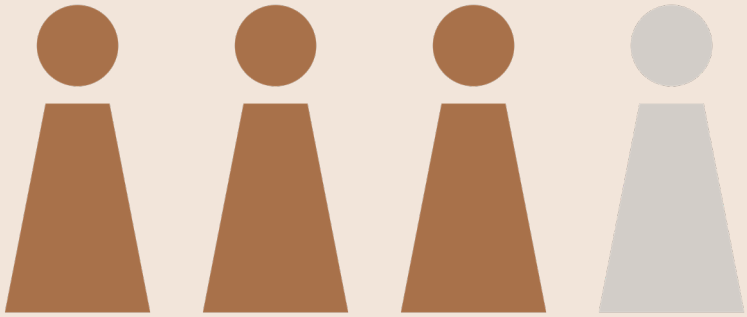
Swiss Sustainable Coffee Platform

Swiss Platform for Sustainable Cocoa

ISSUE BRIEF

Advancing Gender Equality

in Cocoa and Coffee Growing Communities



Key messages

- Gender inequality is a human rights issue and poses a serious risk to living income and child labour goals: women do much of the work in cocoa and coffee but earn significantly less and have less decision-making power over land, income and other household-related decisions.
- Most programmes increase women's access to resources, but few change the rules and norms that drive gender inequality. Those that strengthen women's agency tend to deliver better outcomes.
- Every Platform member can start contributing to gender equality today, conducting gender analyses and gathering disaggregated data. Lasting change requires multi-year, collective action with women as co-designers of programmes and initiatives.

October 2026

Introduction

Why gender equality matters in cocoa and coffee

Gender inequality is one of the most persistent and consequential structural challenges facing cocoa and coffee supply chains, and it is deeply intertwined with smallholder poverty. Women carry a disproportionate share of agricultural labour at origin but consistently receive less income and exercise less control over assets and decisions than their male counterparts.

These disparities stem from social and cultural norms, land tenure systems and cooperative governance structures reproduced across generations, and can be reinforced, often unintentionally, by programme design choices. The problem lies not with the women but with the system that they are living and working within, and women can thus be important drivers of change.

These inequalities do not operate in isolation. Gender intersects with ethnicity, socio-economic class, age, disability, migration status, sexual orientation, and other dimensions of identity in ways that compound disadvantage for specific groups of women and girls.

An adolescent girl from a low-income household, a woman with a disability, or a female farmer from a marginalised ethnic community does not experience gender inequality in the same way or to the same degree as others. Recognising this intersectionality, that is, the overlapping and mutually reinforcing nature of different forms of discrimination, is essential for designing programmes that reach those most affected, rather than those most easily reached (29).

Gender equality is a fundamental human right under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which companies are expected to respect under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and it is also a matter of regulatory exposure.
The EU's Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD), as narrowed by the 2026 Omnibus I Directive, applies from July 2029 to the largest companies, whose due diligence extends to their cocoa and coffee suppliers. Gender-based discrimination, income inequality, gender-based violence and exclusion from cooperatives fall within these frameworks, which require companies to identify, prevent, mitigate and remedy them.

For members, gender equality is also a shared commitment: the SWISSCO Roadmap 2030 adopts a gender-transformative approach and the SSCP Roadmap 2030 recognises women and migrant workers as particularly vulnerable.

Addressing gender inequality also pays off. When women manage cash crop plots with the same inputs and resources as men, they are equally productive (7), and the FAO has estimated that equal access to land, technology, financial services, education, and markets could raise yields on women-managed farms by 20-30% (8).

Conversely, living income programmes that do not account for gender dynamics systematically underperform, and can cause unintended harm to women and girls by increasing their unpaid workload without commensurate benefit (27).

The same applies to child labour. New research from the KIT Institute (2025) finds that income increases alone do not automatically reduce child labour, and in some cases can even increase it, because gender dynamics shape how additional work is distributed within households: labour demands can shift onto women and children, especially girls (30). This nexus between gender inequality, living income, and child labour is directly relevant to members' human rights due diligence (HRDD).

This brief is intended for Platform members and their partners, and focuses on smallholder households, hired, seasonal and migrant women workers that face distinct risks that deserve dedicated attention.

Chapter 2

Current Situation

2.1 Women's contributions: indispensable yet invisible

Women account for approximately 38% of the agricultural labour force globally (28) but in cocoa and coffee supply chains their contribution is even more pronounced and consistently undervalued.

They account for approximately 70% of manual labour on coffee farms globally, performing tasks from seedling care and harvesting to fermentation and drying (1).

In cocoa, the picture is similar: women participate in nearly every step of production, including planting, harvesting, sorting, fermentation, and drying, and contribute an estimated 30-60% of the labour required for cocoa cultivation (2).

Despite this, cocoa is largely considered a man's crop, and women's roles remain unrecognised, undervalued, and frequently unpaid.

In male-dominated value chains, women often provide "hidden" labour - unpaid work as family workers whose contributions are not captured in farm records or statistics. Preparatory work traditionally performed by women, such as cooking for hired labour or mixing pesticides, goes underreported because it is not remunerated. Paradoxically, as value chains become more commercially structured, women's control over activities and income can decrease even as overall value increases.

