

Gender dimensions in the role of CLMRS agents

July 2023

Results from qualitative research on the motivation, perceptions, and experiences of female CLMRS agents in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana.

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all ICI colleagues who contributed to this study with data collection and analysis, inputs to contents, editing and layout.

We would like to thank Tony's Chocolonely for their collaboration in developing and piloting activities to improve gender balance amongst CLMRS agents within their supply chain in Côte d'Ivoire, from which valuable lessons have been learnt and are included in this report.

Finally, we would like to thank the CLMRS agents, cooperative directors and staff, farmers, community members and leaders in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana for their valuable time in taking part in this study.

Addendum

This report was updated in May 2024 with new data insights.

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Executive Summary

Background

Data from Child Labour Monitoring and Remediation Systems (CLMRS) relying on locally based agents show that female agents are on average better than their male colleagues at identifying cases of child labour. This study aims to understand why. It seeks to answer the following questions: Why are women more effective than men at identifying child labour cases? What special qualities do they bring to the job? What benefits do women get from doing this job? Why are there so few females doing this job, and what can be done to recruit and retain more female monitors?

Methods

Qualitative research was conducted in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana in communities where ICI-implemented CLMRS were operational. Interviews and group discussions were held with female and male CLMRS agents who share their experiences of the job and their perceptions of gender relations in their working context; and from cocoa farming communities. Based on preliminary findings, two cooperatives in Côte d'Ivoire piloted adjustments to job adverts, recruitment practices and job modalities to increase the share of female CLMRS agents. These led to the recruitment of additional female agents, whose feedback and experiences were then collected after they had been in service for about one year.

Findings

The study found that increasing the share of women in the role of CLMRS agents has multiple benefits, both in terms of the skills women bring to the job and in gender-transformative effects in cocoa communities. The data show that contrary to widespread assumptions, female agents **overcome mobility constraints** and adopt motor cycling when they are supported to do so; have excellent **communication and interpersonal skills**, which are key qualifications for the job; and have no difficulties **attaining their objectives** in terms of monthly monitoring visits.

Farmers and agents also reported that women have an advantage over men regarding their **interactions with children**. This is because parents feel more at ease to entrust their children with a woman for the child interview; and because children tend to feel more at ease during interviews with a woman. This may be one reason why female agents are, on average, able to identify more cases of child labour.

At the same time, the results also highlight the **importance of removing barriers** for women to access the job. First, the job offer has to be communicated in ways that reach women and encourage them to apply. Job advertisements should mention the benefits that are particularly relevant for women, including maternity cover, and support offered for the acquisition of motorbike driving skills. Some



women find it difficult to justify the job with their partners and families, but experience showed that partners were more collaborative and supportive when they were fully informed about the job and its requirements. Safety was also a widespread concern in respondents' perception, with some female agents asking men to accompany them on certain visits. At the time of the study, no negative experiences had been reported.

Importantly, for many of the female agents interviewed, the job has been a **source of empowerment**. It has offered them the opportunity to further develop their professional and personal skills, build social capital, gain self-confidence, and acquire financial independence. Beyond that, the female agents constitute **role models for girls and women** in the communities. As female agents break with cultural norms and demonstrate that they are professionally competent, mobile and independent, they set powerful examples that can change gender stereotypes amongst cocoa farmers and their families. Hence, a better gender balance in the running of the CLMRS can make an important contribution to gender equality in cocoa communities.

Background

Data from Child Labour Monitoring and Remediation Systems (CLMRS) show that female agents are on average better than male agents at identifying cases of child labour and at accompanying families in stopping this practice. This study aims to understand why and to explore how to recruit and retain more women.

ICI's [Effectiveness Review of Child Labour Monitoring and Remediation Systems \(CLMRS\)](#), examined how different elements of system design and set-up affect how systems perform.

One of these elements was the profile of agents who conduct household and farm visits to monitor child labour. The analysis shows that in systems which rely on locally based agents, **female agents are significantly more likely to identify cases of child labour than their male colleagues**. In ICI-implemented CLMRS in Côte d'Ivoire, female agents are 19 percentage points more likely to identify a child labour case than male agents, all other factors held equal.¹ Data from ICI-implemented CLMRS in Côte d'Ivoire also show that when the agent is female, the rate of children stopping child labour after two consecutive follow-up visits is 11 percentage points higher on average than for male agents. Yet on average across the systems reviewed for which gender information was available, women make up less than 5% of monitors, suggesting that more efforts could be made to recruit and retain female monitors.

