

# FAMILY LABOUR ON COCOA FARMS

By

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## Introduction

Changes in agricultural production techniques including the introduction of new crops and the growing of crops for sale have been noted as affecting the demand for various members of the agricultural labour force in Africa. Boserup (1970) for instance associates a redistribution of farm work between the sexes with the change from hoe to plough agriculture and the introduction of cash crops. Allen (1965) discussing agricultural changes including the spread of cash cropping in Africa south of the Sahara, notes the emergence of a small class of capitalist farmers whose distinguishing feature is their dependence on hired rather than family labour.

Boserup's detailed analysis of women's role in economic development is probably the most comprehensive survey of possible changes occurring in the division of labour between the sexes as a result of agricultural changes. Apart from associating female farming systems with hoe agriculture and male farming systems with plough agriculture, she hypothesises that men play a more significant role than women where cash crops are produced and where land sales take place. She generalises that on farms growing cash crops the women are substituted for by hired workers while they themselves concentrate on the cultivation of food crops for consumption: where women do assist with the cash crops they are merely unpaid helpers on their husband's farms. Boserup notes however the exceptional case of the Yoruba cocoa farmers of Nigeria among whom the women

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are reported to demand payment for working on their husband's farms, and a number of studies which have shown that in fact women often complete more than half the agricultural work even in areas where cash crops are produced, because they frequently work longer hours and have a higher rate of participation than the men. Ottenberg (1959) reports a contrasting situation among the Afikpo Ibo in Nigeria where the women were growing the new crop, cassava, for sale leaving the men to concentrate on the traditional yam which was the prestige crop.

In this paper, data on the use and organization of farm labour, in particular women's labour, by a small number of cocoa farmers working at a farm camp in Brong-Ahafo, Ghana, are presented with a view to looking again at some of the possible changes which these previous studies have suggested follow the development of cash crop agriculture.

#### The division of farm work between the sexes in Ghana

For Ghana there are few detailed studies of work roles among cash crop producers. Addo (1971 : 35), reporting generally on the rural labour force notes that female labour is a stabilising factor in farm employment in many rural areas. Rourke (1971 : 17) however observes that Brong Ahafo is one of the two regions in Ghana where males predominate significantly over females in the total population, and presumably in the labour force. Wagenbuur (1972) reporting on the organisation of work among lime farmers in the Central Region observes that wives of male farmers work primarily on food crops which are not grown for sale leaving the men to concentrate on the lime trees. Independent cocoa farming by women has however been reported in Ghana. Beckett (1947) writing of Akokoaso, an Akim village in the Eastern Region, notes that there were 104 independent female as against 103 male farmers although the women had smaller farms than the men. Hill (1962 : 278) records that in New Juaben and certain native Akim areas about half the women were cocoa farmers in their own right.

There are then a number of somewhat contrasting reports on the role of the sexes in cash cropping. The main focus of the present paper is the contribution of women in particular to work on their husbands' farms rather than their role as independent producers. Data on actual labour inputs on cocoa farms over a period of 12 months in 1972/73 are used. Farmers were selected for study on the basis of their willingness to provide data over a period of at least 12 months for a detailed economic survey of cocoa farming. The total sample included 14 male and 3 female independent cocoa farmers operating 17 holdings comprised of farms of different ages. Although one of the females assisted her husband on his bearing cocoa farms, her major concern was the development of her own separate cocoa farms.

#### The composition of the labour force on cocoa farms

Details of the type of hired labour used on cocoa farms are available elsewhere (Rourke, 1971). Hired labourers can be conveniently be divided into temporary and permanent workers, the latter being those hired on an annual contract for cash and caretakers paid a percentage of the crop harvested in any one year.

Excluding the three women who farmed independently and the caretakers and annual labourers, the labour force on the sampled farms comprised 20 males and 21 females. If the hired workers are included the males are increased to 30. Although the wives of these hired workers did assist at times with the harvesting of cocoa pods for instance, they did not complete any major tasks on the farms on which their husbands were working and could not therefore be regarded as permanent assistants in any sense.

Only two farmers received any continuous help from adult offspring, one a daughter and one a son. Children of school age were mostly attending school in their home towns and therefore they also have little assistance on farms at this site. With the

exception of the two women working independently, the smallest work group of permanent adult assistants other than hired workers was two, comprising a man and his wife. Eight of the farmers were assisted by only one wife. The largest group of kinsmen working together consisted of five adults, a man, his three wives and a nephew. A number of farmers received temporary help from other kin, but as will be seen later, their contribution to work on farms was minimal.

