

Getting her money's worth?

An Exploration of Women's Integration in the Palm Oil Value Chain and the Effects on their Household Food Security

Andrea Adriana Vos

University of Amsterdam

Abstract - Global palm oil consumption is on the rise and is expected to double in 2050. In Ghana, a growing number of particularly women are shifting from food crop farming to being the main producers of the country's palm oil in small-scale mills, raising the question how this affects a household's food security. While research has found that women are key actors in providing household food security and that increased cash income does not by definition guarantee the food security of smallholders, little is known about the relationship between the gender-specific integration into small-scale processing and its impacts on household food security. Hence, this research aims to unravel how the integration of women into the oil palm value chain affects their household food security. By means of semi-structured interviews, observations and focus group discussions with oil-palm processors, their spouses and institutional actors connected to the value chain, this thesis found that gendered incentives spur the increased integration of women in the sector as independent small-scale processors. Especially the independent nature of the work attracts women as they can combine the work with childcare, housework and trade. Simultaneously, this independence also leaves these women particularly vulnerable to risks within and beyond the oil-palm industry, including food insecurity. As women shift their attention from food crop farming to processing, they become more dependent on their insecure income to buy foodstuffs in an increasingly expensive food market. Consequently, this research found that while the processor's households still engage to some extent in food crop farming, the shift towards oil palm production considerably alters their access to food and can impede its availability during the year. Based on these conclusions, the author stresses the need to evaluate value chain integration not only by changes in income, but also with regard to its trade-offs within and beyond the value chain, including the impacts on household food security and the role of gender in the allocation of risks and benefits.

Keywords: Small-scale oil-palm processing, Food security, Value chain integration, Gender, Rural livelihoods, Ghana