

## Paving the way towards greater gender equality in the Adum oil palm landscape in Ghana's Western Region

Gender differences in Ghana's oil palm sector are influenced by numerous factors and anchored within entrenched cultural and social norms. In the Mpohor District of Ghana's Western Region, the P4F-supported Adum Smallholder Oil Palm Project has adopted a gendered approach in order to respond to some of these existing differences and inequalities.

In the project, which seeks to improve livelihoods and empower communities whilst securing a sustainable, deforestation free palm oil supply for the Benso Oil Palm Plantation (BOPP), BOPP and project partners have been implementing targeted measures to advance gender inclusion and gender-sensitive capacity building and benefit-sharing amongst target communities. These activities fall in three main categories: (1) promoting greater female representation and participation in community decision-making bodies; (2) targeting female entrepreneurs in the provision of alternative livelihoods; and (3) including specific gender criteria and targets for allocation of palm oil smallholder plantations.

Early results from these activities indicate that the three-pronged approach is not only proving successful in providing greater opportunities for women in the communities, but also for raising their status and empowering them to have greater leadership in community decision making, which can in turn provide an important channel through which measures to ensure greater gender equality can be championed and supported.



Processing the palm fruit and kernel is a role typically taken on by women in Ghana's oil palm sector.

## Gender dynamics in Ghana's oil palm sector

It is widely acknowledged that women and men have distinct perspectives, roles, responsibilities, and knowledge in managing natural resources and the same holds true in Ghana's oil palm sector.

In terms of the division of labour in the oil palm value chain, men are mainly involved in the cultivation and maintenance of the oil palm, the production of alcohol and basket weaving, whereas women are predominantly involved in weed clearing, picking loose palm fruits, and processing the palm fruit and kernel. It is the roles occupied by men that generate higher financial returns and women's participation in productive activities is limited by time-poverty resulting from time spent on care and reproductive work.

There also exists gendered access and control over resources and benefits derived from the management and use of these resources. Relative to women, men have greater access and control over productive resources and high value assets such as land, labour and equipment, which in turn affords them access to finance from banks and other lending agencies. This access to finance allows them to improve their farms and invest in higher yielding planting materials or other income generating activities – thereby putting men ahead of women economically.

With regards to decision-making, ultimate household decisions – notably on household spending – tend to lie with men. Decisions at the community-level in Ghana are mostly made by traditional male decision-structures such as chiefs and elders, although Queen Mothers may at times be consulted<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, in light of women's reproductive workload, they usually do not have the time to attend decision making meetings, further hindering their participation in such processes.

Gender differences in Ghana's oil palm sector have been found to be influenced by numerous factors – notably economic factors, entrenched gender roles, socio-cultural norms, and stereotypes. Such gender dynamics were similarly observed as part of a 'Gender and Social Inclusion Analysis of Customary Practices in Ghana's Oil Palm Producing Areas' (Appiah, 2018) which was commissioned by P4F in 2018 and which included field work in the Mophor District where the Adum project operates.

<sup>1</sup> Queen Mothers are traditional female leaders, drawn from the relevant royal lineages, who are mostly responsible for women's and children's issues.

## Advancing gender equality as part of the Adum Bansa smallholder project

Given this context, there is a clear need to ensure that interventions seeking to improve livelihoods and empower communities in Ghana's oil palm sector are conscious of and responsive to local gender dynamics if they are to deliver equitable benefits to men and women.

Since July 2018, P4F has been supporting Benso Oil Palm Plantation (BOPP), an oil palm company with majority shareholding by Wilmar International, and the Proforest Initiative Africa to pilot a community oil palm smallholder scheme with three communities in the Western Region of Ghana – Adum Trebuom, Adum Dominase and Apeasem. This pilot scheme is a core element of BOPP's wider strategy to shore-up their sustainable oil palm supply and eliminate deforestation from their supply chain, contributing to the protection of the Nueng South Forest Reserve and improving livelihoods and socioeconomic development within the landscape.

From the outset of the project, partners have been implementing targeted measures to advance gender inclusion and gender-sensitive capacity building and benefit-sharing amongst target communities. With the project now in its pilot implementation phase, these efforts have begun to yield some early contributions towards greater gender equality across three core components of the Adum project: community resource management within the project landscape, additional livelihoods and sustainable smallholder oil palm plantation development.

### Adum Net Positive Carbon and Sustainable Oil Palm Pilot

The 'Adum Net Positive Carbon and Sustainable Oil Palm Pilot' project aims to transform the oil palm sector by implementing a commercially viable, socially and environmentally sustainable model for oil palm in the Adum (Mpohor district) landscape that is based on RSPO principles and standards. The project has established a functional Community Forest Protection Committee and Forest Landscape Governance Board for forest protection and is also providing conditional incentives and additional livelihood options for communities that are tied to binding production-protection agreements.