Although all the wives were assisting on what might essentially be called their husband's farms, a number had received or were expecting to receive a portion of the land being cultivated, or expected to receive a separate plot which they themselves could develop. Only one farmer had actually given his three wives plots, in this case 2.2 acres, which they themselves were developing while also assisting their husband on his farms. Of the three women who were working independently, one was developing a 4 acre plot purchased on her behalf by her husband, and she worked only 6 days on the husband's bearing farms over a period of one year, whilst her husband worked one day on her farm. The second woman who had no husband was working on 4 acres of land provided by her son and she received some direct labour from him. The third had purchased her farm money earned by herself as a nurse, and had hired an annual labourer to be in charge.

#### Time budgets of members of the labour force

Actual contributions to work on farms can only be known when labour inputs are recorded over time. How many days an individual can work on farms is determined to a large extent by the other things which he or she does. Table 1 indicates how husbands and wives spent their days over 12 months.

One important feature of the farming activities at Dominase is the general absence of separate food farms. All the 14 male farmers had young cocoa farms on which food crops were grown for consumption. In some cases wives were sent home to plant food crops on land for which payment for use did not have to be made, and this partly accounts for the considerable amount of time spent away from Dominase by wives. In the case of husbands, three also had bearing farms at home, and part of their time spent away from Dominase was used for supervising work on these farms during cocoa harvesting. Beckett (1947) reports that women and children worked on average 58 actual days on the men's farms but does not note how many days wives worked on their own farms. The only other cocoa area for which detailed time budgeting data are available is that reported for Yoruba cocoa farmers in Nigeria (Galletti Baldwin and Dina, 1956). In this case, as already noted, wives are reported to be unwilling to work on their husband's farms without payment; whereas the men spent 83 percent of their working time on food and cocoa farms (197 days), their wives spent only 7 percent. Most of the wife's working time was spent processing food and fulfilling household tasks, 44 percent and 31 percent respectively (p. 298). Food processing is not a major feature of activities at Dominase, but work in the Eastern Region suggests that in older established cocoa areas it is a more important activity; we might therefore expect to find a different pattern of time budgeting in these areas.

The contribution of wives to work on the husband's cocoa farms, although on average lower than that of their husbands', individually showed greater variation and in some cases exceeded that of their husbands. The lowest number of days recorded as being spent by a wife on a husband's farm over a twelve month period was 28 days, and in this case the wife spent many months in hospital owing to difficult child birth; the lowest record for any man was 96 days.

The highest contribution recorded for wives was 201 days which was also the highest recorded for any male over the twelve month period. Wives in polygynous households contributed on average the same inputs of labour to work on husband's farms as wives in monogamous households.

Table 2 presents the seasonal distribution of farm work by husbands and wives at Dominase. Again, the amount of work completed by both spouses who actually went to farm is similar and is similarly distributed throughout the year with the lowest number of days worked appearing during the main cocoa harvesting season. However, the average per female who actually went to farm was greater than the average for the males from Nover to April, a time when most of the food crops are planted on farms. Again, the variation between the contribution of the women can be seen from the difference in the number of women who actually went to farm in any one month. In no month did all the females go to farm.

Table 1  
Time budgeting of male cocoa farmers and their spouses  
over 12 months

Activities	Actual total days	
	Males n = 10	Females n = 15
Cocoa farm work	149	121
Other Farm work	21	8
Other remunerative work	23	11
Other unpaid work	12	6
Sick/pregnant	21	56
Absent from Dominase	66	80
Rest days	71	83
Social activities at Dominase	3	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>366</b>	<b>366</b>

Table 2

Actual Days worked on husband's farm throughout 12 months<sup>a</sup>

	Total Days Worked	Husband's n = 11 Total Men Working	Average Days per Working Male	Total Days Worked	Total Women Working	Wives n = 15 Average Days per Working Women
May	146	11	13.3	150	13	11.5
June	136	11	12.4	149	13	11.5
July	188	11	17.1	192 $\frac{1}{2}$	12	16.0
August	168 $\frac{1}{2}$	11	15.3	176	13	13.5
September	175	11	15.9	174	14	12.4
October	101	10	9.2	107	13	8.2
November	79 $\frac{1}{2}$	8	7.2	115	12	9.6
December	91 $\frac{1}{2}$	9	8.3	163 $\frac{1}{2}$	12	13.6
January	135	10	12.3	91	6	15.2
February	122	11	11.1	110	11	10.0
March	138 $\frac{1}{2}$	10	12.6	170	12	14.2
April	119	11	10.8	158	12	13.2

a. Excludes 4 farmers and their wives who travelled to work as crop share caretakers over four months of the year.