This invisibility extends into sustainability interventions themselves. Women routinely contribute labour to meeting sustainability programme criteria, climate adaptation, and circular economy initiatives, such as plot maintenance, seedling care, or post-harvest handling, without these contributions being formally recognised or remunerated.

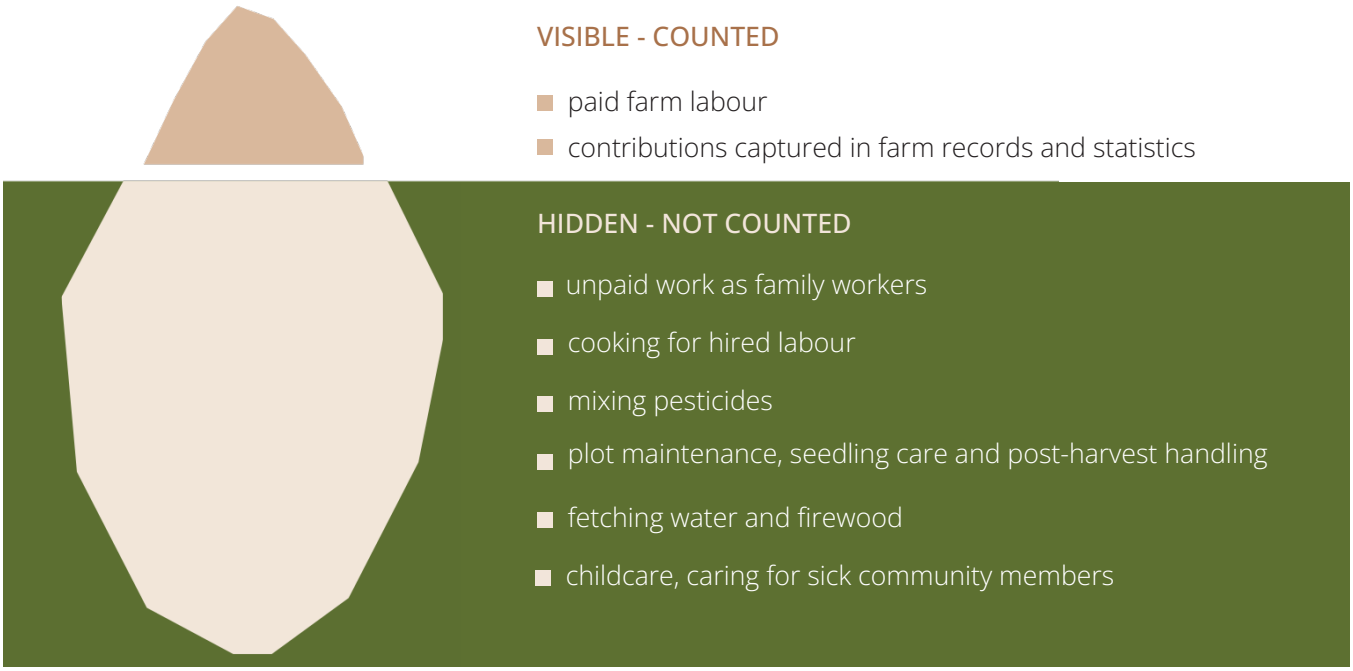
The nature of gendered task segregation matters too. In Ghana's cocoa communities, activities classified as female (e.g. fetching water for pesticide application and mixing pesticides) are performed manually, are often physically exhausting and carry direct health implications.

Activities classified as male (e.g. spraying, transportation) are more often mechanised, although spraying carries its own health risks (33).

Where women's labour is not recognised, men dominate decisions, women's demand for labour-saving technology can stay low despite heavy workloads (34). Programme interventions that target technology adoption should therefore account for this dynamic explicitly, or risk widening rather than closing the gender gap.

Figure 1

Women's contributions: what gets counted and what doesn't



2.2 Key barriers

2.2.1 Land rights and access to productive resources

Because women typically do not own or lease land independently, they are often not recognised as farmers or "household heads", particularly by supply chain actors and public authorities.

In Ghana, the world's second-largest cocoa-producing country, most land is owned by men under customary inheritance systems. As tree crop farming has expanded, women's rights to use land have been progressively curtailed, with inheritance customs continuing to favour male heirs (22).
Women's labour often establishes new cocoa farms in the expectation of land entitlements, which depend on intra-household negotiation (35).

Field data from Ghana's cocoa communities illustrate the consequences: in a CGIAR study of the Ashanti and Western Regions, men owned an average of 5.83 acres versus women's 4.17 acres.

In one community, women averaged 3.2 acres and committed virtually all of it to cocoa, while men averaged 15.5 acres and retained substantial surplus for food crops and fallow. Women with no surplus land cannot diversify into food production, leaving them doubly exposed when cocoa yields decline under cli-

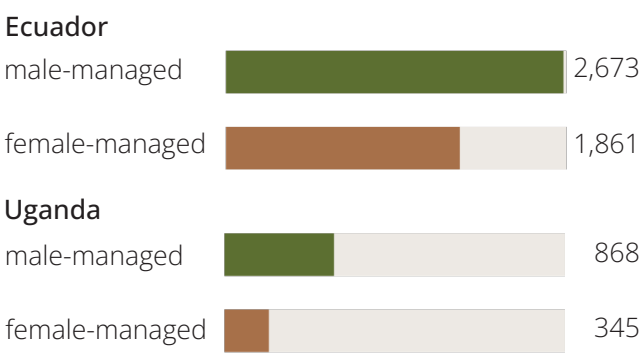
mate stress — with neither income buffer nor crop diversity to absorb the shock (33).

