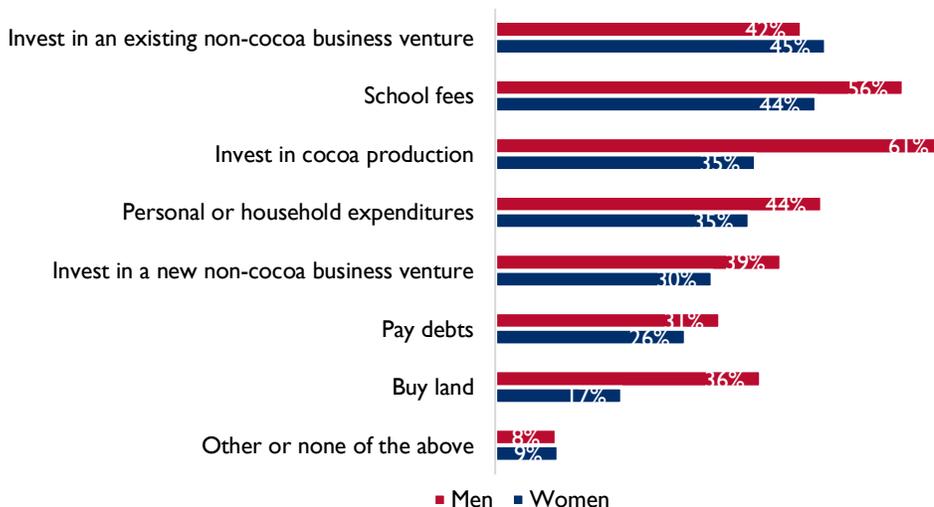
The VSLAs were highly successful in all communities, demonstrated by the willingness of community members to continue the initiative after IIRG ended and by their interest in establishing new VSLAs. ECOM staff highlighted the VSLAs as one of the most successful aspects of the project. By the end of IIRG, 25 out of 52 VSLAs had completed their first cycle of savings-loans-repayment, and 16 had started another cycle (the remaining nine expressed plans to start a new cycle soon and continue operations). Although 31 women dropped out of the VSLAs at the end of the cycle, 116 new members signed up to form six new groups in five communities. Overall, participant experience with the VSLA was positive across all elements (Figure 8), and 94 percent of women and 98 percent of men said they are likely to continue to participate in a VSLA in the future.

**FIGURE 8. SATISFACTION WITH VSLAS**



The VSLAs have become well established in all project communities with functional leadership in place. VSLA members borrowed funds for a variety of purposes, with gender variation (Figure 9). The use of funds for regular household expenditures and to pay for school fees and debts was common for men and women, but men were more likely to use funds to buy land and invest in cocoa businesses, whereas women were more likely to invest in non-cocoa businesses. About half of the participants (50 percent of men and 49 percent of women) said they had no difficulty repaying their loans in time. About 5 percent of women and 2 percent of men had some difficulty repaying the loan and paid it late, and one percent of women said they experienced lots of difficulty repaying their loan.

**FIGURE 9. USE OF VSLA FUNDS**



Women shared that they and their families previously struggled to save money, but thanks to the VSLAs and the financial literacy training provided by the project, they are now able to save, and their financial situation has improved. During interviews and FGDs, women demonstrated excellent recall of the financial literacy and empowerment training, expressing how it was life changing to learn to set financial goals and save to achieve them. This allows women and their families to plan for and better endure the cocoa off-season to support their household needs. Several women spoke about being able to afford fees and expenses related to their children’s education, including secondary or even university-level education.

“At first, I misused my earnings but due to the training and the VSLA I can now save and use my earnings wisely.”  
*Woman farmer from Asamankese*



Members of a VSLA in Boadua, who received training in soap and detergent making. ECOM

Women also used VSLA funds to invest in income-generating activities, further solidifying their economic security throughout the year. The men—VSLA participants or spouses of participating women—also spoke highly of the VSLAs and their willingness to recommend and encourage other women to participate. Both men and women were optimistic about the success of VSLAs, seeing the VSLAs as a source of funds for family needs with the potential to reduce the financial burden on men and facilitate economic prosperity.

### 3.3.2 LIVELIHOODS DIVERSIFICATION

ECOM has demonstrated a deep commitment to supporting women’s access to alternative economic opportunities. The company used its own financial resources to acquire a five-acre parcel of land in the Assin Fosu district for women interested in crop cultivation to set up a block/collective farm, providing chili seedlings with the company’s funds. Over the course of the project, ECOM trained 109 women in maize and chili cultivation (29 on maize and 80 on chili) and cultivated 35.81 acres (on their own plots in addition to the five-acre collective farm). Women reported that cultivating additional crops increased their income-earning prospects throughout the year, which is particularly beneficial during the cocoa off-season.