## Formation of a gender-sensitive Community Forest Protection Committee

A 14-member central Community Forest Protection Committee (CFPC) has been set up with representation from the three beneficiary communities with the mandate to oversee the communities' role in preventing unsustainable activities – notably illegal logging and mining – and managing identified HCV areas.

While community-level decision-making committees existed before the intervention, the project partners found these to be heavily male-dominated, which in turn had ripple effects with regards to the limited participation and inclusion of women in decision-making. Initial community entry engagements and meetings led by the partners were almost always only attended by men, with women often insisting that their participation was unnecessary as their husbands would feedback any information. As Helena Tetteh of Proforest explains, in the few instances when women were part of the meetings, they did not speak up - even when they had concerns and challenges that could have significant bearings on the project's delivery and success. Initially, the partners therefore had to take the women aside for separate discussions before they would express their views and concerns freely.

Project partners have therefore been actively sensitising community members on gender issues, and alongside targeted sessions on gender, are integrating a gender perspective into training sessions, field demonstrations and materials disseminated within beneficiary communities.

In constituting an overarching CFPC, partners made conscious efforts to promote the representation and active participation of women on this decision-making structure and

### Examples of gender roles

WOMEN/GIRLS	MEN/BOYS	WHAT BOTH CAN DO
Girls stay at home	Boys go to school	Both boys and girls can go to school
Women care for children	Men discipline children	Men and women can both care for and also discipline children
Women cook at home	Men cook in restaurants	Men and women can cook at home and in restaurants
Women do household chores	Men do household maintenance	Men and women can do the chores and maintenance/repairs
Women are secretaries in offices	Men are bosses in the offices	Men and women can be secretaries and bosses
Women do not own land or houses	Men own land and houses	Men and women can own land and houses

#### They are presented as:

- Natural (Nature's law)
- Inevitable (Boys will be boys)
- Universal (Everyone is like this)
- Timeless (Always been this way)

**But in reality, they are not!**

**Fig. 1:** Extracts from materials used for a training session delivered to project beneficiaries

today, three of the members are women. As noted by Kwasi Baah Ofori, Estate Manager at BOPP, it is very rare for women to present themselves for leadership positions on decision-making bodies such as the CFPC, and even if they do, the chances of being elected are slim. In fact, the first two women to sit on the committee were co-opted by the project partners to join the CFPC after the elections because “if you left it alone to the general election, they will always only vote for the men to be on it”.

“ We gave them the chance to elect people from the local committee onto the central committee and they elected only men. Meanwhile, the local committee had women on it, but they were not presented for elections to the central committee – so we opted that they should elect two women.”

– Kwasi Baah Ofori, Estate Manager, BOPP.

When asked why she thinks only men were elected initially, Agnes Ntori, treasurer of the central CFPC, explained that there is a widespread perception that “everything is championed by men, so women tend to get ignored” in such processes. However, she believes that seeing women such as herself sitting on the CFPC can inspire others to strive towards assuming leadership roles in the community. The Committee is providing a platform for women to air their views in community meetings and sessions, making them aware about the benefits of the project and being actively involved, as well as ensuring they are not excluded from decision making processes.



**Agnes Ntori** is one of three women who sit on the central Community Forest Protection Committee, where she serves as treasurer.

Agnes is also a beneficiary of the project’s additional livelihood scheme (see below). Her bakery activities have afforded her added income, which has allowed her to save and send her grandchild to school.

“ We realised that over time, [the efforts to ensure women’s representation and participation] had really yielded some results – for instance when it comes to the additional livelihoods – initially it was only male dominated activities and the women were not interested because they were not even participating in the meetings. It was just the men, so when we gave them that platform, we had their leaders on it, and they voted on their behalf and were speaking out for them”.

– Helena Tetteh, Proforest

“ The committee should ensure that women are involved in all community decisions taken. This will help the committee to know the real needs of women and their opinion for effective decision taking in the community. This will promote commitment for implementing decisions for the development of the community”

– extract from meeting minutes of the Community



**Rachael Amadah**, 32, is an elected member of the central CFPC.

Like Agnes, she is a beneficiary of the additional livelihood scheme. Today, she operates her own bakery and with the added income, Rachael has been able to purchase her own equipment and tools including an oven, as well as new stock for her provision shop, and has sent her child to secondary school.