Research questions

This qualitative study aims to better understand these results. It seeks to answer the following questions:

- Why are women more effective than men at identifying child labour cases?
- What special qualities do they bring to the job?
- What benefits do women get from doing this job?
- Why are there so few females doing this job?

¹ For a complete presentation of these results, see <https://clmrs.cocoainitiative.org/identifying-cases-child-labour#section-195>.

What is the role of monitoring agents in a CLMRS?

Two core activities of a CLMRS are to **raise awareness** on child labour and resulting harm amongst farming households and the wider community; and to **identify children** in, or at risk of, child labour through an active monitoring process, using standardised data collection tools.

The monitors who implement these activities (sometimes referred to as *community facilitators*) are the primary point of contact for farmers and their children with the CLMRS. They explain how the system works, its aims and objectives, raise awareness during household and community visits, and feed information back into the system which provides the basis for targeting support.

Many systems in the cocoa sector rely on locally based agents, who are often farmers themselves.

While monitors receive a standard training package, each brings to this job their personal skills, talents, experience, social capital within the community and level of commitment, which will have a strong impact on the outcomes of their work.

- What can be done to recruit and retain more female monitors?

Methodology

Research was conducted in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana in communities where ICI-implemented CLMRS were operational.

Ghana

In **Ghana**, the study looked at the role of CLMRS agents in the context of gender perceptions more broadly, including the perspectives of agents themselves and those of the wider cocoa farming household.

Semi-structured qualitative interviews were held with 46 CLMRS agents, of which 21 were female and 25 were male.² Agents were sampled in a way to make sure that they could draw from sufficient experience in the job: 75 percent of the agents interviewed had been in the job for at least one full year. The sample was drawn from CLMRS implemented by ICI in the supply chains of three industry partners across six districts in Ghana.

To capture perceptions of farming households monitored by CLMRS, seven focus group discussions were held with farmers, with a total of 74 participants, 39 of which were female and 35 were male. All data were collected in November and December 2021 by ICI field staff.



² Of the agents interviewed, 38 were Community Facilitators who do monitoring visits at both household and farm level, and hold awareness raising sessions on the harm caused by child labour; and 8 were Assistant Field coordinators (AFCs) who work at cooperative level to support the monitoring and awareness raising work and do a first quality check on the data collected by the Community Facilitators.

Côte d'Ivoire

In **Côte d'Ivoire**, the study had a stronger operational focus and included testing a set of activities aimed at increasing the share of female agents in CLMRS in two cooperatives in the supply chain of one industry partner (Tony's Chocolonely).

Agents working in the CLMRS in the Tony's Chocolonely supply chain are employed full-time by the cooperative (with all economic and social benefits that come with formal employment), are equipped with motorbikes by the cooperative, and are required to have solid literacy skills.

Research was conducted in two phases. In **Phase 1** in September 2021, focus group discussions were held in cocoa growing communities to capture perceptions, interests and potential challenges related to the recruitment of women as monitoring agents. Based on the findings, adjustments to how the jobs were advertised, recruitment practices and job modalities were piloted in two cooperatives supplying cocoa to Tony's Chocolonely,³ with the aim of recruiting and retaining a higher share of female CLMRS agents. Both cooperatives selected for the pilot have a dynamic leadership, offer different social and environmental sustainability activities for their members, and have female directors. The adjustments led to the recruitment of 8 female child labour monitoring agents in the two cooperatives, and of one female cooperative level CLMRS manager. In **Phase 2**, the outcomes of these adjustments were then assessed based on feedback from the agents in November 2022 and January 2023, after they had been in service for about one year.

During the first phase, 5 focus group discussions were held in each of the 4 communities involved in the study, in the Daloa department. Separate focus group discussions were held with male and female cocoa producers, most of whom were cooperative members; spouses of cocoa producers; and male and female community leaders and opinion leaders. Some of the participants were already covered by a CLMRS and had received visits by monitoring agents. Focus group participants (6 to 8 people per group) were selected to ensure that all the ethnic groups living in the communities were represented. The discussions were facilitated by a mixed team (male and female) of ICI field assistants involved in the implementation of the CLMRS.