Research drawing on sex-disaggregated survey data from cocoa-producing communities in Ecuador and Uganda that supply the Swiss market found that female-managed farms earned far less from cocoa: on average USD 1,861 versus 2,673 a year in Ecuador and USD 345 versus USD 868 in Uganda.

In Uganda the gap was largely explained by smaller cocoa areas and fewer workers; in Ecuador it persisted even after such controls. Both supply chains were certified or part of company sustainability programmes (4).

Figure 2

Annual cocoa income, female- vs male-managed farms (USD)



2.2.2 Income gaps and loss of revenue control

Even where women perform the labour, they frequently do not control the income. In coffee-growing Ethiopia, women carry out approximately 75% of the work in the value chain but earn only 43% of the income generated (5).

In cocoa, the evidence is thinner and not directly comparable, but gaps are similarly marked: assessments in Ghana found that female cocoa farmers earn 25-30% less than their male counterparts, while in Ivory Coast, women in cocoa communities earn up to 70% less than men (6).

2.2.3 Unpaid care work and time poverty

The double burden of productive farm labour and unpaid domestic responsibilities, often called social reproductive work, is a critical, but chronically underestimated, structural barrier.

Women's disproportionate share of unpaid care work, such as childcare, cooking, fetching water and firewood, or caring for sick members of the community, directly constrains women's ability to participate in training and cooperative governance. Agricultural extension trainings are frequently scheduled without accounting for women's dual workload, mobility or literacy, systematically reproducing their exclusion.

This invisibility is reproduced in the data that supply chain actors rely on. Living income surveys are typically conducted at the household level, and time-use data are rarely collected, so women's unpaid labour contributions is structurally absent from the income assessments that inform programme design.

Without such data, it is impossible to detect whether an intervention increases women's workload without increasing their income or agency.

Research from KIT Institute across the cocoa, coffee and cashew sectors in Sub-Saharan Africa found that child labour often substitutes for adult labour, particularly in households where women face time poverty.

Girls disproportionately absorb domestic and caregiving tasks that are invisible to supply chain monitoring, carrying what UNICEF calls a "triple burden" of school, chores and economic work. Where programmes increase women's agricultural workload without reducing their domestic burden, that burden shifts to daughters (30).

INFOBOX

Time Poverty in Focus: The Women School of Leadership (WSOL)

Women in cocoa-growing communities carry a disproportionate burden of domestic and agricultural responsibilities, leaving little time for participation in training or cooperative governance.

The Sankofa Project's Women School of Leadership in Ghana directly acknowledges this reality. Rather than expecting women to adapt to conventional training formats, the Women School was structured around existing daily routines, using a "3-3-3 rhythm" (three workshops, three modules, three days) spread over a longer period.

This flexible approach allowed women to build skills in areas such as leadership, financial literacy, and strategic negotiation without these clashing with their existing commitments (3).

As a gender-accommodative measure, it widens access but does not itself reduce women's workload.

2.2.4 Exclusion from registration, services and decision-making

Exclusion often begins with registration: where cooperatives or national authorities register only landowners or household heads as farmers, women become invisible to the services, premiums, and governance that follow.

Research from cocoa communities in Ghana found that extension services predominantly reach men with larger farms, while women and youth receive fewer services - an outcome attributed to their weaker resource base and to programme designs that assume a male household head as the default farmer.

The trickle-down assumption (that training a man will automatically benefit his female partner) has been repeatedly shown to be false (11).

Women are also systematically under-represented in the leadership of community groups, cooperatives and producer organisations (13).

A meta-analysis of 24 projects funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) found that those strengthening women's decision-making over income and resources were significantly more effective: the number of people with appreciable gains rose by approximately 5 % for income, 9% for dietary diversity, and 19% for resilience, compared to projects that did not address women's agency (28).

~ + 5%	~ + 9%	~ + 19%
increase in income	increased dietary diversity	increase in resilience

Increase in the number of people with appreciable gains vs. projects not addressing women's agency; meta-analysis of 24 IFAD projects (28).

2.2.5 Adolescent girls and intergenerational inequality

Gender inequalities extend beyond adult women. Adolescent girls in cocoa- and coffee-growing families face unequal access to education, heavy domestic responsibilities, risk of early marriage and pregnancy, and a shortage of female role models.

Girls who leave school become more exposed to hazardous work, trafficking and sexual exploitation, adverse child rights impacts that HRDD should address.
These dynamics produce cycles of disadvantage that are transmitted across generations, making early intervention in gender norms essential for supply chain sustainability.

Income instability and household economic shocks are among the primary drivers of child labour, used by families to cover basic consumption needs when incomes are volatile or insufficient.

