Research Summary of the Master Thesis titled "A Gendered Analysis of Small-Scale Cocoa Production in Uganda"

Introduction

Cocoa production is an important source of income for many smallholder farmers in Africa. Smallholders are often struggling with high transaction costs, limited access to markets and rural services as well as human capital and technology constraints. Such issues and constraints, which lower farmers' ability to generate income and escape poverty, are often particularly pronounced for female farmers that represent a large share of the total agricultural workforce in developing countries.

This Master's thesis is a case study that analyzes the supply chain of smallholder cocoa farmers in Uganda with a focus on gender aspects, where the findings can be used to tailor to the needs of smallholders and address gender-sensitive interventions for the specific sample group in the Ugandan cocoa sector.

Research Design

The research uses data collected by the Swiss Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) in 2019 as part of the SusChain research project. The project received funding from the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) research program NFP 73. The empirical evidence is based on a primary data set that contains cross-sectional data from the Mukono district in Uganda. In total, 205 eligible cocoa farmers participated in a semi-structured interview. These farmers represent a random sample from the future supplier base of a national export company. This research aims to assess whether a gender gap exists within the sample group to address two research questions and test three concrete hypotheses.

Research Questions

1: What are the differences between male and female managed farms, if any, in terms of roles and approaches to cocoa-growing and related activities?

2: Does the fact that a farm is managed by a woman influence cocoa revenue?

Hypotheses

1: Female cocoa farmers do not have the same prerequisites as male farmers to participate in the agricultural sector and manage their farms.

2: Differences exist in roles and approaches to cocoa-growing and related activities between male and female managed farms.

3: Female managed farms achieve lower cocoa revenue than male managed farms.

Methodology

First, descriptive statistics and independent samples t-tests were used to compare various variables between male and female farmers. Furthermore, to account for differences on the farm-level, the responsibilities, affiliations and roles in cocoa cultivation and related activities were examined for the surveyed cocoa farmers. The analyses were carried out for the entire sample and separately for the farms managed by men and women. In addition, ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models were developed to estimate whether female farmers have lower cocoa revenues than male farmers, with and without controlling for other sociodemographic, farm and contextual characteristics, such as farm size, education, and access to financial services.

Results

The analysis confirmed the three hypotheses that were tested as part of the research. Concerning research question 1, the results showed that women were involved in all processing steps and most farming decisions, but revealed that several gender-based differences remained in the sample group. Decisions regarding inputs were male-dominated and fell under the responsibility of men on all farms. The respective roles and decision-making power further changed considerably if the farms were distinguished based on the gender of the farm manager. The female managed farms in the sample were characterized by a prominent female workforce, were considered disadvantaged in official land titles and formal savings accounts, and produced more food crops than male managed farms. Male managed farms, on the other hand, included women more often in decisions and activities concerning the farm. Despite this, the data showed that men had more access to formal savings accounts and were advantaged in holding the official land title.

In regard to research question 2, the study results revealed discrimination against female farmers, where the cocoa revenue was significantly lower when a woman managed the farm. A formal savings account, a greater workforce, and a larger cocoa area were identified as the key determinants that significantly influenced the revenue from cocoa. These most certainly represent areas where the female farmers of the sample were disadvantaged, as they generally had smaller farms and were prevented by institutional norms from owning formal savings accounts.

Conclusions

The data revealed a considerable gender gap for the sample caused by several interrelated systemic inequalities that hinder women from participating in the cocoa sector and aggravates their ability to manage a successful agricultural business. In order to strengthen a woman's role in cocoa, several substantial disparities for female cocoa farmers need to be addressed, such as the access to official land titles and formal savings accounts, productive resources, and the requirement for more education and training opportunities. As challenges such as undernourishment and rural poverty prevail, the transformation towards a gender-sensitive cocoa sector offers an opportunity to combat these through removing the existing bottlenecks for female farmers. This, in turn, would allow them to lead their own successful agricultural businesses, which would contribute to food security and Uganda's economic development. The research results are therefore of central importance for organizations and private companies active in the cocoa value chain in order to strengthen the role of female cocoa farmers and to contribute to strategies that eliminate the systemic gender gap. This guides effective interventions, which can expand the evidence base on what is successful in reaching, benefiting, and empowering female farmers and women in agriculture.

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