After adjustments to the recruitment practices and job modalities had been put in place to encourage more women to apply and stay in the job, the second phase of data collection was designed to assess the results of these activities, and the experience of the female agents recruited. Group discussions and semi-structured qualitative interviews were held with:

- 8 female monitoring agents
- 1 female and one male cooperative level CLMRS manager
- the two (female) directors of the cooperatives
- 1 field staff of Tony's Chocolonely

These data were collected and analysed by the ICI monitoring and evaluation team.

³ The first of these two cooperatives has been operating a CLMRS since 2017. Of the 15 agents in service before the launch of this research, 4 were female. The second cooperative was new in Tony's Chocolonely supply chain and a CLMRS was set up in 2021. The Directors of both of these cooperatives are women.

Table 1 Summary of data collection activities

	Ghana	Côte d'Ivoire
Semi-structured qualitative interviews	46 CLMRS agents (21 female, 25 male)	5 CLMRS monitoring agents (female) 1 cooperative-level CLMRS manager 2 cooperative directors (female)
Focus group discussions	7 focus group discussions with farmers (male and female)	20 focus group discussions with farmers (male and female), farmers' spouses, opinion leaders / community leaders (male and female) 1 group discussion with female CLMRS agents
Coverage	CLMRS implemented by ICI in 6 districts of Ghana	CLMRS implemented by ICI in 2 cooperatives in Côte d'Ivoire

Thematic content analysis

In both countries, the aim of the research was to collect various opinions and reactions, and not necessarily to agree on a single answer to each question.

A thematic content analysis was applied to the transcripts of the interviews and discussions. The interview material was coded and conceptualised to identify common themes and patterns across respondents. A list of themes pre-defined by the research questions provided the starting point of the analysis, with additional themes determined by the data in an inductive approach, meaning that new hypotheses were derived from the patterns found in the data.

In the following section, we present a condensed overview of the main findings for Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire (for Côte d'Ivoire this includes both phases of the research) organised by theme, with selected quotes from individual respondents to illustrate key points. Findings from the two countries are closely aligned overall, but we highlight any differences where relevant. In the conclusion section we summarise perspectives that were common to both studies.

The expectations, attitudes and perceptions of cocoa farmers and community members related to women in the role of CLMRS agents are compared with the perspectives and experiences reported by the agents themselves.

Findings

What motivates people to be CLMRS agents?

As an opening question, CLMRS agents were asked what motivated them to do this job. In both countries, a large majority of the agents mentioned that they were **motivated by the idea of improving children’s experiences** or working for the benefit of the community. Many agents’ responses reflected a genuine concern for the risks posed by child labour and the need to encourage children’s participation in school. This intrinsic moral motivation was prevailing amongst male and female agents alike. One female agent in Ghana stated: *“Seeing a child performing well in school and being happy as a result of my support and effort is a great motivation.”* Some agents were also motivated by their personal experience with child labour, such as a male agent in Ghana who said: *“It has always been my passion to support any course that seeks to protect children as I grew up in a community setting, my father being a purchasing clerk ⁴and a child labourer myself. So when this project was introduced, I saw it as a big opportunity and decided to jump on it.”*

“Supporting elimination of child labour is my greatest motivation. I am happy to be part of the course to support the dreams of children in my community.” (Female agent in Ghana)



The second most frequently mentioned motivation across agents in both countries was the **remuneration**. For many agents, it was of great value to have a small extra income at their personal disposal. One female agent in Ghana stated: *“[I] also save money from the allowance to be able to continue my education.”* Some agents said they appreciated the favourable working conditions and flexible working hours, as well as (depending on the project) in-kind support received such as bicycles.

⁴ *Purchasing Clerks* are agents who facilitate the purchase and quality control of cocoa from farmers on behalf of Licensed Buying Companies in Ghana.

Recruitment

How to reach women with the job advert?

