

# Peru's "Castañeras" Brazilnut Women Concession Holders:

Brazilnut Concessions seen through the  
Eyes and Experience of Women  
Concession Holders from Madre de Dios,  
Peru

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Climate Change Division

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# PERU'S "CASTAÑERAS"

## Brazilnut women concession holders

BRAZILNUT CONCESSIONS SEEN THROUGH THE EYES  
AND EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN CONCESSION HOLDERS  
FROM MADRE DE DIOS, PERU



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# INTRODUCTION

**“Peru’s Castañeras. Brazilnut women concession holders: Brazilnut concessions seen through the eyes and experience of women concession holders in Madre de Dios, Peru”** provides an insight into the world of Brazilnut (*Bertholletia excelsa*) harvesting through interviews and surveys with more than 100 women.

Brazilnut harvesting is one of the few profitable forestry activities that have minimal impact on the forest. The Brazilnut business model itself cares for and protects biodiversity and the environment, so Brazilnut concessions are fundamental to the conservation of these forests as they give value to the standing trees.

There are more than 1,120 Brazilnut concessions, of which about 380 are held by women (34%).<sup>1</sup> As concession holders, women are responsible for product management and decision-making, leading work teams and participating in local organizations.

Few gender studies are available on natural resource management in Madre de Dios. As a consequence, a decision was made to examine the value chain of women-managed Brazilnut concessions in Madre de Dios that resulted in this publication. This document aims to show who the Brazilnut women concession holders, or castañeras, are, how they get involved in economic activities and

how they perceive the elements of the Brazilnut processing chain.

**Our research was conducted within the framework of the development project “Mitigation of deforestation in Brazilnut concessions in Madre de Dios, Peru” (Castañas Project),** in collaboration with over 80 Brazilnut concession holders. The project was implemented by Profonanpe between 2015 and 2019 and was funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) through the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). This research aimed at demonstrating whether the possession of concession title by women Brazilnut concession holders ensures their effective involvement along the stages of resource use and concession management.

The results below seek to contribute to gain a better understanding of the complex Brazilnut sector through an analysis of Brazilnut concessions held by women, and their role as forest managers and concession title holders.

1. Database of the Regional Forestry and Wildlife Management Bureau (GRFFS) updated in June 2017. Unpublished.

# 1. CONTEXT

Madre de Dios is located in southeastern Peru. It comprises three provinces (Tambopata, Tahuamanu and Manu) and 11 districts, with the city of Puerto Maldonado as its capital. Due to its high diversity, the department was declared “biodiversity capital of Peru” in 1994<sup>2</sup> and, currently, over 50% of its territory is a State-protected area (GOREMAD, 2016).

Changes in the socio-demographic profile of the region in recent years result from internal migration encouraged and strengthened by the southern interoceanic highway project and growing extractive activities such as gold mining (WWF, 2015). Mining, mostly illegal, together with an expanding agricultural frontier are the major drivers of deforestation across the region (GOREMAD, 2016). Between 2001 and 2016, more than 160 thousand hectares of forests were slashed in Madre de Dios (Geobosques, 2018).

Other economic activities focus on the exploitation of forest resources, including timber extraction and the collection of non-timber products such as Brazilnuts (DRA, 2007).

Brazilnut harvesting is one of the few profitable forestry activities that has minimal impact on the forest. Brazilnut concessions play an important role in the conservation of Brazilnut forests, as less deforestation occurs in and around them (Perales, 2015) thanks to a business model that protects biodiversity. Brazilnut is the only commercial nut in the world whose

activity directly involves local populations that depend on the direct use of the forest for their livelihoods (Guariguata, 2017). Due to its economic, social, ecological, and cultural importance, it was declared a flagship product of Madre de Dios.<sup>3</sup>

Of the more than 1,120 existing concessions, 34% are held by women. According to the information from the Regional Forestry and Wildlife Management Bureau (GRFFS), women manage Brazilnut concessions of between 40 and 3,800 hectares that together total over 337,000 hectares, and account for about 35% of the total concession area.

Women’s engagement in nut harvesting includes tasks considered as “complementary” or “feminine” such as taking care of supplies for work in the plot, looking after young children, food preparation, and post-harvest peeling Brazilnuts. However, as concession holders, they also perform other roles sometimes associated exclusively with men, such as managing the product, making decisions from harvest to sale, leading teams and managing concessions.

The activities carried out by women are essential for the sustainability and continuity of Brazilnut forests. However, gender inequalities persist along the production chain, reinforced by socio-cultural biases and lack of information that sometimes prevent the full participation of women in certain tasks such as “barriqueo (which) cannot be carried out by women because it is too harsh”<sup>4</sup>.