For non-agricultural opportunities, women expressed great appreciation for the participatory nature of the needs assessment led by BAC to assess viable alternative livelihoods. They enjoyed the freedom to decide which economic activity to participate in, which increased their commitment to training and the effort put into future enterprises. ECOM selected 849 women from 35 VSLAs to be trained on the selected livelihood activities and distributed starter kits and/or seed funding to women’s groups. Supporting economic enterprises through groups rather than individuals was intentional to leverage collective agency, encourage women to pool resources together for larger investments, and ensure that seed funds were used for their intended purpose.

This activity was completed at the end of the project, so deeper monitoring of initial results was limited. However, women emphasized their confidence that these new ventures would improve their economic situation in the near future and beyond and that their families would have more resources to invest in cocoa farming. Participants reported that, in the past, they struggled to set goals for themselves and their businesses, but participating in VSLAs and empowerment and financial literacy training equipped them with the knowledge and skills to manage their finances for their businesses to be profitable.

### 3.4 SUSTAINABILITY AND SCALABILITY

The partnership with USAID under ILRG aimed to de-risk a pilot women’s empowerment initiative for ECOM, allowing the company to strengthen its internal capacity and use project results to make internal decisions about whether there was a business case to sustain activities. As detailed above, the project



ECOM Ghana leadership during a management-level training. The “walk of life” exercise allows participants to discuss how gender and social identities impact access to opportunities. THAIS BESSA/ ILRG

resulted in shifts in perceptions and behaviors among ECOM staff that are starting to translate into changes in business practices and increased buy-in for sustainable GESI responsiveness. Staff at all levels agreed that GESI and WEE activities are important for ECOM’s business. Potential benefits from this work include increased cocoa productivity, maintenance of cocoa volume purchased by ECOM, improved company perception among cocoa farmers leading to less conflict and more loyalty, and a competitive advantage for ECOM vis-à-vis chocolate brands as ECOM positions itself as a GESI leader.

ECOM Ghana has demonstrated a strong commitment toward continuing and institutionalization of the activities piloted under USAID ILRG. By the end of the project, all departments and business units in ECOM Ghana were developing their annual budgets and financial requirements for implementation of GESI activities that were being integrated into the ongoing budget preparations. A member of the ECOM leadership team shared that there are ongoing conversations with international partners for funding opportunities to

continue the implementation of the GESI activities. All ECOM Field Officers expressed great confidence in their abilities to continue implementing activities to empower women farmers after the ILRG project ends. Field officers expressed a strong belief that the role of the Gender & Sustainability Specialist was critical to sustaining gains, which was shared by all management-level respondents. Discussions with country management revealed that ECOM Ghana is retaining all GESI staff recruited as part of the project, including the Gender & Sustainability Specialist and three women Field Officers, representing a huge commitment and indication of the value the company now places on GESI.

To enhance the current GESI investments that ECOM is making, the Gender & Sustainability Specialist noted the need for a future designated department or unit to coordinate the implementation of the GESI Strategy, conduct periodic capacity strengthening for staff, and provide continued technical guidance for several internal and farmer-facing activities.

Responses were mixed about which of the project activities were most effective and impactful, with ECOM staff agreeing that all activities were impactful, and none were “nice to have” (non-essential)—even those that go beyond ECOM’s perceived traditional mandate. According to staff, a clear GESI commitment from the top and GESI training allowed and will continue to allow them to integrate GESI into their work routines and engage with women in the supply chain. Staff highlighted the VSLAs as transformational because they improved the saving culture in cocoa communities and served as a platform for GSP and women’s empowerment training, which positively affects ECOM’s image in the communities. According to a field staff member in Asamankese, “After the first share-out of VSLAs, the number of ECOM farmers increased in project communities. About six communities have been enlisted to be part of ECOM certification through the success of VSLAs.” At the end of the 2022/2023 season, 144 new women were registered as ECOM farmers in the two districts.

