

# A GENDER ANALYSIS OF THE ORGANIC CACAO INDUSTRY IN THE TOLEDO DISTRICT



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IN THE TOLEDO DISTRICT**

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*“Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance.”*

**Kofi Annan**

(Ghanaian diplomat, seventh secretary-general of the United Nations, 2001 Nobel Peace Prize.)

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## Executive Summary

This study aims to guide the strategic actions of Help for Progress when supporting cacao farmers in the Toledo District. It describes the major activities carried out by men and by women throughout the production and processing of organic cacao, and identifies the constraints and barriers faced by them in carrying out their activities.

The main findings were obtained through interviews with the Chairman and Manager of the TCGA, and a focus group discussion carried out in San Jose, Toledo District. The conclusions and recommendations are:

- § The production and processing of organic cacao in San Jose is a family affair, where every family member contributes at different times and in different capacities.
- § In general, women contribute in those tasks that require less physical effort, less expertise, and can be done near their houses.
- § Equipment and technology related to irrigation will facilitate the women's work in the cacao nurseries.
- § Farmers require special equipment and/or training in grafting of seedlings, pruning of mature trees, fermentation and drying of cacao beans, and the identification and control of pests and diseases.
- § TCGA experience reports that women are better grafters, so training in grafting of cacao seedlings should be provided directly to women.
- § For the training sessions of women: provide a female trainer where possible, invite only women, provide childcare, and carry out the instruction in the women's village.
- § The design of smaller fermentation boxes and the direct training of women in fermentation of cacao beans will improve their performance and increase production.
- § The design and construction of drying facilities will contribute to making the women's job easier and avoiding loss of crop production due to mildew.
- § Exchange visits between farmers, and their families, of different communities, districts and even countries, should be arranged to share experiences and learn from each other.
- § A gender analysis should be carried out during the design phase of future agriculture or development projects.
- § Women should be involved through active participation in the project planning, design, implementation and evaluation.

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## Introduction

Help for Progress (HfP) is a Belizean non governmental organization based in Belmopan since 1981, which mission is: *“Help for Progress is an NGO that acts as an agent of change to support the development of rural communities in Belize. We work for the empowerment of people, for gender equality, and for the elimination of poverty. We carry out our work through training, micro-credit services, community development and advocacy.”*

As part of its mandate, HfP is implementing the project “Development with Equity in the Adjacency Zone: Belize-Guatemala”, financed by Oxfam GB. “Sustainable Economic Alternatives” is one of the components of this project. It involves the promotion and support of organic cacao production in order to provide a sustainable income to the communities of the adjacency zone; it is expected that women will participate and benefit. HfP always practices a gender equity approach in its interventions with rural communities.

There is not much information regarding the distribution of labour between men and women in the production and processing of organic cacao, so the role and participation of women in the productive cycle is invisible or not evident. The tendency is to believe that only men are involved in this industry; consequently, all the efforts to support organic cacao production are generally addressing the constraints faced by men.

In this framework, HfP, as a non-governmental organization supporting the organic cacao sector in the Toledo District, saw the necessity to identify the involvement of women and consequently address the needs of both women and men in their future interventions.

This study presents a gender analysis of organic cacao production in the Toledo District. It aims to provide recommendations for the future work of HfP in supporting cacao farmers by considering and addressing the different opportunities and constraints faced by both women and men in the production and processing of organic cacao.

This document deals first with the study’s purpose and objectives, followed by the methodology utilized to gather the information. It continues with a section that provides contextual information about

the Toledo Cacao Growers Association. Next, the main findings of the research are presented; it ends with a statement of the conclusions and recommendations.

## **Objective**

The main purpose of this study was to develop practical recommendations for Help for Progress' work, towards the promotion of gender equity in the production of organic cacao in the Toledo District by:

- determining the major activities carried out by men and by women throughout the production and processing cycle of organic cacao industry, with special emphasis on making visible the women's roles and participation; and
- identifying the constraints and barriers faced by men and women in carrying out their activities.