Programmes that raise average household income without building economic resilience through measures such as insurance, income diversification or savings mechanisms, will not sustainably reduce child labour or intergenerational inequality.

2.2.6. Gender-based violence and harassment

Gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) ia both a cause and a consequence of inequality, and a salient human rights risk. Where women depend on male gatekeepers, such as husbands, buyers, field staff or labour contractors, for land, inputs, payments or work, this creates opportunities for coercion and sexual exploitation, particularly for seasonal and migrant workers. GBVH also restricts women's participation, and shifting household roles can provoke violent backlash (see section 3.4).

What Works

Evidence on Gender-Transformative Approaches

3.1 From mainstreaming to transformation: defining the approach

A four-stage framework, building on established gender markers and applied for example by Oxfam's Business Advisory Service in its Gender Transformative Tracker for the International Coffee Organization (44), offers a practical map of where any given programme sits on this spectrum.

It distinguishes between:

- gender-blind or gender-harmful (no action to identify or address gender-specific needs, with a risk of reinforcing inequality or causing unintended harm);
- gender-aware (acknowledges differences but takes only limited action on specific needs);
- gender-sensitive or gender-responsive (acknowledges inequalities and responds to the specific practical needs of women and men);
- and gender-transformative (seeks to examine, challenge, and transform the underlying causes of gender inequality, including discriminatory norms and unequal power relations).

Most company programmes in cocoa and coffee currently sit at the gender-aware or early gender-responsive stage, and progress is rarely linear.

"Gender-accommodative" approaches, which are by far the most common in cocoa and coffee programmes, aim to work around existing barriers, typically by targeting women with specific training and resources, without challenging the underlying norms that produce inequality in the first place.

While such interventions can be useful entry points, the evidence increasingly shows they are insufficient on their own.

Gender-Transformative Approaches (GTAs) represent a more ambitious and durable framework. GTAs shift the burden of achieving equality away from women alone, engaging men and communities as active participants in change.

They target the structural barriers and constraining norms, such as the unwritten rules about who does and controls what work, assets, and decisions, and seek change not only at the individual level but in laws, institutions, and organisational culture (9).

Because such change is slow and costly, it needs coalitions with governments, NGOs and donors.

A study in Burundi comparing a GTA with a conventional gender mainstreaming approach found that the GTA resulted in higher adoption rates of improved agricultural technologies, higher production, and greater improvements in dietary diversity for women.

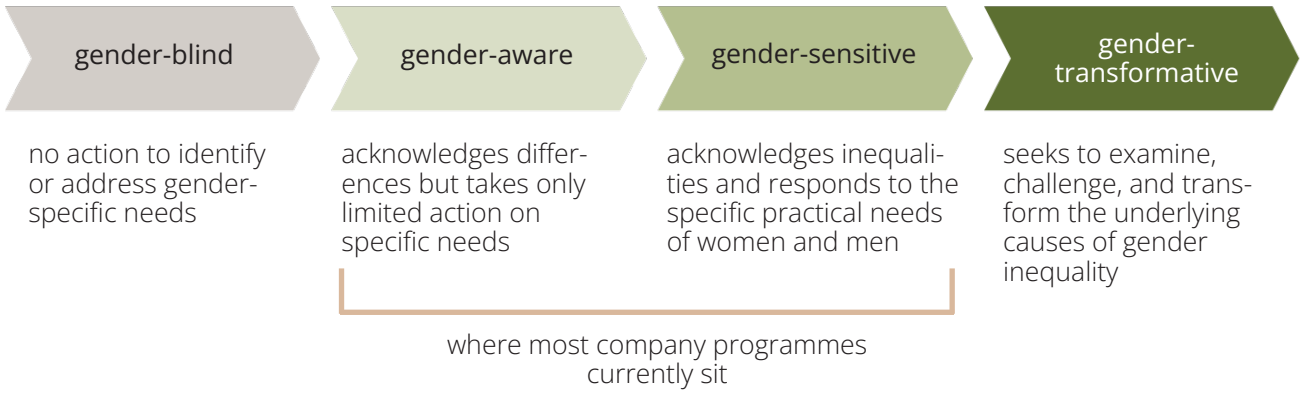
Women in the GTA group saw an 84% increase in empowerment indicators, compared to a 31% increase in the conventional group (10). These gains required institutional and structural change, so gender-transformative work must engage cooperatives, companies, and governments and not just farmers at the field level.

Voluntary standards also address gender: Fairtrade standards prohibit discrimination and abusive behaviour, Fairtrade runs the Women's School of Leadership (40), and since 2021 the organic Principe of Fairness has included gender equality (41).

These are valuable starting points, but certification alone does not ensure gender equality.

Figure 3

From gender-blind to gender-transformative



3.2 The Gender at Work Framework

A complementary analytical tool for diagnosing where gender inequality comes from and where interventions should be targeted is the Gender at Work Framework, developed by Aruna Rao and David Kelleher.

The framework maps gender equality across two dimensions: individual versus systemic change, and informal/invisible versus formal/visible. This produces four quadrants that are directly applicable to cocoa and coffee supply chains. Change in one quadrant rarely lasts without change in the others.