Distribution of the labour force between farms and tasks

The type of work to be completed on cocoa farms varies both between and within farms containing trees of different ages. Within the first twelve months of cocoa farm establishment, 24 percent of the total time spent working is used for planting and harvesting the major shade crop plantain and other food items, whereas on farms aged 13

months until they are fully bearing, 5.3 percent of the time is spent on these activities, and less than one whole day on fully bearing farms (Okali, 1973). Most of the food crops planted on the farms included in the survey were consumed by the production group itself or taken to home towns for other family members. If women are still largely concerned with producing food for consumption we might therefore expect to find differences in their contribution to work on farms of different ages. The way in which all the various members of the labour force distributed their farm working hours between different farms is given in Table 3. Both spouses spent the largest proportion of their time on first year farms, similarly other female members of the husband's kin groups. Women did not spend as much time as the men on farms 13 months to full bearing and were to some extent substituted for by hired labourers on these farms, Wives in particular however spent a large proportion of their time on full bearing farms.

Table 3

Time budgeting of members of the labour force between  
cocoa farms of different age

Labour Force Farms	% Total time spent on farms							
	Male Farmer	Male kin	Wives	Female kin	Hired <sup>a</sup> labour	Other <sup>b</sup> farmers	Care- takers	Annual labour
MONTHS								
1-12	36.1	30.7	42.3	84.1	27.3	2.8	6.2	99.4
13 Months to Full Bearing	27.6	15.5	19.3	3.0	46.0	3.2	0.2	-
Full Bearing Farms (Farmer in charge)	21.4	43.5	31.1	12.9	13.7	31.4	1.9	-
Full Bearing Farms (Hired caretaker in charge)	14.8	10.3	7.3	-	13.0	62.6	91.7	0.6

a) Includes labourers hired on a daily basis and those hired on contract. For a detailed discussion of the types of hired labour available for work on cocoa farms see Bourke (1971).

b) Other farmers' refer to neighbours.

If we look at the way in which husbands and wives spent their time on particular tasks on different farms there is some evidence of task specialisation (Table 4). The work requiring most inputs on all farms was weeding, and both husbands and wives spent a large proportion of any farming time completing this task. On all farms weeding starts in May and from May to October is the major task to be completed. Similarly, during harvesting time on bearing farms there is little competition between tasks and both husbands and wives are able to spend a large proportion of any time spent on farms harvesting.

Table 4  
Percentage distribution of spouses' time between tasks on cocoa farms

Tasks	Husbands			Wives		
	A	B	C	A	B	C
Planting food other than plantain and harvesting	15.9	6.0	4.9	27.0	11.6	11.2
Planting Plantain	4.0	-	-	12.8	-	-
Planting Cocoa	31.3	5.2	-	16.1	11.1	-
Weeding	33.5	78.6	24.7	37.1	63.1	33.4
Land Clearing	15.3	-	-	7.0	-	-
Harvesting Cocoa	-	8.7	31.7	-	12.7	30.6
Other Maintenance	-	-	27.4	-	-	6.7
Drying Cocoa	-	-	11.3	-	-	18.0
Other	-	1.5	-	-	1.5	0.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

A Farms 1-12 months    B Farms 13 months to full bearing  
C Full bearing farms.

Table 5 presents the data in a slightly different way. Here the importance of different members of the agricultural labour force for completing various tasks is indicated. Extreme specialisation may mean that some jobs are not completed at all. However, few tasks are completed entirely by one type of labour, which is partly a reflection of the total time taken to complete a particular job, and partly a reflection of the extent to which certain jobs are seasonal. For instance on first year farms tasks involving planting food and cocoa are all completed within a similar time period. A large proportion of all work during the first twelve months is completed by members of the farm family although the situation obviously varies according to the size of the farm. The largest new farm cleared during the survey period was 8.5 acres, the average 2.2. With a peak labour requirement on all young farms of 13 days per acre in the three months of February, March and April, even excluding the work on food crops other than plantain, some additional labour is obviously necessary unless the family labour force is large (Okali 1973). Women were however more responsible for planting and harvesting food than were the men, particularly during this first year of planting, and on bearing farms, and the men for felling trees and planting cocoa. Farm maintenance operations other than weeding are also largely the responsibility of the farmer himself whereas clearing of new farms is almost entirely completed by hired workers. Looking at the division of labour between wives, husbands and other kin, it is only the less time consuming tasks which are particularly specialised.