It is expected that the conclusions of this gender analysis will guide the strategies of Help for Progress supporting cacao farmers in the future by considering and addressing the different opportunities and constraints faced by both women and men in the production and processing of organic cacao.

## **Methodology**

The methodology includes a review of literature related to the cacao industry in the Toledo District, the Toledo Cacao Growers' Association, the different activities performed in the whole process of organic production and processing, gender analysis tools, and a study developed in other country.

The main findings of this study were obtained through interviews with the Chairman and Manager of the TCGA, and a focus group discussion carried out in San Jose, Toledo District.

San Jose was considered to be a good model for this preliminary study, since it is one of villages in the Toledo District which has grown cacao commercially for a long time.

The focus group was carried out on Sunday, 9<sup>th</sup> December, 2007 with 28 farmers, 7 women and 21 men. Firstly, the main activities of cacao production and processing were identified, as well as when and where those tasks were carried out. At the same time, the participants were asked about the roles and involvement of both women and men in the identified activities. The women were allowed to answer before the men.



Once the contribution of the family members to the production and processing of organic cacao was determined, the session went on to identify the main constraints and limitations faced by women and men in carrying out their activities. To conclude the session, the farmers were requested to reveal any other general concerns that they had.

## The Toledo Cacao Growers' Association

These days, the production of organic cacao in the Toledo District constitutes a very important source of income for the indigenous Maya farmers and their families.

The Toledo Cacao Growers' Association (TCGA) was established in 1983 by a group of cacao farmers of the Toledo District in an effort to have more bargaining power, lower costs of transportation, a better price, and more convenient and secure method of payment at the time of selling the cacao product.



“Green and Black’s started to buy cacao beans from TCGA since 1994. During one of the visits in Belize, the cacao drink (locally used by the Mayas) was given to one of the proprietors. The drink was tasty and as a result the new market for the TCGA came into existence. TCGA sold its first cacao produce under Organic and Fair-trade certification.

*TCGA Manager*

The TCGA head office and depot are located in Punta Gorda, Toledo District, where 875 farmers are registered as certified organic farmers, 35 of them being women. Cacao production varies from year to year, mainly because the plantations are quite vulnerable to the weather. In 2007, the TCGA depot received 51,410 lbs from the 146 farmers who have plantations under production; from those farmers, 26 are women.

At this moment, the total area cultivated with organic cacao is uncertain, but it is approximately 3000 acres in Toledo and Stann Creek Districts alone. Moreover, farmers are establishing new plantations in the Cayo District. The success of TCGA goes beyond Belize; last year, as a result of the cooperation among countries promoted by the project “Development with Equity in the Adjacency Zone: Belize-Guatemala”, 19 farmers from Petén, Guatemala were registered in TCGA.

According to the TCGA records, generally men are the owners of the land. However, there has been a gradual change in the last four years, and women have started applying for land.

The TCGA has a department offering extension services to the farmers, where, at present, all the officers are men. However, TCGA expect to hire a female extension officer by November 2008. The Board of Directors of TCGA is comprised of nine members, two of whom are women.

## **Main findings**

This section provides the information gathered during the focus group in San Jose and the interviews with the TCGA Manager and Chairman regarding the distribution of labour, the main constraints faced by

women and men and the identified needs in equipment and skills for doing certain tasks. The section concludes with their remarks about the access to and control over resources.

The information is presented following the cycle of tasks carried out throughout the production and processing of organic cacao. A summary of these findings may be found in Annex II.

### ***Nursery establishment***

Cacao plants are propagated by seeds and on some occasions the seedlings are grafted to reduce the time of obtaining production and to ensure the genetic material. The seedlings grow in the nursery approximately from October to June.



For the establishment of a nursery in a community, the TCGA identifies a household (cacao farmer and his/her family) in the village who will be in charge of and paid for taking care of the plants growing inside the nursery; this task does not require any special skills. In the case of individual or family nurseries, the woman assists the man in the construction. The nurseries are built

near the house for easy access and to facilitate the work to be done during the time that the seedlings are growing inside it.