In Côte d'Ivoire, we discussed with cocoa communities and agents how to make the recruitment of monitoring agents more gender inclusive. Firstly, respondents noted that the job adverts needed to reach and appeal to women, and women needed to be encouraged more actively to apply. Various ideas were shared on how this could be done, including, for example, announcements through community radios which could reach a critical mass of women, while at the same time preventing any doubts on the reputability of the job. Another idea was to communicate the job opportunity to the community chiefdom first, so that they could organise an information session for the public and, above all, emphasise the advantages of this work for women. Several female agents confirmed that they had heard about the job opportunity by word of mouth, and that someone personally encouraged them to apply.

Independent of the channel of communication used, respondents recommended that job announcements should explicitly mention the benefits that are particularly relevant for women, such as maternity cover, support to pass the motorcycle driving test, flexible working hours, etc. These elements will be discussed in more detail below.

What obstacles might prevent women from applying for the job?

Communities and agents in both Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire were asked about the obstacles that could prevent women from applying for the job. One important theme which emerged was the perception of the job as a **man's domain**, mainly because it requires physical strength and mobility.

“People perceive female field workers to have male component in them. They are hardworking but tough to be with.” (Male agent)

The following points were mentioned by community members and agents in both countries:

- It was a widespread perception that women struggle to drive motorbikes and that they were unsafe alone on the roads, especially during the rainy season.
- Some respondents argued that the average level of education was lower among women than men in cocoa communities, and that it was therefore to be expected that fewer women felt qualified to apply.
- The time available to take on paid employment was believed to be a stronger constraint for women than for men. Both men and women mentioned that responsibilities for household management and childcare (especially for young children) constrained women's participation in the labour market.
- According to some respondents, the job's working hours are particularly incompatible with daily routines of women who have childcare and household responsibilities. For these women, engaging in a paid activity outside the house was easiest between 9 am and 3 pm, whereas child labour monitoring visits often had to be scheduled after 3pm.
- The job was perceived by many community members as incompatible with maternity (including mobility constraints during pregnancy). While no cases were reported during the study, concerns were also expressed that women could be victims of harassment.
- Some female agents also mentioned that the role implied a reputational risk for them, as illustrated by one response by an agent in Ghana: *“They think I am dating the male farmers because I am a female interacting with farmer.”*
- Respondents also expected that some men would refuse to let their wives or daughters carry out this activity, related to fears around women gaining independence, spending more time outside the home, and having less time available for their traditional family responsibilities. Some community members in Côte d'Ivoire stated during focus group discussions *“a working woman is considered insubordinate.”* Indeed,

their partners' attitudes towards their new job was brought up as a challenge by female agents, as is discussed further below.

How can these obstacles be addressed?

Ideas were collected from local stakeholders (including community members and leaders, agents, cooperative representatives, and field staff involved in CLMRS implementation) about ways to address these obstacles and make the job more attractive for women. This question was more specifically addressed in the study in Côte d'Ivoire, given that Tony's Chocolonely was interested in testing a set of measures at pilot scale and integrating them into their CLMRS approach. Nevertheless, some of the suggestions collected in Côte d'Ivoire also echo those collected in Ghana.

The following suggestions earned widespread approval:

- Supporting women to learn to ride a motorbike and get their motorbike license.
- Within teams of agents, allocating farmers to be covered in such a way that allows female agents to work close to their residence, to avoid the risk of aggression or attacks.
- Granting additional flexibility so that women don't have to visit remote residences and farms during menstruation.
- Allowing female agents to be accompanied by men for certain visits.
- Offering salaries that compensate agents appropriately for the demanding job and allow them to hire someone to help with domestic work in their homes if needed⁵. In addition to the salary, offering the following benefits:
 - paid maternity leave
 - performance bonuses
 - health insurance
 - refunds for fuel consumption
 - maintenance of their vehicle.
- Organising awareness raising and information sessions addressed at, or involving, male partners. These sessions should highlight the financial contribution to the household, which was believed to be a convincing argument for partners with firm reservations.
- Encouraging families to share childcare and household responsibilities across the adults in the household, for example through awareness raising sessions, or couple's dialogue sessions, to break with traditional gender roles.
- Community awareness raising to prevent harassment and strengthen the feeling of safety.

⁵ Focus group participants in Côte d'Ivoire were asked to quote appropriate salaries for full-time employed CLMRS agents. Participants suggested a monthly salary of between **CFA 100,000 and CFA 200,000** (approx.. 150 EUR to EUR 300) plus bonuses, with equal treatment for men and women. These salary suggestions clearly exceeded the minimum wage of CFA 60,000. Some respondents said that an incentive-based payment scheme would be helpful to attract female agents.