2. Law No. 26311.

3. Regional Ordinance N°0172009 - GRMDD/CR.

## 1.1 Brazilnut economic activity

### 1.1.1 Forests, trees, and fruits

The Amazon nut grows naturally mainly in the forests of the Peruvian, Bolivian and Brazilian Amazon (MINAM, 2014) where it is found in natural stands in association with other species (GOREMAD, 2016). Madre de Dios is the only department in Peru where Brazilnut trees are found in sufficient density to allow economic nut harvesting (MINAM, 2014), principally in Tambopata and Tahuamanu provinces (Perales, 2015). The surface area of forests populated by Brazilnut trees is approximately 2.5 million hectares, or about 30% of the department's land area (MINAM, 2014). On average, tree density is one tree per hectare (GOREMAD, 2016).



4. Example: "(...) For this latter task [Brazilnut shelling] women are hired to perform some of the few activities where they can participate, since the work of the barriquero [person who carries the sacks full of Brazilnuts], due to its harshness, is only performed by men" (MINAM, 2014).



The Brazilnut tree can live for hundreds of years, reaching over 40 meters and up to five-meter diameter (Guariguata, 2017). A slow-growing plant, its juvenile period exceeds 12 years (MINAM 2014). A woody coconut-shaped fruit, measuring between 10 and 16 centimeters and containing 10 to 25 Brazilnuts covered by a thick shell, falls from the Brazilnut tree (Perales, 2015). Brazilnuts are rich in proteins, amino acids, and micronutrients, such as selenium (MINAM, 2014).

## 1.1.2 Economic impact of the resource

Historically, Brazilnut harvesting has been carried out by local populations and is part of their social dynamics. Since the beginning of the 20th century, it has been a commercial exporting activity (MINAM 2014) after the end of the local rubber boom (Guariguata, 2017).

Currently, Brazilnut harvesting is an important economic activity for Madre de Dios and Peru at large, as a source of foreign exchange and jobs (DRA, 2007). Between 15,000 and 20,000 people (20% of the department's total population) are directly and indirectly involved in this industry which accounts for about 67% of households' annual income (MINAM, 2014). Madre de Dios's annual output of shelled Brazilnuts reached 3 million kg between 2006 and 2010, worth US\$14 million in that period (Quaedvlieg, 2015).



Peru has positioned itself as the second largest Brazilnut exporting country second only to Bolivia,<sup>5</sup> with foreign sales reaching 5.8 million kilos of shelled Brazilnuts worth over US\$64 million in 2018. However, imports of Brazilian and Bolivian Brazilnuts to Peru have grown exponentially in recent years due to high local operating costs (remoteness and in some cases river transport), low tree productivity and high losses throughout the production process (SERFOR, 2019).<sup>6</sup>

5. Responsible for supplying more than 70% of the international market.

6. Import of shelled nuts reached almost 5 million kilos in 2017, due to free trade agreements with both countries and demand from trading companies (SERFOR, 2019).

## 1.1.3 The Brazilnut activity



The Brazilnut harvest is a family activity. Nuts are collected, gathered, and crushed to obtain the fruits that are transported to the camp.



During post-harvest, the shelled Brazilnuts are dried, moistened and air-dried in warehouses. They are then peeled by hand or in processing plants.



Nuts are sold to processing or exporting companies, or marketed through Brazilnut associations, intermediaries, or collectors.

## 1.1.4 Legal framework, authorities and management documents

This publication concerns the Brazilnut forests located outside natural protected areas (NPAs), classified as Permanent Production Forests<sup>7</sup>, Brazilnut being a non-timber forest product. Brazilnut harvesting is regulated by the existing Forestry and Wildlife Law N°29763 and regulations thereunder approved at the end of 2015, which updated Law N°27308 approved in 2000.<sup>8</sup>

Harvesting concessions are granted by regional governments, to individuals or companies for a period of 40 years, renewable by concession title.<sup>9</sup> In Madre de Dios, they are granted by the Regional Forestry and Wildlife Management Bureau (GRFFS), the Regional Government's agency in charge.<sup>10</sup> Concession contract holders must demonstrate ability to sustainably exploit this and other resources (such as aguaje, chiringa, etc.) found in the concession area.

Access to a concession can be gained through various mechanisms, such as transfer of holding-rights, death of the initial holder, informal sale and purchase, temporary rental, etc. Although existing laws do not authorize their purchase and sale, this is a well-known practice in the Brazilnut industry. These arrangements are recorded in notarial agreements between the parties.<sup>11</sup>

Individual concessionaires must formalize their use of resources within their plots through various documents such a Concession Contract and a Management Statement (DEMA), among others.

## 1.1.5 Brazilnuts organizations

Concessionaires have created various civil society organizations. Currently, there is the Federation of Brazilnut Harvesters of Madre de Dios (FEPROCAMD) and around 20 associations, including the Association of Brazilnut Gatherers of Madre de Dios (ASETCAMD), the Association of Organic Collectors of the Amazonian Nut of Peru (RONAP), the Association of Brazilnut Gatherers of the Tambopata Pioneers Reserve (ASCART), and the Madre de Dios Indigenous Forestry Association (AFIMAD).<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, their organizational structure remains weak due to limited management capacity (SERFOR 2019).