Special skills are not required for mixing the soil with the compost, or for filling the plastic bags with the mixture, often these tasks are carried out by both women and men. The men dig the soil to be mixed with the compost, and then the soil is usually mixed by the women and children, who also fill the plastic bags with the mixture.



Certain expertise is needed for the selection of the seeds to be planted. Thus, in community nurseries, the cacao seeds are selected

by a TCGA extension officer. In individual or family nurseries, the selection is usually done by the men, who are more experienced or trained to do this task; it seldom is done by women.

The seeds are planted both by men and women, depending on the time availability of each one.

In general terms, women are in charge of watering and weeding the seedlings growing in the nursery. When the nursery is near the house, women water and weed the plants and when it is far, the men do these tasks.



During the time the seedlings are growing in the nursery, the men monitor the possible infestation by insects and/or diseases. Taking into consideration that the cacao plants are growing organically, this task is very important and farmers require acquiring certain knowledge to identify any problem in time to address it.

### ***Grafting***

Cacao grafted plants have a twofold advantage: they will start to produce earlier (two years), and the genetic material can be selected from a known good productive mother plant. However, to graft cacao plants equipment and certain expertise are required and farmers need to be trained to acquire those skills.

In San Jose, although some male farmers have tried grafting cacao and other have tried with crops such as citrus, in general, TCGA provides the ready grafted plants by men, brought from nurseries located in other communities.

According to the TCGA experience, women are better grafters than men. Once the women have learnt, they can graft more seedlings in the same time, and the rate of grafting success is higher than the men. It seems that the women's hands are more stable and firm, an important attribute in grafting.



When the previous comment was shared with the focus group, one woman said: “then, in that case, training should be provided for women”. The women participating in the meeting mentioned that they would prefer to have a woman trainer, and for the training to be carried out in separated groups of women and men. Also, the participants stated that in the case of training women in grafting, it will require to have childcare in the meantime of the women being trained.

### ***Field Management***

In the case of a first cacao plantation in the area, the men clear the land or strip lines where the seedlings will be planted.

In June and July, the seedlings are transported to the field by men, usually using a horse. However, this can vary from family to family, and in some families women and children help to carry the plants.

The transplanting of the plants is done by the family; when the children are on vacation, they also help.

The tasks carried out in the field, such as pruning, weeding or the identification and control of pests and diseases are done by men, mainly because women must take care of the small children at home. However, it is recognized that some women do weeding.

“I hire men to help me. The main constraint I face is the distance to the farm, there is no road to reach the farm, I do not have transport, I have to hire and pay for a horse to transport the production”.

*Woman farmer and cacao owner at focus group*

Pruning is a very important task in the management of a cacao plantation in order to keep it healthy, however special equipment and skills are required. In Toledo, pruning is usually done with machetes, and on many occasions men have to climb to the tree to prune its branches.



The special equipment (such as small saws, pruning scissors and ladders) required for pruning is expensive, and training in the use of this equipment is essential. The farmers could buy them if the price was lower, so subsidies to purchase the equipment would be of much help. With this type of equipment, women could also prune because they would not have to climb the trees.



The identification and control of pests and diseases are of vital importance in the production of organic cacao, especially now that the fungus "monilia" is in the country. Usually it is done by the male farmers since they are the ones trained. Farmers considered that more training in the control of this "monilia" and other diseases under organic conditions is necessary.

### ***Harvest and post-harvest***

The cacao fruits are harvested all through the year with peak season from January to June. The ripe pods are identified, harvested and broken by the whole family. Children enjoy these tasks very much. The men will transport the cacao seeds to the home.

The fermentation of the beans is a very important task; hence, one person should be in charge of the whole process. The men received training in fermentation, and afterwards they trained to their wives and children. It could be said that fermentation is carried out by both, women and men; it depends on the family and on the amount

of seeds to be fermented. If the amount of seeds to be fermented is large, men will do it because is hard and difficult for women to turn over the seeds inside the fermentation box; if the amount of beans is small, the women will be in charge.

