



Learning into action: Recruiting and retaining female field agents

This brief summarizes practical action to improve the gender balance of staff in sustainability programmes. It draws on research findings and learning from the field about gender roles in cocoa communities in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana.

Why recruit women to do sustainability work in the field?

Men generally outnumber women among field agents in sustainability programmes in Africa. But it doesn't mean they should:

- **Women can help programmes go further.** Women have skills and opportunities allowing them to reach different population groups to men, especially children and other groups who can be hard to access.
- **Women can make programmes more effective.** Women are highly capable and outperform men in some tasks. For example, as monitors in a smallholder farming context, women identify higher

average rates of children in child labour than men, helping more children to receive support. Likewise, when monitors are women, children are more likely to stop engaging in child labour than when monitors are men.

- **Female field staff are role models.** Women employed in sustainability programmes are valued and respected in their communities. They help challenge the cultural norms which restrain women's empowerment and independence and can serve as role models for other women and girls.
- **When women benefit, so does everyone else.** Hiring women helps improve women's access to earnings, raises their aspirations and encourages men to share the responsibility for domestic work and childcare, benefitting children and helping combat restrictive gender stereotypes for future generations.

What works to help recruit more women?



Insist

Deciding to recruit more women is an effective means of doing so. When management supports the decision to hire more women, this makes it easier to make additional efforts when needed.



Invest

Addressing barriers to recruitment, such as providing additional training to new recruits, is an investment that pays off. If a better gender balance makes programmes more effective, some initial investment can lead to long term savings.



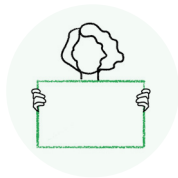
Spread the word

Proactively communicating about a vacancy, and the fact that women are encouraged to apply, works. Sharing vacancies through social centres, community-based women's groups, community leaders, local radio, and in public places such as markets, are all effective ways to reach more female candidates.



Address barriers

Identifying the reasons why few women apply and putting in place measures to overcome them, is effective. Providing driving lessons to new recruits is just one example of a strategy that helps greatly increase the number of female staff who need to travel by motorbike as part of their job.



Identify changemakers

Despite the barriers in place, some women already hold positions as field staff. Using these people to share positive experiences and advise on challenges can be helpful.



Be flexible

Globally, women do more work than men, and rural communities in Africa are no exception. Flexible working arrangements and flexible working hours are two ways to help combine employment with other responsibilities.

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Being a woman, I am warmly welcomed in all households as compared to the male agents. Also, the farmers feel more comfortable leaving their children, especially girls aged 15 to 17, with me to conduct an interview with them.”

[FEMALE MONITORING AGENT IN GHANA]



Practical measures to hire and retain female field staff

- ✓ **Provide and communicate employment benefits**, including adequate remuneration for demanding work, performance benefits, flexible working, reimbursement of fuel costs, and maternity leave.
- ✓ **Provide information sessions for men** to explain the role and ensure that women who apply have the trust and support of their families.
- ✓ **Allow flexible working hours** to help women combine employment with other work.
- ✓ **Support mobility** where travel is necessary to do the job, for example by providing driving lessons, protective equipment and access to vehicles.
- ✓ **Reach out to women.** Proactively communicate that women are being recruited and publicise vacancies via radio, social centres and in public places visited by women.
- ✓ **Encourage staff to work together** whenever working alone is perceived as risky for women.
- ✓ **Use other programmes to tackle gender inequality.** Cultural norms, discrimination, insecurity, unequal access to education, and gender-based violence are all barriers to women's employment. Addressing the root causes of inequality can help girls aspire to and access more career opportunities in the future.

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I used to pass unrecognised through the village. Since I have become a cooperative-level Child Labour Monitoring and Remediation System manager, everybody knows me.”

[FEMALE FIELD AGENT, CÔTE D'IVOIRE]





Want to learn more?

[Gender dimensions in the role of CLMRS agents](#)

[Spotlight on Child Labour Monitoring and Remediation System \(CLMRS\) agents](#)



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