Some of these suggested measures were discussed in depth by the ICI field team and Tony's Choclonely, shaped out in more detail and implemented at pilot scale in two cooperatives in the Tony's Choclonely supply chain in Côte d'Ivoire.

Adjustments piloted in two cooperatives to increase the share of female CLMRS agents

Based on the various recommendations made during the focus group discussions in the first research phase, the following actions were taken to increase the share of women amongst applicants:

- Displaying the CLMRS job announcement in public places frequented by women
- Disseminating the job advertisement orally to the different sections of the cooperative via the section delegates
- Announcing the job on the cooperative-owned community radio
- Financing driving lessons and getting a driver's licence
- Offering flexible working hours

Following these adjustments, the share of women amongst the newly recruited CLMRS agents increased substantially. One third of agents recruited in the two cooperatives in 2021 were women (3 female monitoring agents and one female cooperative-level CLMRS manager in one cooperative; and 5 female monitoring agents in the other cooperative). All of the agents took motor cycling lessons and obtained a driving license before they started the job in November 2021. The experience of these agents was captured in group discussions and interviews one year after they started the job, and is presented in the following section, along with feedback by female agents interviewed in Ghana.

Women's perceptions on mobility?



Of the 8 female agents recruited following the gender-transformative adjustments, only one already knew how to ride a motorbike before she started the job. All others acquired the skill after they had been recruited, and the costs for driving lessons, acquisition of driving licenses, and motorbikes for all agents, were covered by the project. While some women recalled that it was challenging at the beginning, all confirmed that they had gotten used to it and now felt comfortable riding a motorbike. They confirmed that it was the most appropriate mode of transport to reach the places they needed to reach to do monitoring visits. Some women nevertheless reported that during the rainy season, riding a motorbike on the local roads was quite challenging and demanded physical strength, but that did not deter them.

In fact, since riding a motorcycle was a requirement for the job, women revised their previous perceptions that motorcycling was by nature reserved for men. They discovered that women also had the necessary capability. More importantly, they sensed changes in the perception of other women in the communities who started to aspire to do the same. As one agent stated: *"Appetite comes with eating. And it is the motorbike itself that makes the job attractive."*

How do women perform in terms of numbers of visits?

In the two pilot cooperatives in Côte d'Ivoire, the distribution of farmers between male and female agents and the number of monitoring visits to be done, remained the same. The female agents covered on average the same number of farmers as male agents, and all, both male and female, generally covered farmers near their place of residence. According to the cooperative management, the female agents performed very well and attained or even exceeded their objectives in terms of visits to be done. At one of the cooperatives, the best performing agent for the month preceding the interviews was a woman.

One cooperative manager also stated that female monitors were more motivated and better organised than their male colleagues. They explained that this might be because the women had to reconcile their family obligations with the job, and that being in the job was an unfamiliar situation for women: *"Because the woman, when she is in a role with which she is not familiar, she makes more effort than the man...makes her do more in order to be able to meet the challenges."*

According to the cooperative directors, the share of women amongst the agents should be raised further.

The agents are formally employed by the cooperative, which means they are enrolled in the National Social Security Insurance (CNS) and have access to **maternity cover**. They can take compensated maternity leave during the last 6 weeks of pregnancy and the 8 weeks following the birth of their child. The cooperative managers said that in cases of an agent's maternity leave, the farmers covered by this agent would be attributed across the other agents.

In some instances, the female agents reported that they preferred to be accompanied by men when they did visits, either for **security** reasons or because the journey to reach some of the farmers was too long. They asked either their husbands or other family members, male CLMRS agent colleagues, or other male cooperative staff to accompany them. In other instances, the women would spend a night in the community where they had done a visit, if it was too late to return before darkness. It was reported that it was easy to find an arrangement for accommodation, typically at the house of the local cooperative representative.

What personal qualities does the role of a CLMRS require?

Agents were asked to describe as per their experience, the personal qualities the role requires. One theme highlighted by agents was the need to show **respect and empathy towards farmers and their family members**. Some agents in Ghana described this as a need to be *kind* and *humble*. These terms were often mentioned along with the need to be patient: “[The job requires] *patience to communicate with the farmers, good human relation and respect for farmers*”.