## Support for additional livelihoods

As well as aiming to reduce rural poverty through sustainable income and job creation from oil palm development, the Adum project is implementing an additional livelihoods component to incentivise forest protection by diversifying income sources for communities and providing a source of livelihood during the immature phase of the plantation. The project will establish no less than 100 alternative livelihood micro-enterprises to this end.

To date, 35 women and 69 men have benefited from practical training in a range of activities including bakery, piggery, beekeeping and small ruminant production in addition to the provision of start-up materials, structures, and animals to commence work independently. These are providing women with new income sources, and anecdotal evidence from the field suggests that there have been some positive changes in incomes as a result. In addition, some women are now even participating in activities traditionally performed by men including poultry, piggery, beekeeping, and rabbit rearing.



**Cecilia** in front of her pen ◀ and loading a crate of eggs for delivery to a customer ▼



Women commencing baking activities at Adum Trebuom ◀ and Adum Dominase ▶



“ I am very proud and happy that I have been able to rock shoulders with the men in poultry production since it’s considered as a male dominant field”

– **Cecilia Asante**, beneficiary of the alternative livelihood scheme who now operates a poultry production business.



**Loverance**  
preparing bread  
in her bakery in  
Adum Dominase

Until recently, project beneficiary Loverance Kronkron, 29, primarily sold kenkey - boiled maize dough - for a living. Today, she is a proud owner of her own bakery, producing and selling bread and meat pies along with cocoa drinks.

While she had always dreamed of being a baker, she was not in a financial position to pursue her ambition. This changed when she learnt about the Adum project and its support to additional livelihood enterprises in the community in exchange for forest protection. Loverance submitted her name and was accepted into the bakery training programme, which not only taught participants how to bake but also made available equipment and input materials such as a communal oven in the community centre, baking sheets, yeast, flour, sugar, and margarine. Given the opportunity to pursue her passion, Loverance stopped selling kenkey and devoted all her time to learning bakery skills.

Upon graduation, she received a bakery start-up kit which she explains has allowed her to start her own independent bakery business without needing to take out a loan. In terms of changes in income, Loverance notes that while there is money to be made in producing and selling kenkey, it requires a lot of labour input relative to bakery activities. She therefore had to hire people and pay them on a daily basis, which ate into her profits. With the higher income generated through her bakery business, Loverance has been able to accumulate savings at a local microfinance institution and is no longer relying on bakery materials made available by the project. Today, she is purchasing items for her business independently - including her very own oven.

Loverance also cites other less tangible ways in which she feels she has benefited as a result of the project. She proudly explains that she is now equipped with the skills to teach other women in her community how to be bakers. As a result of the training received through the project, she is also now well-versed in records keeping and financial management. Moreover, through the project, she has acquired valuable knowledge on forest protection, which she has in turn applied to her business which she is eager to be environmentally friendly – for instance, not to use firewood in her bakery. More generally, through forest protection trainings she has attended at the community centre, she has learnt that “the forest benefits the entire community and the entire world, not only individuals”.

Before the project, Loverance very rarely attended community meetings as these were usually held in the early morning when she was preparing kenkey to sell, or in evening when she is busy cooking dinner for her husband and children. Loverance also explains that previously, many women did not see the benefit of attending such meetings. However, project partners have been actively sensitizing them on the importance of gender and encouraging them to participate and engage in these meetings. Nowadays, Loverance frequently attends Community Forest Protection Committee meetings, and given the chance, hopes that she can someday sit on the Committee as an elected member.

## Farm allocation process for plantation development

Through the project, BOPP has committed to support the three beneficiary communities in using 1,400 ha of their farmland for sustainable smallholder oil palm development. An estimated 300 individuals and their households will benefit from the scheme directly by owning between 3-4 ha of the smallholder oil palm farm. Additionally, the project will provide direct employment to about 250 individuals from these communities who will be engaged to carry out general activities ranging from land preparation to farm management. The plantation development scheme will also create several other indirect employment opportunities for the local people.

While the allocation process for smallholder oil palm farms to farmers for sustainable plantation development is yet to formally commence, agreement on the criteria for selection of beneficiaries and farm allocation has been reached by the CFPC. Prompted by the project partners, key agreed criteria to ensure the process is inclusive and gender-responsive in nature include the following:

- The selection of the beneficiaries shall be in such a way that as many different families/households as possible from the communities will be selected.
- Resident native farmers under 40 years will be given priority for selection.
- At least 40% of all beneficiaries of the project should be female.

Agnes explains that the latter criterion was decided upon because “they [women] are equally important and need to involve themselves” and that she does not believe that such a large proportion of women would be in a position to benefit from the plantation development scheme in the absence of this quota being imposed. Similarly, in explaining the rationale behind the quota, Rachael believes “if we leave it to the men alone, the men will not always mind them [women], their challenges and their needs”.