Figure 4

The Gender at Work Framework



Mapping the programmes in this brief (Table 1) shows that most interventions cluster in the individual-formal quadrant; some also build skills and consciousness (e.g. GALS, WSOL, Nespresso's female agronomists), and some recommendations address formal rules on land and cooperatives.

Almost entirely absent is sustained engagement with informal norms: only GALS and, in its strategic intent, the Mars/KIT Resilience Journey explicitly target this quadrant.

This reflects a structural tendency in supply chain gender work to treat access to resources as a sufficient condition for equality, when it is at best a necessary one. Reserved seats without shifts in who is seen as a credible leader produce inclusion without voice.

Addressing the informal norms that determine how formal rules are interpreted and resources are distributed, requires sustained, multi-year engagement with men, communities, and institutions, and funding that values depth of change over numbers reached.

INFOBOX

The Gender Action Learning System (GALS)

GALS is not a single blueprint methodology, but a philosophy of change grounded in principles of gender justice, inclusion, and mutual respect. It grew out of livelihoods and poverty reduction work by Linda Mayoux from 2002 onwards, developed under Oxfam Novib's WEMAN programme since 2008, and has since been applied in more than 26 countries and 50 projects (16).

Unlike conventional gender training, GALS engages men and women together from the outset, starting from participants' own life visions rather than externally imposed frameworks. Its visual tools, such as the Vision Journey and the Gender Balance Tree, make the often invisible division of labour and income within a household visible, creating a shared basis for negotiation between spouses. Implementation follows three phases over two to three years, anchored in community "champions" who adapt the tools locally and scale change through pyramid peer training. In the coffee sector, evidence from Uganda is among the most compelling.

A Farm Africa project combining GALS with Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) found that women's decision-making power over agricultural production rose from 22% to 92% by project end, as measured using the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (14). In cocoa, KOLTIVA's implementation through the TRANSFORM programme in Aceh, Indonesia, reached 107 producers across 21 villages by mid-2025, with 73% of participating households reporting joint decision-making (15).

Table 1

Gender at Work mapping of programmes described in this brief

Programme	Individual Resources / Conditions	Individual Consciousness / Capability	Formal Rules / Policies	Informal Norms / Deep Structures
Nespresso AAA (Chapter 3.3)	Inputs, premium access, income	Female agronomists, leadership training, safe spaces	Cooperative leadership roles	Husbands encouraged to support wives, but not primary focus
Mars / KIT Resilience Journey (Chapter 3.3)	Women Grow Together jobs programme	In-depth gender dynamics mapping, co-created strategies	Supplier-level gender strategies	Strategy explicitly aims to address root causes and norms
GALS (Chapter 3.3)	None	Vision Journey, Gender Balance Tree, household dialogue	None	Core methodology targets household and community norms
WSOL / Sankofa Project (Chapter 2.2.3)	Financial literacy as enabler	Leadership, negotiation skills	None	Flexible format acknowledges norm constraints but doesn't directly challenge them
VSLAs (Chapter 4.2.1)	Savings, credit, financial independence	Financial literacy training	None	Men not systematically engaged; household approaches can be layered on
Solidaridad / Pathways to Prosperity (Chapter 4.2.2)	Paid employment, equipment, income	Technical skills training	Licensed Buying Company subsidy structure	Challenges male-dominated task norms, but not a norm-change programme
Etico Nicaragua (Chapter 4.5.3)	Pricing recognition of unpaid labour	None	Contract-level reform	None
Viwala ILF Facility (Chapter 4.7)	Capital access, lower interest rates	Gender training for ventures	HR policies, governance targets	Targets internal company culture but not community norms

3.3 Case Evidence

Results in these cases depend on context, commitment and duration, so transferability will vary.

Case 1 — Nespresso AAA Sustainability Quality Programme (Ethiopia and others)

The Nespresso AAA programme, developed from 2017 and assessed by FAO, IFPRI, ITC, and IDH, is one of the most documented gender-transformative initiatives in the coffee sector.

In Ethiopia, it included the recruitment of female agronomists, gender-sensitisation training, women's leadership modules, household nutrition training, and safe spaces sessions for both men and women, with sessions scheduled around women's availability, and women encouraged to become farmer trainers and cooperative leaders.

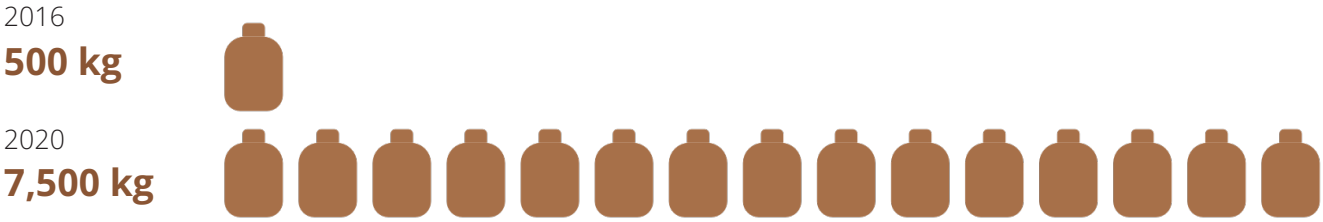
Women's participation in the programme rose from 1% to over 30%, and 40% of field agronomists are now women, which is well above the 15% global average for the sector.

