

"Choice and independence" for women in agricultural supply chains

LONDON: In support of International Women's Day on the 8 March, themed The Gender Agenda, Gaining Momentum, [Olam](#) - the agricultural supply chain and food ingredients company - has undertaken a unique survey into the social impacts of female employment in its cashew processing plants in emerging markets*.



Nearly 6000 women from rural communities in Côte d'Ivoire, India, Mozambique, Nigeria, Tanzania and Vietnam were asked to choose the single most important reason they value their job, beyond the obvious financial benefits. 36% identified that working "gives me independence and choices", 33% singled out the impact on "status and confidence", while 19% felt that "I learn useful information to take back to my family". Just 11% of respondents answered "none of these".

Commenting on the findings, Briony Mathieson, head of corporate & sustainability communications said, "As a global employer, Olam is well placed to help understand how opportunities in agricultural processing, rather than in subsistence farming, are supporting women in remote rural communities. These findings - although only an anecdotal snapshot - strongly suggest that these jobs provide much more than just a wage packet.

"The findings of our survey clearly reinforce that the value of working together in a sociable and supportive environment cannot be under-estimated."

According to the UN's FAO report, on average 43% of the agricultural labour force of developing countries is women**. It notes that "new jobs in high-value, export-oriented agro-industries offer much better opportunities for women than traditional agricultural work".

Income in the hands of women yields beneficial results

It goes on to state: "A very large body of research from many countries around the world confirms that putting more income in the hands of women yields beneficial results for child nutrition, health and education. Other measures - such as improving education - that increase women's influence within the household are also associated with better outcomes for children."

The research reflects Olam's commitment to creating positive impacts in the communities in which it operates. For example, processing crops, such as cashews, closer to where they are grown not only reduces financial costs but reduces carbon miles, retains economic value from the crops within the country of origin and creates more employment in rural areas, particularly for women. In its sourcing operations, and through collaboration with partners, Olam provides education and business skills development for women employed in 'traditional agricultural work'. These programmes, which put equal emphasis on men, help to improve crop yields, secure income and create greater capacity for self-sustaining communities.

Briony added, "It is clear that employment helps to build confidence and status among women, giving them choices and improving prospects for their children. If the theme of International Women's Day is gathering momentum though gender equality, our research suggests more focus on rural employment would be a big move in the right direction."

**The research was carried out among 5971 women in February 2013 in Olam owned and operated processing plants in Côte d'Ivoire, India, Mozambique, Nigeria, Tanzania and Vietnam.*

***United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Report*

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