“ There will be jobs when the project starts - we will see to it that women too will be employed to work on the concession, not only men – so that women aren't left behind”

– Rachael Amadah, elected member of the central CFPC

Moreover, and importantly, the criterion is key in ensuring that individual women are in a position to directly obtain proceeds from the land rather than having to rely on their husbands for benefit-sharing. This is not the status quo, as even when women farm on the land, they ordinarily let their husbands or the head of the household lead on the engagement with BOPP, who therefore accrue the direct benefit and go on to decide on whether and how it is distributed amongst the household. Although women may own portions of the family's land – for instance if a woman owns 4 out of 10 acres belonging to the family as a whole – the person leading the engagement with BOPP would normally not disaggregate by individual ownership, instead presenting the 10 acres as collectively belonging to the family. The partners therefore had to drill down into ‘who owns what’ and sensitise women on the advantages of partaking in the process to ensure that benefits from smallholder plantation development can be accrued on an individual and gender-neutral basis.

“ It's about who fronts the engagement and who is more educated to lead the engagement – women will most of the time say ‘engage my husband’ or ‘engage the family head’ and you then realise that it is the men's names that go into the records and it proceeds from there ... so the women in a very subtle way lose out”

– Helena Tetteh, Proforest

## Early results and reflections

As this case study illustrates, the project partners and stakeholders of the Adum Bansa Smallholder Project are making conscious efforts to advance women's economic empowerment as well as improve their participation and representation in decision-making. Though the long-term impacts of these mainstreaming efforts on gender equality in the project area remain to be seen – and it must be acknowledged that entrenched cultural practices, norms and beliefs that underpin and shape gender dynamics are not easily changed – there are indications that this gendered approach is supporting some early results and changes towards greater gender equality.

These include some strategically and symbolically important commitments, such as championing equal opportunities for men and women to participate in and benefit from additional livelihood activities and the plantation development scheme, and ensuring adequate representation of women on committees to participate in and influence decision-making processes. The gender-inclusive approach adopted by the project is key to its long-term sustainability, as it helps secure broad-based buy-in and continued support for the intervention by acknowledging and actively responding to the fact that women and men have diverse perspectives, roles, needs, capacities, and constraints - all of which can influence project delivery and impact.

**“ I think there is still more room for improvement, because generally, the traditional role of women is still at the back of the minds of both women and men. It will need a lot of continuous education and sensitisation, because some of these things are cultural and you can't change them within a year or two. But I believe as the project goes on, looking at the way we are doing the selection and allocation process and the trainings, I'm sure with time we will be able to make a lot of headway.”**

**– Kwasi Baah Ofori, Estate Manager at BOPP**

With the project's much-anticipated smallholder plantation development component about to commence, it is now critical that progress towards gender equality, amongst other intended outcomes, can be systematically tracked and measured. Therefore, to guide project implementation and inform scale-up efforts going forward, the project has recently developed a MEL framework with P4F support. This framework, which will in the first instance be rolled out with a baseline study to be conducted in November, includes targeted gender-related outcomes and indicators, as illustrated below. Robust measurement of progress towards these outcomes will facilitate project partners' assessment of the strengths and weaknesses and differential effects of the project on men and women and adapt activities accordingly. This in turn may – in the long term – allow the Adum Smallholder Project intervention to move from being gender sensitive to gender transformative.

**“ During our discussions, [the women sitting on the CFPC] make very important interventions. There are times that the men [representing the different communities] tend to think along community lines and it becomes divided because everyone is looking at their own community. But in most of those cases, the women representatives on the committee [each from different communities] have come in, reasoned with each other and reached agreement, rendering the tug of war between the men useless ... this helps us in taking decisions quickly. I'm sure that if they were not on the committee, we would've had a lot of disagreements.”**

**– Kwasi Baah Ofori, Estate Manager at BOPP, on how the project has benefitted from women's representation on the CFPC.**

With the project's much-anticipated smallholder plantation development component about to commence, it is now critical that progress towards gender equality, amongst other intended outcomes, can be systematically tracked and measured. Therefore, to guide project implementation and inform scale-up efforts going forward, the project has recently developed a MEL framework with P4F support. This framework, which will in the first instance be rolled out with a baseline study to be conducted in November, includes targeted gender-related outcomes and indicators, as illustrated below. Robust measurement of progress towards these outcomes will facilitate project partners' assessment of the strengths and weaknesses and differential effects of the project on men and women and adapt activities accordingly. This in turn may – in the long term – allow the Adum Smallholder Project intervention to move from being gender sensitive to gender transformative.