Female agronomists proved to be a key structural lever: they directly improve the quality and reach of training women receive, shifting their status from invisible labourers to recognised producers.

The experience of farmer Tigist Wube, whose coffee harvest grew from 500 kg in 2016 to 7,500 kg in 2020, shows what targeted training can do (5).

Figure 5

One farmer's coffee harvest: Tigist Wube, Ethiopia



Case 2 — Mars/KIT: Resilience Journey (Ivory Coast, Ghana, Indonesia)

From 2019 through 2022, Mars worked with the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) to map gender dynamics in cocoa-growing communities across three sourcing origins and develop a comprehensive gender strategy.

The work concluded that a gender-transformative approach addressing root causes of inequalities and centring farming communities is necessary for lasting change.

At their research farm in Ecuador, Mars ran the "Women Grow Together" programme in partnership with local NGO Acción Solidaria, supporting over 80 women through capacity-building programmes to increase access to jobs in the cocoa sector.

The key lesson: gender strategies must engage brands, suppliers, and internal company teams and not only field communities (12).

3.4 Limitations of Gender-Transformative Approaches and conditions for success

GTAs can target rules and laws as well as households and many limitations stem from household-only applications.

First, approaches that focus primarily on intra-household negotiation - including GALS - can be insufficient, or even counterproductive, in contexts where power imbalances are severe or where gender-based violence is present.

They can be adapted, but only with deep local understanding and buy-in from community leaders.

Second, any methodology that shifts household norms around labour, income, and decision-making carries a risk of backlash. Women who challenge entrenched expectations may face denial of resources, restricted movement, or violence.

Programmes must include safeguarding protocols and referral pathways, and be designed to monitor for unintended harm, not just positive outcomes.

Third, household change does not by itself remove structural constraints such as land titling, cooperative governance rules, pricing structures, and market access, so GTAs must be combined with the structural measures described in section 4.5.

Corporate co-optation is a documented risk: deployed as efficiency tools, GALS and similar methodologies can instrumentalise gender justice, and CSR framed around women's productive value rather than their rights can reinforce stereotypes (20).

Finally, the evidence base itself has weaknesses. Rigorous independent evaluations remain scarce relative to self-reported results, and GALS' pyramid peer training tends to dilute quality with each tier.

Transformative norm change is long-term and non-linear: short project cycles of two to three years are rarely sufficient, and programmes need adaptive learning built in. GTAs therefore work best when they combine household, community and institutional change, are resourced over several years and are underpinned by safeguarding.

Chapter 4

Recommendations

Practical Measures for Cocoa and Coffee Supply Chain Actors

The following recommendations are not a compliance checklist. They are intended to support members in moving from awareness to action, and from isolated initiatives to structural change.

They follow the HRDD cycle: 4.1 identifies and monitors risks, 4.2-4.5 prevent and mitigate them, and 4.6 covers safeguarding and remedy.

Figure 6

How the recommendations follow the HRDD cycle

Identify & monitor	Prevent & mitigate	Safeguard & remedy
4.1 Gender analysis and disaggregated data	4.2 Women's economic agency 4.3 Training, extension and programme design 4.4 Engaging men, boys and communities 4.5 Land, cooperatives and decision-making	4.6 Embed gender across your organisation

4.1 Starting point: Gender analysis and disaggregated data

Understanding the gender situation in your specific supply chains is the prerequisite for everything that follows. Without this baseline, programmes risk being gender-blind by design.

- Conduct a gender analysis of your supply chain before designing or revising programmes. This analysis should cover the division of labour, women's own priorities barriers, prevailing norms and GBVH risks, who controls land and membership, and your organisation's own internal GESI capacity.
  Relevant tools include the Nespresso/TechnoServe AAA Gender Analysis Tool, the IFC/World Bank Gender in Agribusiness Toolkit, Oxfam's Gender in Value Chains framework, Save the Children's Gender and Power (GAP) analysis, and SDC's gender policy marker (42).
  The Gender at Work Framework can help identify which quadrants are most constraining in a given sourcing context.
- Equal Origins' Gender Equity Index (GEI) offers a free, sector-specific entry point for producer organisations and service providers. It maps gender awareness across an organisation's functions, and its report forms the basis of a targeted Gender Equity Development Plan and a baseline for monitoring.
- Register women farmers individually wherever national rules and cooperative by-laws allow. Where they do not, record women's co-farming roles in traceability and programme data and raise the rules with cooperatives and authorities. Registration should reflect women's actual roles, which vary by context.
- Disaggregate monitoring and evaluation data by sex and age from the outset, and where feasible by disability, covering farm size, yields, income, workload, training participation, cooperative membership, premiums and leadership roles. The ETI Gender Data Initiative provides a practical, tiered framework of indicators that companies can progressively adopt (24).
- Protect the women behind the data: individual income data can expose women to coercion or backlash, so define who owns and accesses the data and pays for it.
- Integrate gender-specific KPIs and commitments into annual reporting frameworks, keeping the burden on producer organisations proportionate.

