

Women and youth in agroforestry

Why their inclusion matters: lessons from Ghana

In the cocoa sector in the Ahafo region, women and youth face specific constraints that shape how, where and whether they can engage in dynamic agroforestry (DAF). Their farming trajectories are influenced by insecure land access, heavy workloads, low income and limited room to negotiate and make decisions.

Women describe fragmented time linked to household responsibilities. Youth often do not own land, work under sharecropping arrangements and rely on irregular, seasonal income. Uncertainty around land and tree rights further limits their ability to invest in long-term agroforestry systems.

These differences do not indicate lower motivation; they reflect unequal starting positions that require differentiated engagement strategies.

Voices from the field

Farmers' experiences show that women and young people often emerge as drivers of agroecological initiatives, linking personal motivations with collective action. The following testimonies illustrate some of the roles and pathways through which they engage in agroforestry.



Aisha Kasim

cocoa farmer
youth worker

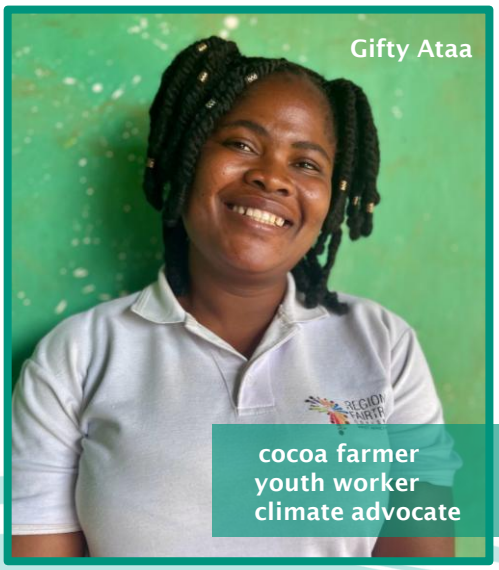
LEADING BY EXAMPLE

"Many women are interested in dynamic agro-forestry; they see the benefits. But most do not have land. It is not easy for a woman to obtain land.

Without land, you can't do DAF. You can't risk starting a plot on someone else's land; they can change its use any time.

Even when women have land, they often don't have time. You may have only half a day; you have a household to run.

This is why some women say DAF is risky. But as youth worker I show that we can succeed. I tell them, if you are prepared and willing to do the work, you benefit from it. I encourage women to start a plot by herself."



Gifty Ataa

cocoa farmer
youth worker
climate advocate

BUILDING SKILLS & CONFIDENCE

"If you want to make it easier for women and youth to take up DAF, you need to raise awareness.

As youth brigade, we sit down with the youth; we invite them to calculate their spendings and see if farming could work for them. We encourage them to set aside some money. We show what we do and invite them to join us.
The key is to spend time together, share information, listen, train. Training is key. It opens your mind.

I would like to create a training center where women and youth can gather and learn and create things together. So that they know that, as a woman, as a young person, you have the power to do something for your future. You can start yourself. Empower yourself. This is my biggest dream."

This factsheet was produced as part of the capitalisation study in support of the agroecological transition of cocoa farming in Ghana, 2026

What women and youth experience?

Field experiences show that women and youth can engage in dynamic agroforestry (DAF) even under less favourable entry conditions.

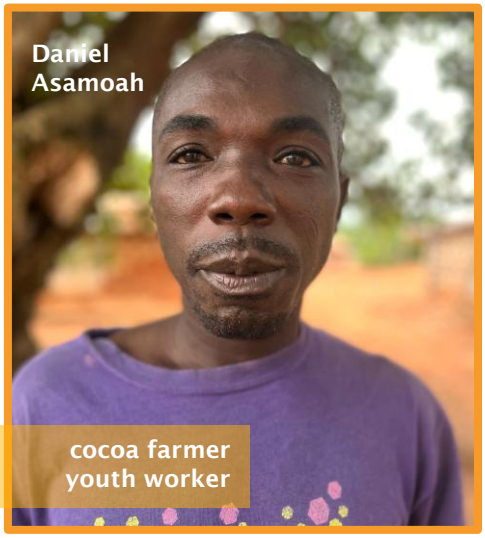
- Through participation in youth brigades, young people gain skills, income, recognition and often a first concrete entry point into agroforestry.
- As confidence and knowledge grow through collective training and field installation, women and youth gain recognition as DAF farmers and strengthen their voice in farm decisions.
  In some cases, this enables access to small plots to take up DAF.
- Training initiatives, such as the Women School of Leadership of Fairtrade Africa, strengthen these dynamics. They support empowerment, leadership, and awareness of agroforestry and help women and youth positioning themselves as farmers and leaders within their communities.
- Food for household consumption and initial income diversification are early benefits that further support engagement in DAF, particularly for women.

GAIN ACCESS TO LAND

"I am caretaker of my father's farm under a sharing agreement ('abusa'). It is not enough to feed my family, so I am always looking for other income.

When I joined the youth brigade, my father gave me a small plot to practice DAF. I planted fruit trees and vegetables. That is how I entered agroforestry.

Now I see the benefits: food, and in the future, timber to build my own house and a way to help others plant trees."



Local dynamics that sustain DAF uptake

Fairtrade cooperatives
- Trusted local structures that support collective action, create spaces for women and youth and help establish DAF in communities

Youth brigades (young men & women)
- Reduce workload, especially for weeding; provide on-the-spot learning and offer youth opportunities to build skills, practice agroforestry, earn income and inspire others
- Seen by farmers as a key ally in the early years and a local capacity to strengthen over time

Women and youth as drivers of local initiatives that can make agroforestry more accessible (start a tree nursery, run a pruning group) and that can support adoption of DAF

What is needed to enable women and youth to engage in DAF?

- Make DAF compatible with diverse life situations. Keep multiple entry pathways open to assure women's and youth's participation.
- Adopt a step-by-step approach aligned with farmers' trajectories that reduce labour and financial risks in the early years and allows farmers to test practices and assess what they can sustain.
- Start on small plots close to home and combine cocoa with food crops; this is particularly important for women, as it better fits daily rhythms and household responsibilities.
- External labour support in the early years to sustain regular weeding and maintenance remains critical.
- Secure access to land "with value" (good soil, existing trees); this is key for investing in agroforestry.
- Continue with practical DAF training and proximity activities (nearby demonstration plots, youth brigades, community-based training); it helps translate knowledge into practice.
- Provide training on empowerment and leadership, to strengthen women's and youth's capacity to act.

➡ Where these conditions are present, engagement with DAF becomes more anchored in everyday life.

Women and youth are central to agroforestry transition. Their inclusion is about making it possible for them to step in - and stay. By building from their realities and supporting them to overcome constraints, they can adopt DAF and actively transmit it to others.

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