INTENDED OUTCOME	INDICATORS
Both women and men will be supported to own their own high-yielding oil palm farms	Gender equity in ownership of farms and access to income from managed (smallholder) scheme
Narrowing the gender income gap and lifting many women out of poverty	Yields and income from scheme payments and alternative livelihood activities, disaggregated by gender

**Fig. 2:** Extract from the Adum Bansa project Outcome Harvesting Tool

## Sharing lessons beyond the Adum Bansa experience

Beyond the immediate Adum Bansa project, gender and social inclusion remains at the forefront of the agenda of the P4F-supported Africa Palm Oil Initiative (APOI) and the Ghana National Platform – which is led by Proforest, and on which BOPP sits as a Steering Committee member. The APOI in its Theory of Change recognizes that the oil palm sector cannot be developed sustainably without promoting the inclusion of marginalized groups, including women. It was against this backdrop that the Ghana National Platform through Proforest sought to commission a GESI analysis that examined customary practices in oil palm growing areas in Ghana in a bid to understand the extent to which the APOI process in Ghana is gender sensitive and is promoting inclusion. The resulting P4F-funded *GESI Analysis of Customary Practices in Oil Palm Producing Areas and the Africa Palm Oil Initiative Process in Ghana* (Appiah, 2018) produced a number of key recommendations on how the National Platform can strengthen its approach towards GESI going forward, one of them being:

*GESI knowledge in the organizations represented on the National Platform should be shared among members of the platform to strengthen the GESI focus. Lesson sharing should be encouraged between National Platform members – for instance GESI studies conducted by the organizations and other relevant reports could be shared to build on the existing store of knowledge*

**(Appiah, 2018, p.42)**

By virtue of their prominent role on the APOI, there exists an invaluable opportunity for the Adum Bansa project partners to share the early results and lessons from this project – gender-related and others – not only with the other members of the Ghana National Platform, but also with the larger, regional APOI community to promote wider uptake of the gender-sensitive approach by private companies, CSOs, and public sector entities seeking to implement similar interventions for inclusive and sustainable oil palm development.

## How Partnerships for Forests has helped

P4F funding and technical assistance to date has directly enabled many of the activities underpinning the Adum Bansa Smallholder Project, including partnership formation; community consultations, sensitisation and engagement (including FPIC); signing of production-protection agreements with beneficiary communities; the establishment and operationalisation of the Community Forest Protection Committee and Landscape Governance Board; development and implementation of Community Forest Protection by-laws and working principles; smallholder capacity building; and income diversification (additional livelihoods) training and support. All these activities have had elements of the gender strategy incorporated within them and have thus contributed in part to the observed improvements in gender equality.

“ If it hadn't been for P4F, we wouldn't have been able to carry out the additional livelihood activities which are an incentive for the forest protection component of the project – so that is really key.”

– Helena Tetteh, Proforest

Both Proforest and BOPP are – albeit to varying degrees – well versed on gender issues, and gender sensitivity is embedded in their operations and organisational cultures. BOPP, as a member of the RSPO, has in place an institutional gender policy, equal opportunities policy, and reproductive rights policy, as well as a designated Gender Committee within its existing plantation which is responsible for all gender-related issues. A member of the APOI Ghana National Platform, BOPP has also been involved in recent discussions on gender mainstreaming and inclusivity. Kwasi Baa Ofori notes that as a result, “we are mindful in everything we do of the participation of women”. He also explains that gender issues were considered from the outset in the project development stages because P4F is a donor funded programme and like all other donor programmes, made their expectations clear for the project to advance gender inclusion.

BOPP's own disposition towards gender-inclusivity has been further bolstered by the support and expertise lent by the Proforest team. Over the past couple of years, Proforest has been making conscious efforts as an organisation to mainstream gender into its projects, programmes and day-to-day processes. A gender expert has been brought in to review tools and processes with a gender lens, and to build the capacity of the organisation in gender sensitivity and mainstreaming. This has entailed everything from in-house and external gender training sessions for staff, down to a complete restructuring of Proforest's field questionnaires to make them more gender sensitive and allow for the collection of sex disaggregated data.

As explained by Helena Tetteh, the timing of this institutional commitment towards gender inclusion coincided with that of the Adum Smallholder project development process, and the team realised that “it's one of the projects that we could use to pilot what we have been studying in-house”. The conscious, combined efforts of BOPP and Proforest to integrate gender considerations into project activities, with P4F grant and technical assistance, has been instrumental in bringing about the improvements towards gender equality in the Adum landscape.

Going forward, monitoring and evaluative management will position the partners to sustain and further enhance gender-related outcomes.

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