4.2 Make women's economic agency a structural priority

4.2.1 Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs)

VSLAs are among the best-evidenced tools for strengthening women's economic agency in cocoa and coffee communities.

CARE's evidence across VSLA programmes globally shows that members' incomes grow by an average 275% within five years, members are 50–60% less likely to face food shortages and are up to 85% more likely to have savings available during emergencies (17).

In cocoa specifically, women have a higher propensity to participate in VSLA programmes than men, and income controlled by women is more likely to be invested in household nutrition, education, and health (18).

KIT Institute's review rates savings groups as strong for building economic resilience and moderate for shifting social norms but limited for household income unless combined with income-generating support and market links.

It recommends linking VSLAs with child labour sensitisation, household approaches and Child Labour Monitoring and Remediation Systems (CLMRS) where they exist (30).

- Support the establishment of VSLAs in sourcing communities, with women as the majority of members, linked to financial literacy training, and, where appropriate, household methodologies such as GALS; and recognise that women are not homogenous group.
- Review loan eligibility criteria in cooperative credit schemes and remove collateral requirements that effectively exclude women, such as land titles in the borrower's own name, replacing them with peer-group guarantee models.

Figure 7

Savings groups: what they deliver



4.2.2 Agroforestry and income diversification

Agroforestry and income diversification can be powerful pathways for women's economic agency, but these interventions are not gender neutral and are often designed without women's input.

Without explicit design, women may lose access to the small plots they manage for food crops or side income. Because agroforestry decisions are long-term, programmes should involve the whole household rather than bypass either partner.

- Ensure women have direct, individual access to seedlings, inputs, water for nurseries and technical support within agroforestry schemes, rather than access mediated through a male household member.
- Where legally and socially feasible, support women to secure tree tenure, the right to plant, own, and benefit from trees, which is distinct from land tenure in many contexts but difficult for many farmers regardless of gender.
- Design income diversification for land-constrained women: intercropping food crops within existing plots, communal plot or negotiated planting rights; land-independent activities such as small livestock; and women-led processing, such as cassava into attiéké or drying mango, pineapple and cashew in Ivory Coast.
- Build women into service delivery, not just as beneficiaries. Solidaridad's 2025 Pathways to Prosperity project in Ghana trained 200 cooperative members, of which 110 were women, as professional service providers for farm management tasks such as pruning and spraying with Licensed Buying Companies subsidising services through a per-bag premium (19).
  Such models should start from services women want to offer, such as grafting or post-harvest handling, and meet sustainability and safety criteria.

4.2.3 Well-being and individual agency

Trauma from violence, widowhood or abandonment can undermine women's confidence and investment decisions.

A Swisscontact project in Santander, Colombia, combining psychological support with technical and financial training for 25 women coffee producers and their families saw farm income rise by approximately 10% within 24 months (43).

- Consider integrating psychosocial support into economic empowerment programmes.

4.3 Redesign training, extension and programme design to reach women

Agricultural training and extension services are among the primary mechanisms through which gender inequality is reproduced in supply chain management, not merely reflected.

An Ethiopian extension policy framework aligned with the Ethiopian Coffee and Tea Authority's gender strategy shows how time poverty, mobility and norms can be addressed (36).

- Design training with women, not only for them: consult them on timing, location and duration, and co-design content, which may need to go beyond agronomy. Sessions at peak childcare hours or requiring travel exclude women.
- Recruit and deploy female agronomists and field officers. Women are significantly more likely to attend and engage with training delivered by women, and female field staff can access spaces and times unavailable to male colleagues (5). Where the pool of qualified women is small, invest in building it.
- Consider childcare provision and compensation for caregiving costs as components of extension programmes. This is rarely implemented but consistently cited by women as a key participation barrier.
- Invest in format and language accessibility as deliberately as in content: material in local languages, shared through radio, farmer-based organisations and community durbars, reaches women, youth and people with disabilities excluded by formal channels, and a bottom-up trainer-of-trainers model can lower costs and build community ownership.
- Reduce time poverty at source by co-investing in labour-saving technologies women want and in community infrastructure such as water access.

4.4 Engage men, boys and communities in shifting norms

Norm change cannot be achieved by training women alone. It requires engaging men, boys, community leaders and institutions, with safeguarding in place.

- Use household approaches such as GALS or couples' dialogues and train husbands and wives together where possible.
- Work with men and boys on positive masculinities through male champions and men-only reflection spaces.
- Support community-wide dialogue and commitments, such as Village Social Contracts, and behaviour change communication through radio, drama and respected local voices.

4.5 Address structural barriers: land, cooperative membership and decision-making

4.5.1 Land rights

Often women have legal rights to access lands but de facto this does not translate into higher rates of female land ownership due to customary and cultural practices and norms. Access is mediated by customary authorities and family heads, whose interests need to be understood.

- Decouple programme eligibility from land ownership: where certification or national rules require a registered farm, register women as co-farmers or programme participants.
- Engage with land rights organisations to raise awareness of existing legal protections and advocate through platform-level engagement for joint titling, inheritance reform and tree tenure recognition, prioritising landless and the most marginalised women.