---

7. In Brazilnut forests located within NPAs and their buffer zones, Brazilnut harvesting is governed by special regulations (MINAM, 2014).

8. See publication in El Peruano Gazette, July 16, 2000, and Supreme Decree 014-2001-AG.

9. Forestry and Wildlife Law 29763.

10. At the end of 2019, and through Regional Ordinance 008-2019, the Regional Government of Madre de Dios (GOREMAD) created the GRFFS to replace the Regional Forestry and Wildlife Directorate (DRFFS).

11. The prices of the concessions vary according to location, size of the concession and the number of Brazilnut trees found in the concession. They range between 30 and 60 thousand Peruvian soles.

12. Some of the existing associations are no longer active.



The regional Brazilnut Technical Roundtable brings together industry and government, and encourages the exchange of experiences to “seek alternative solutions to the sector’s problems”.<sup>13</sup> The Technical Roundtable is led by representatives of the regional government and representatives of the Brazilnut associations.

### 1.1.6 Supporting institutions

National and international cooperation organizations have shown interest in supporting Brazilnut economic activity for the benefit of the population and as an initiative for conservation and sustainable forest management, increasingly adopting a gender perspective to ensure equitable participation of male and female Brazilnut concessionaires. Some of these organizations are the Association for the Conservation of the Amazon Basin (ACCA), Cesvi, Rainforest Alliance and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which, with funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the European Union, for example, have fostered initiatives to organize and provide concession title, create enterprises, foster the certification and export of Brazilnuts, and strengthen associativity, among other initiatives.

13. Regional Executive Resolution 778-2015-GOREMAD/GR, dated November 3, 2015, setting up the Brazilnut Technical Roundtable.

## 1.2 Methodology used

The research fieldwork that is the basis of this publication was made between September 2018 and April 2019.

Quantitative and qualitative data collection

- **105 surveys**
- **16 interviews**
- **4 focus groups**

The analysis was based on collected qualitative information.



The methodological design of the research was **quantitative-qualitative** and its analysis used as a basis the collected qualitative information. The **surveys were semi-structured** and randomly applied to the maximum possible number of holders, after being validated. The application of the surveys lasted **40 minutes** on average.