#### Summary and Discussion

The main focus of this paper has been the contribution which various members of the agricultural labour force, in particular wives, make to work on cocoa farms. From the sample it was shown that

taking labour of relatives alone, both sexes were almost equally represented although when all members of the permanent labour force in the sample are taken together, male participation is greater than female.

Although Boserup (1970) refers to women working on their husband's farms, in the situation described here, some of the women do expect to receive part of the farms, albeit a small one, and both spouses spent on average a large proportion of their working time on the same cocoa farms, husbands 73 percent, and wives 83 percent, which contrasts strongly with the situation described for Nigeria (Galletti, Baldwin and Dina, 1956). It was noted however that there was considerable variation in inputs among wives and in their contribution throughout the year. If only wives who actually worked were considered, it was shown that their contribution in terms of actual days they went to farm was often greater than that of their husband.

Since the type of work to be completed on cocoa farms varies considerably over the life of the tree, particularly with respect to foodcropping, data on the extent to which various members of the labour force spent their time on particular tasks were used to investigate the contention that women spend time growing food crops for consumption while husbands concentrate on cash crops. From the data, it was demonstrated that although some division of labour between tasks was evident, particularly when a number of tasks had to be completed during the same time period or when tasks took little time to complete, there was considerable work sharing. Tasks which in any case required intensive labour inputs took a large part of all time spent on farms of all workers regardless of whether they specialised in other tasks. Although all members of the family completed a large proportion of work on young farms, women did tend to complete more of the work of food cropping. Finally, although hired labour was used on farms, there was no evidence to suggest that it was used as a substitute for female labour on cocoa farms as a whole. On bearing farms, hired caretakers substitute both for the farmers and their relatives.

Table 5  
Tasks completed by members of the labour force on cocoa  
 farms of different ages

Labour	Proportion of total work							
	Farmer	Male Kin	Wives	Female Kin	Hired <sup>a</sup> Labour	Other Farmers	Care- takers	Annual Labour
<u>Year One</u>								
Clearing	8.5	-	-	-	91.5	-	-	-
Felling	33.1	3.9	5.6	-	57.4	-	-	-
Burning/Apen	32.3	4.0	32.2	-	22.0	-	9.5	-
Planting Cocoa	46.9	8.6	30.5	1.0	3.7	-	6.6	2.7
Planting Plantain	15.9	2.2	64.1	4.9	0.8	-	8.8	3.3
Planting Food crops	22.4	7.8	46.9	6.6	13.0	-	1.8	1.5
Harvesting Food	19.9	4.0	50.0	19.0	1.8	-	-	5.3
Weeding	19.2	6.9	26.8	6.2	30.0	-	4.4	6.5
Making Traps	52.6	15.6	-	-	31.6	-	-	-
All Tasks	25.6	6.4	31.4	4.5	23.0	0.1	4.9	4.1
<u>13 Months to Full Bearing</u>								
Planting Cocoa	24.3	15.2	39.1	1.3	20.1	-	-	-
Planting Plantain	-	-	100.0	-	-	-	-	-
Planting Food	44.6	-	49.0	-	6.4	-	-	-
Harvesting Food	23.3	8.4	42.2	-	26.1	-	-	-
Weeding	23.9	3.2	14.3	0.4	57.9	-	0.3	-
Spraying	46.4	26.8	26.8	-	-	-	-	-
Other Maintenance	100.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Harvesting Cocoa	29.5	19.6	32.9	-	-	18.0	-	-
All Tasks	25.0	6.0	19.4	0.4	47.6	1.3	0.3	-
<u>All Bearing Farms</u>								
Planting Food	62.7	12.7	22.2	2.5	-	-	-	-
Harvesting Food	7.8	4.0	86.0	-	2.3	-	-	-
Weeding	6.6	6.5	11.2	-	24.5	0.6	50.5	-
Other Maintenance	59.3	8.6	18.1	-	2.9	-	14.0	-
Harvesting Cocoa	10.2	5.8	12.2	1.2	-	37.2	33.0	-
Drying cocoa/ carrying	9.0	13.8	17.9	1.0	0.4	1.2	56.7	-
All Tasks	12.1	7.6	14.2	0.7	10.2	13.4	41.8	-

<sup>a</sup> Includes labourers hired on a daily basis and those hired on contract.

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