Agents in both countries also mentioned the importance of **interpersonal and communication skills**. Eloquence as well as solid reading and writing skills were important preconditions for an agent to hold successful awareness raising sessions on child labour, and to take farmers efficiently through the questionnaires.

“You should be respectful, know how to talk to people, be patient, know how to dress appropriately and be a good communicator.” (Female agent in Ghana)

Some agents also commented that the job required a good level of **self-confidence** and the ability to deal with an unwelcoming attitude on the side of some farmers. An agent should “*not take every comment they get to hear from farmers to heart and learn to play small*”. One female agent in Ghana expressed this as follows: “[it takes] *someone who is not shy, someone who is confident and bold to approach people or talk to people [...] Working with farmers, you will be meeting a lot of people who will sometimes say anything that comes to mind to you; some will be quite offensive but you need to learn to swallow it.*”

Another important theme to emerge was that an agent must be an **upright, trustworthy and a respected** member of the community, be **highly committed** to the job and willing to work hard.

These notions were mirrored by the responses given by farmers during focus group discussions. From the perspective of those receiving monitoring visits, agents should be **trustworthy and truthful**. They should be **tolerant and open-minded** people who are “ready to accept others' views”. Farmers also expect agents to be **patient**, to explain their messages in simple words, and to go through the questionnaires with patience.

To conclude, **trust, respect and interpersonal skills** emerged as some of the most important themes in desired agent qualities, highlighted by agents and farmers, both male and female.

What advantages do women have in this role?

Interpersonal skills

Agents and community members were also asked the specific talents and advantages they believed women bring to the job. These responses reflect the agents' personal perceptions of typical female attributes, in the local cultural and social context.

One important theme emerging in both countries was that women were endowed with a special ability to communicate and connect with farmers and children. They were said to be particularly *patient, empathetic and compassionate*. Several respondents in Ghana, both male and female, mentioned that women tended to be more **polite and tolerant** towards unfriendly respondents. In Côte d'Ivoire, some focus group participants **perceived women to be more honest than men**, with honesty being seen as an important characteristic of agents.

“We have patience and can tolerate any misconduct or loose talk from farmers. For women, this is more a natural thing.” (Female agent)

Community members in Côte d'Ivoire shared different views regarding **communication skills** held by men and women. On the one hand, men were thought to be particularly good at conveying messages. On the other hand, women were thought to be better at attracting the attention of the audience and motivating other people, which helped them mobilise the community and raise awareness. This was expressed in particular by community members who had experienced women in this role. Female respondents considered women overall to be the better communicators and advisors.

Special access to children

Regarding building relationships with children, several female agents in Côte d'Ivoire said the monitoring visits had led them to develop ties with the children, expressed by one agent: *“In addition to our own children, we have children at work...When you arrive in the village, they come running ‘aunty, aunty’ and hug you.”*

A good relationship between agents and children can facilitate child labour monitoring. One agent in Côte d'Ivoire stated: *“When a child is not happy, as a woman you can sense that.”* This quote by a Cooperative Director in Côte d'Ivoire confirmed the observation: *“Producers and child workers listen more to female agents. They interact gently with the child. The child feels as if with a mother.”*

In addition, **parents also said they preferred to entrust their children with a woman rather than with a man for the child interview**. Concerns for child safeguarding during interviews were expressed by farmers in the focus group discussions in both countries. Farmers said that agents needed to be trustworthy people; and several farmers confirmed that they had more confidence in a woman requesting to interview a child.

“Me being a woman, I am warmly welcomed in all households as compared to the male agents. Also, the farmers feel more comfortable leaving their children, especially the female ones between 15 to 17, with me to conduct an interview with them.” (Female agent in Ghana)

As a result, **interviews with children conducted by female agents may be more likely to take place without parents' interference**, leading to better data quality and more accurate reporting of children's work engagement.

How does the job of a monitoring agent drive women's empowerment?

Perspectives of cocoa farmers and communities

Community members and agents in both countries expressed that women in the role of monitoring agents were admired for their *courage, strength and boldness*. The female agents in both Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire reported that the feedback they received was overwhelmingly positive and encouraging. Most **women said that they were received with admiration and respect**. However, sceptical attitudes on the side of some farmers were also reported, such as by one male agent in Ghana: *"People doubt that women are strong enough to do this men's job"*.