4.5.2 Cooperative membership and governance

Cooperatives' membership criteria have historically excluded women because they are linked to land ownership. This is a direct lever for change that sourcing companies can use through their supplier relationships (21). Many of the most marginalised women, such as day labourers and migrant workers, cannot become cooperative members at all.

- Work with supplying cooperatives to review and reform membership criteria that implicitly or explicitly exclude women.
- Reserved seats and minimum quotas in cooperative governance bodies are a necessary but insufficient measure. Without accompanying norm change and capacity-building, women are structurally present but substantively marginalised (section 3.2). Support cooperatives with both structural reform and confidence building, and with changing attitudes towards women leaders.
- Ensure that premium payments and financial flows from sourcing relationships are traceable to individual women, not only to cooperatives where women may be invisible minority members. Test direct payment mechanisms.
- Support women's own organisations as partners, not programme outputs: map existing groups first, fund them directly where possible, and give them seats in programme and grievance governance.
- Extend supplier codes of conduct and HRDD to labour contractors, so that women day labourers and migrant workers are covered.

4.5.3 Recognise unpaid work in cost-of-production and pricing

Where women's unpaid labour is not acounted for in production cost models, pricing structures systematically undervalue the true cost of production and render women's economic contributions invisible at the commercial level.

Pricing it in is ambitious and uncommon even in Europe, but every member can take a first step by counting unpaid family labour in cost-of-production and living income assessments.

INFOBOX

Case Study from Nicaragua

~ 22%

of total labour input was women's unpaid indirect labour

In Nicaragua, the ethical trading company Etico collaborated with the Juan Francisco Paz Silva Cooperative and cosmetics retailer The Body Shop to incorporate women's unpaid labour, such as cooking for field workers and domestic work, into the purchase price for sesame oil, after finding that this indirect labour accounted for roughly 22 % of total labour input.

The model has since been extended to coffee cooperatives in Nicaragua, which direct the additional funds toward community activities benefiting women (27). It is a rare model worth examining for cocoa and coffee procurement.

4.6 Embed gender across your organisation

Gender-transformative supply chain change cannot be outsourced to field programmes. It requires organisations to examine their own practices as well: who they hire, how they structure supplier relationships, what data they collect, and how they exercise influence with partners and governments. It also requires leadership accountability at senior management and board level.

- Conduct an internal Gender Equality and Social Inclusion audit of your organisation's policies, practices, and supplier relationships. Key questions: Does our supplier onboarding inadvertently exclude women? Do our training delivery models reach women? Do our premium payments flow to women? Do we have female field staff?
- Equal Origins' GEI (see section 4.1) also works within companies, helping sustainability and procurement teams assess whether their own practices and service delivery to farmers reproduce the exclusions they seek to address at origin.
- For individual programmes, strategies or proposals, the ICO Gender Transformative Tracker (44) offers a publicly available 16-question self-assessment that places an activity on the four-stage framework described in section 3.1 and suggests concrete actions to strengthen it. Although developed for coffee, most of its questions are not crop-specific. It works best as a team exercise at the design stage, repeated during implementation.
- Develop or revise an organisational gender strategy with specific, time-bound commitments, assigned responsibilities, and a dedicated budget. Strategies without resources and accountability structures do not produce change.
- Integrate safeguarding and Gender-based violence and harassment analysis into HRDD: assess Gender-based violence and harassment risks in programme design, adopt codes of conduct, train staff, set up referral pathways to support services and monitor for unintended harm.
- Make complaint channels work for women and lead to real remedies: not dependent on literacy or a male intermediary, accessible at times that suit women, with trained female staff and links to local support services.
- Consider engagement with sector-level gender initiatives such as the Women in Cocoa and Chocolate (WINCC) network, which strengthens gender equity in cocoa sector governance, including by mentoring women professionals (32
- Train internal staff, such as agronomists, field officers, procurement managers, and programme designers, in gender sensitivity and Gender Equality and Social Inclusion analysis.

4.7 Buying practices and innovative finance as levers for gender inclusion

Low, volatile prices and rising compliance costs, rarely matched by higher prices, squeeze producer budgets, and women often bear a disproportionate burden. Buying practices and finance are therefore central levers. Impact-Linked Finance (ILF) ties the terms of a loan or investment, such as the interest rate, to verified achievement of gender inclusion targets.

A documented example from the Swiss development cooperation context is the Viwala Gender Inclusion ILF Facility, designed by LeFil Consulting with SDC funding. It provided blended loans to impact ventures, with interest rates reducible to 0% upon verified achievement of gender targets, plus technical assistance and first-loss guarantees for ventures lacking collateral.

Three of six participating ventures fully met their gender targets, and every USD 1 of SDC funding generated USD 1.14 in additional financing as a direct result of the ventures' gender-focused efforts (31).

For cocoa and coffee supply chain actors, this principle can move into mainstream procurement, provided it adds reward rather than burden.

- Reward progress with gender-linked premiums or investment on top of existing prices, rather than adding gender KPIs as a condition of doing business.
- Keep reporting proportionate and co-finance its cost.
- Offer multi-year purchasing commitments, which help households absorb the risks of long-term changes such as agroforestry.
- Pilot blended finance facilities with gender KPIs in origin countries, for example through SWISSCO and SSCP public-private partnerships.

Chapter 5

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