“Once the cacao beans are in the fermentation box, women will turn over the beans for a period of 6 to 8 days. The women develop these traits over time and thus become expert at it. They count the days in their heads”.

*TCGA Manager*

Fermenting the cacao beans is considered a very important task, where farmers find that improved skills and equipment are necessary.

After the cacao beans are fermented, they need to be dried. Women spread the fermented cacao beans over a plastic sheet to let them dry by the sun. If there is a big amount of seeds, men will assist the women. This is a critical task in the process, where some improvement is needed. The quality of the product could be jeopardized, or even the whole production could be lost if this task is not well managed.

At present, since farmers don't have dryers, the drying of beans depends on the weather; the women have to watch at it all day. Drying beans during the rainy season is a constraint and some production is lost. A development in drying equipment will lead to a bigger crop production; therefore providing drying facilities is being considered by TCGA as one of its priorities for supporting the farmers, especially women, in future projects.



The dried beans are stored in a plastic bucket when the amount is small or in a bag when it is bigger until the production is delivered to the TCGA depot.

### *Access to and control of resources*



According to TCGA records, approximately 75 % of the deliveries are brought from their communities by women by bus. The payment, by cheque, is directly to them, in their names. In San Jose, the farmers stated that “the owner” is the person who delivers the crop to TCGA depot and collects the payment; “if the woman owns the farm she collects the cheque”.

“Better the woman collect the money because sometimes men drink all the money”.

*Male farmer at focus group*

In general terms, the title of the land is in the name of the man or head of the family. San Jose is in reservation land, which according to Justino Peck, TCGA Chairman, poses a problem for growing permanent crops such as cacao. He recommends farmers should own the land for the cacao production, and, in the case of leased land, ensure that the name of the wife and/or one of the children be registered in the lease, to avoid complications in the case of death of the first owner.

The focus group in San Jose agreed with the TCGA Chairman in that the ownership of the land is a problem. When they were asked about who owns the land, they unanimously replied, “Government owns the land”.

“TCGA provides advice and support to farmers in carrying out the land survey and informs them about lease and purchase of land.”

*TCGA Chairman*

Armando Choco, TCGA Manager, declared that the majority of the cacao plantations belong to men. He believes that for women to have access to and control of the resources, such as land, they need to generate their own income, thus they will be respected, considered and involved in the decision making process. Armando believes that cacao production is one way women will be able to generate income for their own and thus allowed them to make sound decisions. The

TCGA recognize this and is currently doing its best to source assistance for the women.

In the past, the provision of training and equipment has been directed to male farmers. TCGA is learning from its experience and is now targeting women in the fermentation of beans training. Also, it is promoting exchange visits among women groups, not only locally but in Centro America; an example is the exchange visit of women groups from San Felipe and Santa Elena to Kajbon in Alta Verapaz, Guatemala with the purpose of learning to make chocolate.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

The division of labour between men and women and access to and control of resources in organic cacao production may vary from community to community and from family to family. The reader should keep in mind that this is a preliminary study, the gender analysis having been carried out only in San Jose, and therefore, the conclusions and recommendations are based on those findings.

It is fair to conclude that the production and processing of organic cacao in San Jose is a family affair, where every family member contributes at different times and in different capacities. Children participate in the productive activities only after school hours and on vacation time.

Since the findings may vary from community to community, it is recommended that a gender analysis be carried out during the design phase of future agriculture or development projects; furthermore women should be involved through active participation in the project planning, design, implementation and evaluation. This approach will empower women and give them a stronger sense of ownership, and consequently the project will have a greater success.

In general, women contribute in those tasks that require less physical effort and less expertise. Women's main contributions are to those tasks that can be done near their houses. Specifically, these tasks are related to the management of the cacao nursery and the harvesting and post-harvesting processes. However there are women who own the farm and hire men to do the work for them.