Maintaining internal capacity is a pathway for sustainability, leveraging the initial staff training and GESI Strategy. ECOM has made commitments to retain GESI staff in the near term and integrate GESI needs into annual planning and budgeting. In terms of continuing farmer-facing activities, such as GSP training and women’s livelihoods diversification (through VSLAs and training), ECOM can also build upon the resources developed under ILRG, such as training manuals and in-house training expertise. As another commitment to sustainability, ECOM is making the updated GSP training and WEE training modules available to all Ghana Field Officers (beyond the two pilot districts) and including these materials in annual field officer training plans from 2024 onward. The retention of the three women Field Officers will allow for the continuation of GSP training in 29 new communities in Asamankese and Assin Fosu districts. As a start, by the end of 2023, ECOM aims to roll out the revised GSP training in 10 new communities, reaching approximately 500 farmers. For the long-term continuation of GESI activities in cocoa farming communities, ECOM can explore new partnerships with international organizations and chocolate brands. To support these efforts, ILRG mapped the GESI priorities of the main chocolate brands and linked them to ECOM’s own global sustainability priorities and the Ghana pilot experience. Many of ECOM’s Ghana-based, regional, and global leadership staff highlighted the relevance of ILRG’s GESI work and the need to replicate it in other ECOM origins. To support this scaling-up effort, ILRG produced a roadmap or replication guide for ECOM, offering step-by-step direction for the design, implementation, and monitoring phases of internal and farmer-facing GESI activities.

“Any projects with the potential to ensure rural prosperity is beneficial to ECOM’s engagement with chocolate brands.”

*Business Head, Cocoa and Sustainable Management Services*

## 4.0 CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

### 4.1 ECOM BUY-IN AND OWNERSHIP

The project was co-designed by ILRG and ECOM, which led to greater ECOM ownership and leadership from the start. According to ECOM staff, a mandate from the top signaled that the company was serious about GESI, leading to commitment and accountability at all levels. After getting top-down buy-in and before starting activities at the field level, there were meetings with all regional managers to discuss key performance indicators (KPIs). Then there were meetings with district managers to introduce the project, and then with field officers and farmers. Everyone within the company felt involved from day one in the design, budgeting, and implementation timeline and can confidently talk about this project. Embedding GESI staff within the company instead of having a separate team working alongside company staff was also important for ownership and seamless integration during and after the project ended. This can serve as a positive example for USAID in future private sector engagement initiatives. The participatory nature of developing the GESI Strategy was also successful; as one management staff put it, “From involvement comes commitment, and from commitment comes a willingness to see it succeed.”

A key challenge for the future is ECOM’s ability to sustain current commitments and fully implement the GESI Strategy across all business units within the company. This will depend on continued buy-in from the company’s leadership and will require ECOM to take ownership without outside funding. There is potential for ECOM to market itself as a GESI leader to major chocolate brands and international funders to obtain additional funding for the continuation of GESI activities. However, it is more likely that such external support will focus on farmer-facing activities, and ECOM will need to assign its own funds for internal work, including GESI staff retention and continued capacity-strengthening efforts. Better socialization of the GESI Strategy and other GESI-responsive policies and documents is needed. For instance, although the development of the GESI Strategy was highly participatory, many staff members said they had not made time to review the final version, and some said they did not remember even receiving it. Although ECOM started collecting gender-disaggregated data for sustainability reports, it indicated that its farmer register uses a universal template developed by the Rainforest Alliance that provides room for only one owner per farm to be added, which disadvantages women.

### 4.2 TRAINING DELIVERY AND SUSTAINED GENDER NORMS CHANGE

ECOM appreciated the revision of the GSP training and training-of-trainers materials, with one management staff saying, “The review of the manual really helped. Now we know how to go about providing good gender training for farmers.” However, some of the staff responsible for delivering training said they had to create their own drawings on flipcharts for sessions, which they found challenging. They mentioned that adequate visuals like posters and handouts would be helpful. A key lesson from training delivery was the need to consult women and men farmers when choosing the time and venue for training. Greater consultation improved commitment and punctuality, and the participatory approach made the training lively. ECOM staff noted that training both husbands and wives promoted peer/family learning and increased uptake of knowledge and practices.

The length of the project and delays in implementation constrained a deeper assessment of the lasting impacts of activities within ECOM and communities. As previously mentioned, most behavioral changes were limited to those participating in project training, and sustained shifts in harmful gender norms will take time to be established in the entire community. In particular, women’s access to and control of land remains low compared to men, and only a small portion of men have given access and transferred ownership of land to their wives. GESI sensitization in some of the Muslim-dominated communities received less uptake than in Christian regions due to stronger gender norms around women’s and men’s

roles and responsibilities. Both women and men in the Muslim-dominated communities did not find some of the key training messages around equitable division of labor, resource control, and decision-making compelling. These communities required additional and repeated sensitization efforts from field staff and would benefit from a longer intervention.