In fact, we also saw that the positive perception of women in the role of monitoring agents has an important gender-transformative potential. Respondents in both countries, including both male and female agents, said that female agents were seen as **role models for girls and women** in the communities, that they set powerful examples for changing gender perceptions, which was seen as something positive by those who mentioned it.

"[Farmers] turn to praise these females. They also use them as examples for their female children to emulate." (Female agent)

Women in the role of monitoring agents are seen to break with cultural norms, which is viewed with suspicion by some, but seen as positive by most. This result brings to light an important additional benefit of women assuming the role of CLMRS agents, in that they help **to challenge cultural norms which restrain women's empowerment and independence**, and thereby make an important contribution to gender equality in cocoa communities in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire.

Perspectives of female agents

The female agents also felt the job had given them a sense of personal empowerment. They reported gaining a strong **sense of pride and self-esteem**, and feeling more respected and valued within their community since starting the job. They had built social capital by getting to know people. The job also allowed them to develop **interpersonal and communication skills, including the confidence to speak in public**. Overall, they were grateful that their role as agent enabled them to rise on an economic, social and intellectual ladder.

Several quotes by female agents in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire underpin this:

- *"Being a CF has given me the exposure to learn and meet a lot of people"* (Ghana)
- *"The job has broadened my mind"* (Ghana)
- *"In my social environment, there is the respect that work has put on us. Now people speak to you politely. You become independent."* (Côte d'Ivoire)
- *"Now I earn money. Thanks to the work, I have a responsibility, I have dignity, people respect me, I have had a lot of acquaintances."* (Côte d'Ivoire)
- *"I used to pass unrecognised through the village. Since I have become ASR [cooperative-level CLMRS manager], everybody knows me."* (Côte d'Ivoire)

Several agents in both Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire also said that the financial independence gained from earning a salary was very important to them:

- *"The job has given us value since we earn a salary. Also, we have learned a lot. So if tomorrow we find ourselves in a different situation, at least we have some knowledge, which is an advantage."* (Côte d'Ivoire)
- *"I am proud to be an agent. Since we started the job, I have a bank account, and that makes me feel proud."* (Côte d'Ivoire)

Some non-married agents said they perceived the job as a way of giving back something to their parents.

The job also raised ambitions and aspirations in some of the women to continue their professional career, for example, applying for the job of cooperative level CLMRS agent or other positions within the cooperative, or applying to ICI field positions, or even to work abroad.

Partners' perceptions of the job

Comments from female agents also suggested that the new role affected their partnerships in different ways. Some agents said that their husbands supported them to do the job, with some even accompanying them on their monitoring visits or to the cooperative. Others mentioned that their husbands initially had reservations about their new job, but eventually the contribution they could make to the family budget had helped to overcome these. A number of agents also mentioned that the job had made it necessary for husbands to assume more responsibility for the children during their absence, which the women appreciated.

A few agents, however, mentioned that their husbands or partners did not support them in their role, and even showed resistance due to jealousy or fear of change. Some said that their relationship had suffered as a result and in a few cases it had even led to a separation.

« My ex-partner works in [nearby town]. Because of the job, I did not go to see him as often, so he replaced me. In the beginning he was jealous [...]»

“My house turned into a hotel. When I go to work, my partner stayed at home. When I came back at several instances I found other girls in the house, so we are no longer together.”

The research shows that for most of the female monitoring agents, taking on the job led to many changes in their lives, and sometimes also in the lives of their families. While many of the changes were positive, in some instances they can have unintended negative consequences.

These experiences suggest that there is a need to take the potential negative implications into consideration during recruitment and in the training of female agents. It was recommended by the agents and ICI and Tony's field staff that partners should be involved in information sessions about the job, as well as in some of the training sessions. This would help them understand the nature and the benefits of the job, they would feel valued themselves, which would help to gain their trust and support. Also, mediation and counselling support could be offered to female agents who experience that the job is putting a burden on their family and partner relations.

Conclusions

The agents who implement the core CLMRS activities on the ground are the primary point of contact cocoa-producing households have with the CLMRS. They explain the CLMRS and its objectives to farmers, raise awareness on harm caused by child labour, and conduct interviews with farmers and their children to identify children who need support. Agents and their work are therefore key to the success of the system.