A gender analysis during the design of a project will identify the major constraints faced by women in carrying out their tasks and propose how to overcome them. This study detected that for the work carried out in the community nurseries, equipment and technology related to irrigation, such as watering cans, hosepipes and irrigation systems, will facilitate the women's work.

Farmers' main constraints are in those activities that require special equipment and skills or depend on climate conditions, i.e. grafting of seedlings, pruning of mature trees, fermentation and drying of cacao beans, and in the last years, the identification and control of pests and diseases. Practical sessions of hands-on training should be provided to the farmers in the above areas.

In the past and in general terms, the man was trained and afterwards he trained his family, whether he will perform that task or not. It is recommended that training is provided directly to women in grafting of seedlings since, as TCGA has concluded, women are better grafters.

Although the fermentation and drying of cacao beans are the last key areas in the production of cacao, they have not received much support regarding improvement in the practices.

Women have difficulty in lifting heavy weights; therefore they can handle better the fermentation of small amount of beans. The design of smaller fermentation boxes and the direct training of women in fermentation of cacao beans will improve their performance and increase production.

Drying the cacao beans during the rainy season is another constraint faced mainly by women. Often the women have to move heavy weights of beans before they get wet. The design and construction of drying facilities will contribute to making the women's job easier and avoiding loss of crop production due to mildew.

Whenever training is provided to women, four recommendations should be taken into consideration: i) provide a female trainer where possible, ii) invite only women in the training sessions, iii) provide childcare during the training sessions, and iv) carry out the training sessions in the women's village.

It is also suggested that exchange visits between farmers of different communities, districts and even countries, should be arranged. Moreover, it is proposed that the whole family should be involved in such exchange visits to share experiences and learn from each other.

In general, the participants of the focus group session felt that the meeting was quite interesting, and it was very helpful to hear and exchange ideas on how different families distribute their labour throughout the whole cycle of production and processing of organic cacao.

## **Annex I. Participants in the focus group**

### **Women**

1. Teresa Tzub
2. Clotilda Cho
3. Victoriana Sho
4. Agapita Ical
5. Gregoria Bol
6. Raimunda Teck
7. Cristina Peck

### **Men**

8. Justino Peck
9. Lucas Pop
10. Catarino Tzub
11. Rafael Tzub
12. Juan Pop
13. Marcelino Cal
14. Felipe Wook
15. Honorato Ical
16. A. Bolon
17. Luciano Tzub
18. Sebastian Teck
19. Silvestre Peck
20. Benedicto Cal
21. Enelino Cho
22. EmetrioPop
23. Felipe Teck
24. Pablo Sho
25. Toribio Ical
26. Justino Mes
27. Alfredo Sho
28. Reyes Teul

## Annex II. Summary of the main findings

Description	Who		When (months)	Equipment and/or skills required
	Women	Men		
<b>Distribution of labour</b>				
<b>Nursery establishment</b>				
Construction of structure		X	From October to June	No
Soil mix	X	X		No
Filling bags	X			No
Seed selection		X		Yes, skills
Sowing-Seed planting	X	X		No
Watering	X			No
Weeding	X			No
Insect and disease monitoring		X		Yes, skills
Grafting		X	March	Yes, both
<b>Field Management</b>				
Transporting seedlings		X	June, July	No
Transplanting	X	X	June, July	No
Weeding	X	X	All year	No
Pruning		X	All year	Yes, both
Identification and control of pests and diseases		X	All year	Yes, skills
<b>Harvest and post-harvest</b>				
Identifying the ripe pods	X	X	From January to June	No
Harvesting	X	X		No
Pod breaking	X	X		No
Fermentation	X	X		Yes, both
Drying		X		Yes, equipment
Store	X			No
Delivering to TCGA Depot	X	X		No
<b>Access and control of resources</b>				
Collecting payment	X	X		
Land ownership		X		
Equipment		X		
Skills		X		

