What is ‘gender’?

‘Gender’ refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women. It differs from the closely related word ‘sex’ that refers to the biological and physiological differences between men and women.

Why is gender equality important for the UTZ Certified program?

Gender and sustainability are interrelated in many ways. In order to have the strongest possible impact in achieving sustainable production and sustainable supply chains, UTZ Certified believes that it is important to understand underlying social structures and gender roles. For example, it is important to understand who attends trainings and meetings, how tasks are divided and who makes the decisions about the resources within the household, because these social structures can strongly influence the success of sustainability interventions.

Understanding the constraints female producers and female workers are facing is also necessary to actively contribute to improving gender equality and to strengthen the position of women economically, in decision making processes and in society overall. The following section provides a brief background on gender roles and constraints in agricultural supply chains, and explains how those issues are related to sustainable production.

Gender aspects in agricultural supply chain – a short background

In many agricultural sectors and regions, there is a clear division of labor between men and women. Although not always visible to buyers, women are very much involved in the production of coffee, cocoa and tea. A recent study has shown that in the tea smallholder sector, women do most of the weeding, plucking and transport to the buying center and also help their husbands with land preparation, planting and pruning. In addition they also do most of the work on the subsistence crops and the household chores.

In the West African cocoa sector there is a similar division of labor, and women are also very much involved in post harvest processes such as drying and sorting.

Trainings provided in the agricultural sector are mostly attended by men, while a large part of the work on the farm is done by women. Information is often not effectively passed on to the women, meaning that the actual impact on farming practices could be limited. Also, a recent study in tea sector in Kenya showed that men are better informed about certification programs than women, which was explained by the fact that women usually do not attend meetings. In order for training and certification to be effective, it is very important that information also reaches women.

In West Africa, cocoa farms are increasingly run by women as a result of migration, HIV/AIDS, social conflicts and the large age differences between men and women. According to the STCP, an estimated 15-25% of cocoa farms in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire are owned by women. However, women are often not a member of a cooperative, which means that they have no access to the cooperative’s services such as loans and training. Cocoa from female farmers is often of lesser quality and usually sold to middlemen against a lower price. Also due to a lack of time, access to family labour and knowledge of good farming practices, female farmers depend more on hired labour.

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1 http://www.who.int/gender/whatisgender/en/
2 Opondo, Maggie and Herbert Mwachiro (2010) “A gendered value chain analysis of the tea sector in Kenya”
4 Opondo, Maggie and Herbert Mwachiro (2010) “A gendered value chain analysis of the tea sector in Kenya”
Apart from understanding gender aspects, a certification program also needs to have a good understanding of possible unintended consequences in order to design measures to combat them. In many of the production regions of the UTZ Certified program there is often also a clear division of budgets; men usually control the income from the cash crops, while women often control the income from food crops. This is important as certification could shift the focus within the household more to the cash crops. Also, the workload of women could increase, as certification requirements could lead to increased workloads in female dominated tasks (especially harvest and post-harvest activities).

In the hired labor situation, the issues are somewhat different from the smallholder situation, and more related to labor rights. Gender related issues are for example the right to take maternity leave (and resume the work afterwards), access to child care facilities and gender discrimination in hiring and promotion opportunities. Other issues that workers are facing are sexual harassment, a lack of job security and the requirement of pregnancy tests upon hiring.

When implementing a certification and producer support program, these are important issues to take into account. How to reach this increasing number of women who own or manage a farm but are not a member of a cooperative? How to make sure women, who are conducting many of the tasks, actually receive training? How to monitor unintended consequences such as increased workload for women? How to ensure that the discrimination of women in hiring and promotion policies is effectively audited and that the participation of women in management and decision making is promoted?

**How does UTZ Certified address gender issues?**

Certification can have an important catalyzing effect on gender issues. Especially in the hired labor situation, certification can play an important role to ensure that labor rights such as maternity leave and non-discrimination are respected. In promoting gender equality, UTZ Certified takes a realistic and pragmatic approach. We realize that certification alone (as a form of outside incentive) is not sufficient to make a long term and sustainable change in this area. As a parallel process, awareness raising and training is needed. UTZ Certified therefore supports such strategies by including them as criteria in the certification code and by working together with local extension services.

The UTZ Codes of Conduct prohibit discrimination in hiring, remuneration, access to training, promotion or other benefits. Equal work must be remunerated with equal pay, which the certificate holder must be able to show with wage records. The certificate holder should stimulate the equal participation of disadvantaged and minority groups within the company, particularly with respect to recruitment, staff and a committee membership. Forced labor is prohibited and spouses of contracted workers are not required to work on the farm.

Obviously, sexual harassment is prohibited. Women are entitled to maternity leave and additional rest brakes after childbirth. With regards to health and safety, pregnant or breastfeeding women are not allowed to handle or apply agrochemicals and workers and their families have access to primary health care, including maternal health care. Educational programs on HIV/AIDS, hygiene, nutrition and other issues that improve the general health of on-site living workers and their families are stimulated.

As tea production largely takes place on large plantations and women form a large part of the workforce, the tea code includes some additional requirements regarding gender. From the 3rd year of certification onwards, changing facilities must be provided (for men and women separately) to change clothing and protective outer garments. The certificate holder scores additional certification points by ensuring that workers have access to save transportation after overtime shifts and by providing convenient and affordable day care services for children of workers.

Contrary to tea, cocoa production for the largest part takes place on small scale farms. The cocoa code for group certification includes requirements on equal participation in the cooperative and equal training opportunities. The participation of women in training should be stimulated and the cooperative must organize awareness raising meetings on equal rights and opportunities for women.
As a parallel process of setting requirements in the Code of Conduct, awareness raising and training is needed. UTZ Certified supports such strategies by working together with other organizations in origin countries. Together with these organizations we are working on the active inclusion of women in training programs and assessing the possibility to set up platforms within organizations where women can raise issues and express their needs. In terms of effective auditing of gender issues, UTZ Certified requires that lead auditors are qualified for auditing social standards and have social auditing experience, for example with SA 8000. UTZ Certified is looking at ways to include gender in auditor trainings.

In order to better understand the gender issues, needs and opportunities in the different sectors, UTZ Certified conducts research and participates in workshops. For instance, UTZ Certified and Solidaridad, with support from Oxfam-Novib, have conducted a study on gender issues in the West African cocoa sector\(^1\). Also in the context of the Tea Improvement Program of the Dutch Sustainable Trade Initiative (IDH) an independent study was done on the Kenyan tea sector\(^2\). We use this information to continually improve our program. UTZ Certified is in the process of developing gender indicators to include in its monitoring system in order to monitor positive and unintended negative effects of certification on gender equality.

**Conclusion**

In order to effectively implement and promote sustainable production practices, it is very important to take into account underlying social structures and gender roles. Certification alone, as a form of outside incentive, is not sufficient to make a long term change; training and awareness raising are necessary as a parallel process. Through its certification program, the requirements in its code of conduct and its cooperation with local organizations, UTZ Certified aims to contribute to gender equality.

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2 Opondo, Maggie and Herbert Mwachiro (2010) “A gendered value chain analysis of the tea sector in Kenya”.