This study has collected the **perspectives of female and male agents**, and of **cocoa farmers in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire**, on women performing the role of CLMRS agents. The results **make a case for increasing the share of women in this role**. Women were found to bring valuable skills to the job, and they

derive great personal benefits from it. As women start to do the job, they deconstruct and challenge many of the reasons given as to why they may not be well suited to it. This is recognised both by the female agents themselves, and those around them, and the study suggests improving the gender balance amongst CLMRS agents can have gender-transformative power in cocoa communities. At the same time, the results also highlight the importance of removing barriers for women to access the job, in addition to extra support for those in the job.

The following key insights from the data collected are relevant for the design of CLMRS and apply in both Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire:

1. **Women excel in the role of CLMRS agents.** Female agents attain or even exceed their objectives in terms of monthly monitoring visits; they identify on average more cases of child labour; and they enjoy support and admiration from farming households for their courage, strength, and commitment.
2. **Women have special access to children: Parents prefer a woman to interview their child rather than a man.** Also, women are often able to make children feel at ease during interviews, allowing them to collect reliable data on children's work engagement.
3. **The job is a source of empowerment for women in cocoa growing communities.** In a socio-cultural environment where women do not have equal access to education, decision-making and the labour market, the job offers important opportunities for women to
 - develop professional and personal skills,
 - build social capital,
 - gain self-confidence,
 - and acquire financial independence.
4. **Female agents are role models for girls and women in the communities.** As female agents break with cultural norms and demonstrate that they are professionally competent, mobile and independent, they set powerful examples that can change gender stereotypes amongst cocoa farmers and their families. A better



gender balance in the running of the CLMRS can make an important contribution to gender equality in cocoa communities.

Accessing and performing the job can also be challenging for women:

1. **The job offer has to be communicated in ways and through channels that reach women and encourage them to apply.** Since female farmers are highly under-represented in cocoa cooperatives, recruitment activities have to reach beyond cooperative members. Also, the job offer needs to mention maternity cover.
2. **The job is physically demanding and requires mobility.** Travelling from one village to another and visiting farmers on their cocoa plantations can be challenging, especially during the rainy season, and is generally easiest on motorbikes. Few women in the cocoa communities in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire own and ride motorbikes, and many women do not initially have the confidence to learn. However, after receiving support to acquire a driver's license and a motorbike, female agents recruited under the pilot initiative quickly learned to drive and felt comfortable on their motorbikes.
3. **Some women find it difficult to justify the job with their partners and families.** Married women are expected to be fully available for childcare and managing the household. In some cases, partners felt neglected, and relationships suffered from the fact that the women acquired a new role outside the family. Experience showed that partners were more collaborative and supportive when they were fully informed about the job and its requirements, and when they were able to see the financial benefits for the family.
4. **Safety is a concern.** Some female agents prefer to be accompanied by men for certain visits.

Recommendations

From this research, we make the following recommendations on how to reach a better gender balance amongst locally based CLMRS agents, in order for the CLMRS to reach its full gender-transformative potential:

- **Job adverts** must be explicitly **targeted at women**. Possible communication channels to reach women are community radio stations, social centres frequented by women, postings in public places, and direct communication through community leaders. Female agents already in the job can support the recruitment of new agents by sharing their positive experience.
- Agents should be **supported to adopt motorcycling** when they start the job. Costs for driving lessons, driving licence fees, and motorcycles should be covered by the project.
- **Male partners should be invited to join information sessions** about the job, both during the recruitment and the induction. This will allow them to understand the job's requirements and ensure their support.
- CLMRS agents must benefit from **maternity cover**, either through public social insurance schemes or through private employer schemes.
- Employment contracts should include clauses to **protect agents during pregnancy**, so they are exempt from certain hazardous tasks in accordance with Ivorian law.
- All **employment benefits**, from maternity and pregnancy arrangements to flexible hours and funding of driving lessons, must be **communicated explicitly** during recruitment to encourage women to apply.

- Some of the measures recommended require additional budget for recruitment and training of agents, which must be planned in during project design, but which can be expected to translate into improved results of the CLMRS eventually.

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