### **4.3 FINANCIAL LITERACY AND ACCESS TO FINANCE**

ECOM planned to support digitization of the VSLAs by establishing partnerships with digital financial services to provide a mobile application-based platform to track group deposits, withdrawals, and repayments. However, there were implementation challenges due to women's low digital literacy and poor connectivity in the project areas. While the VLSA app worked offline, it required a network connection for data to sync to the server. The women reported that, although the app interface was user-friendly, they were not used to using touchscreen phones. ECOM staff had to provide continuous support and supervision for at least one month before the groups were able to use the app on their own to log group activities and transactions. Despite the provision of financial literacy training, women's low numeracy skills were a continued challenge. Monitoring and auditing of groups' books revealed inconsistencies in records, requiring Field Officers to check books for mistakes. Late implementation of the alternative livelihood training limited the team's ability to assess outcomes from this activity. ECOM staff reported that, even with VLSA savings, many women lack sufficient seed capital to start businesses, which can demotivate women to pursue enterprises in the area they have received training.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Harnessing private sector influence in the cocoa sector is a strategic approach to bring awareness to GESI issues and empower women in cocoa communities. A more productive and inclusive cocoa sector could benefit not only the communities involved in cocoa production but also the companies along the supply chain. At the global level, ECOM has recently finalized a set of sustainability commitments that includes GESI goals. The company's global sustainability team has worked with regional and country offices to operationalize these commitments. The partnership with USAID has capitalized on this commitment and coordinated with ECOM's global, regional, and local teams in Ghana to develop a country strategy that integrates GESI principles into policies and practices for improved internal capacity and engagement with cocoa farmers. The goal was to invest in "quick wins" that have high scaling potential by building upon and adapting existing ECOM policies and training approaches, as well as de-risking GESI and women's empowerment solutions for ECOM by funding their initial deployment for eventual uptake directly by the company.

ECOM Ghana has made significant efforts to strengthen its internal GESI capacity through a consolidated GESI Strategy, a core GESI team, and strong GESI training for all staff at management and field levels. It also adapted the content and delivery methods of training for cocoa farmers, delivering highly effective trainings on harmful gender norms for men and women farmers. The company also invested in women's economic security in cocoa communities, supporting women with the means and skills to form VSLAs and start new agricultural and non-agricultural business ventures. However, sustaining these initial results will require continued commitment in terms of buy-in and human and financial resources.

### **5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS ON INTERNAL COMPANY CAPACITY**

- Develop a medium- and long-term vision for GESI goals, aligned with global sustainability commitments and GESI priorities of leading chocolate brands, allocating the necessary human and financial resources, and defining roles and responsibilities to sustain and scale GESI efforts.

- Improve internal and external communication to socialize GESI goals and key documents with all staff and business units and with potential external partners.
- Promote and support women taking up farmer-facing and management roles, including by setting minimum quotas for women for different positions. Revise job descriptions and recruitment processes to reach more women candidates.
- Make GESI goals explicit in job descriptions and KPIs, evaluating the performance of management and field staff based on appropriate GESI criteria such as developing GESI-responsive budgets and gender-balanced recruitment and engaging with women farmers.
- Continue to strengthen ECOM's staff capacity on GESI and women's empowerment, integrating GESI training (including GBV) into basic annual training for new and existing staff members at all levels. Consider both synchronous, in-person training and self-guided, asynchronous options.
- Provide tailored support for women Field Officers, assessing the main challenges they face and developing appropriate solutions.

## **5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS ON FARMER ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES**

- Revise potentially exclusionary criteria for farmers to join the supply chain, such as land ownership. Revise farmer registration forms and templates to include space for more than one farmer per farm to be added.
- Consider mobile money options to pay farmers for purchased cocoa at the end of the season, as this can promote greater transparency within cocoa farming households and increase women's say in how cocoa income is used.
- Establish incentives and recognition for purchase clerks to work with women farmers.
- Roll out the revised GSP training manual across the target districts, other districts in Ghana, and other ECOM origins in West Africa, providing adequate training for field staff and adapting the material to different contexts.
- Using own funds or funding from partnerships, support the establishment of VSLAs, consulting communities about whether they prefer mixed or single-gender groups. Provide initial support for VSLAs to function appropriately and training on socioemotional skills, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy.
- Using own funds or funding from partnerships, support livelihoods diversification in cocoa communities, especially for women. As cocoa is seasonal and families often struggle economically in the off-season, alternative sources of income will increase economic stability in the communities, reduce conflict, and allow farmers to further invest in their cocoa businesses.
- Improve data collection and analysis systems to capture women's participation in ECOM's supply chain and the impact of GESI activities. Use data collected to track the impact on business outcomes and to inform adaptive management.

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