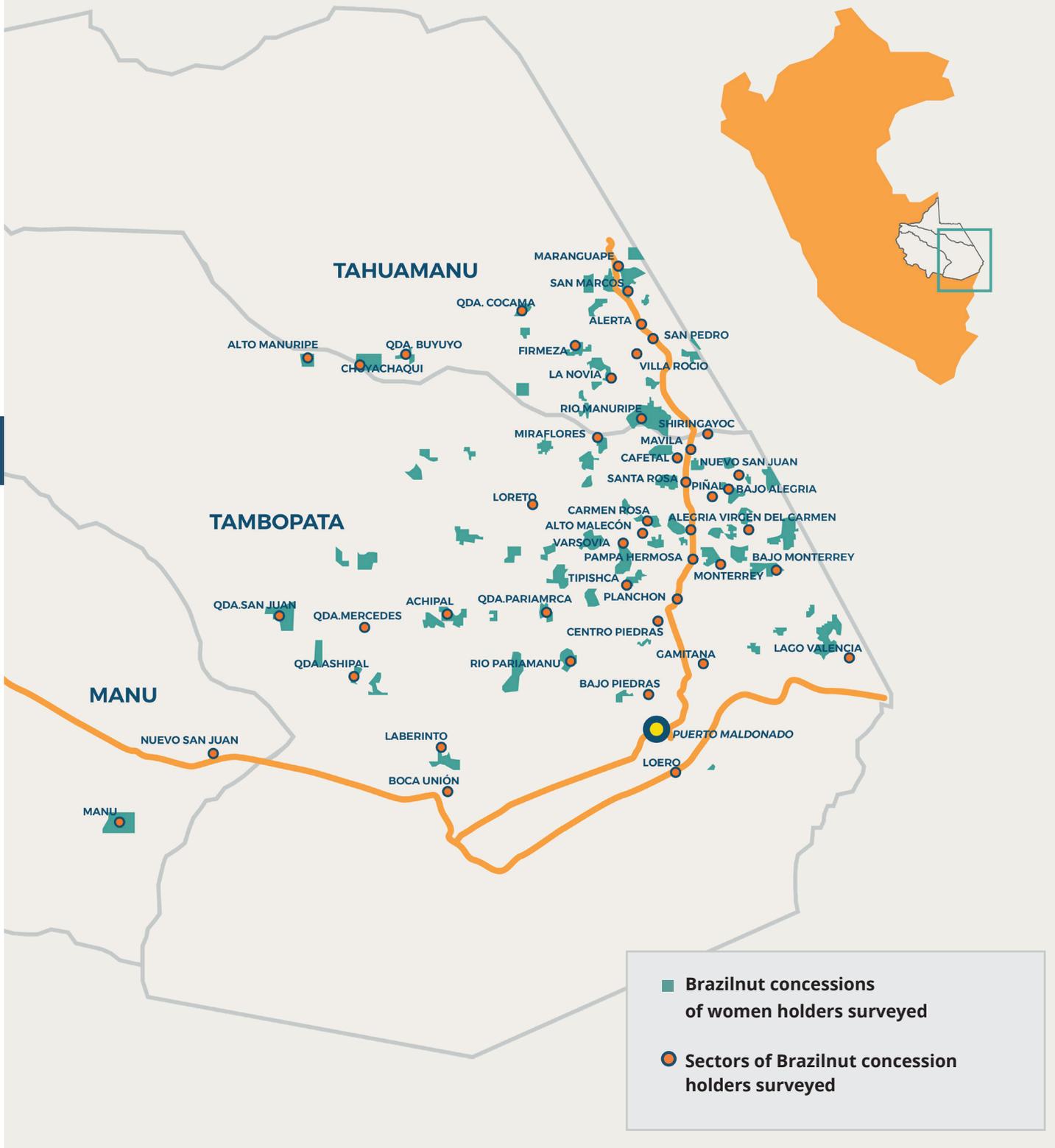


The **interviews were semi-structured and individual** and lasted between 15 and 45 minutes. In the **focus groups**, approximately 2 hours long, **20 women** participated in total and between 4 and 6 women in each meeting, who were in the same age range.



The **interviews and focus groups were recorded** and developed until it reached information saturation.

# Sampling map. Gender and Brazilnuts





The interviewees and focus groups' participants were previously surveyed and selected based on a preliminary analysis of the information collected, based on their profiles and experience in the Brazilnut activity. The research participants included **a group of beneficiaries of the Brazilnut Project**. Participants gave their consent for gathering information, registered using Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia official formats.

## 2. RESULTS

### 2.1 SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF BRAZILNUT CONCESSIONAIRES



*“(The Brazilnut) is the only activity I have known since I was little, largely because my parents gave me the opportunity. Yes, I like it and I live there (in the countryside), I like the activity, I identify well with it.”<sup>14</sup>*

16

For this woman, harvesting Brazilnuts is a family tradition.<sup>15</sup> Like this woman, there are many others with diverse stories.

**The 105 women concessionaires surveyed show a range of profiles.** Their ages range from 23 to 82 years old, although most were between 40 and 59 years old (51.4%). A large percentage are mothers (94.3%) and most live in the city (54.2%). Their trajectory in the Brazilnut world varies, from those with a long family tradition to those with no experience at all. In addition to Brazilnuts, some are engaged in other economic activities, including farming and small commercial activities, such as grocery retailing or restaurants.



*“(…) But due to my health I spend time in town and he spends his time there (on the concession). I look after the documents to make sure everything is in the right order, and looking after the children that still are with me.”*

14. The quotations included in this publication have been edited or redacted for readability, always respecting the original meaning and contents intended by the survey's interviewees.

15. Our research focuses on women Brazilnut concession holders. However, there are many more women involved in the Brazilnut harvesting chain, especially in post-harvest activities such as nut shelling, who are also affected by gender inequalities.

## 105 SURVEYED BRAZILNUT CONCESSIONAIRES DIVIDED BY AGE

		 CONCESSIONS	 MARITAL STATUS	 EDUCATION	 LOCATION		
<b>20 to 39 years old</b> (20 women)	Concession acquired between 1999-2016	Single	45%	Elementary	5%	Puerto Maldonado	70%
		Partner	40%	High school	25%	Out of town	25%
		Married	15%	Technical	15%	Not mentioned	5%
		Divorced	0%	Professional	45%		
		Widow	0%	No education	0%		
				Inc. high school	10%		
		Not mentioned	0%				
<b>40 to 59 years old</b> (54 women)	Concession acquired between 1978-2015	Single	33%	Elementary	28%	Puerto Maldonado	56%
		Partner	39%	High school	44%	Out of town	43%
		Married	19%	Technical	4%	Not mentioned	1%
		Divorced	2%	Professional	17%		
		Widow	7%	No education	2%		
				Inc. high school	2%		
		Not mentioned	3%				
<b>60 years or older</b> (28 women)	Concession acquired between 1950-2009	Single	25%	Elementary	57%	Puerto Maldonado	46%
		Partner	25%	High school	7%	Out of town	50%
		Married	7%	Technical	0%	Not mentioned	4%
		Divorced	11%	Professional	11%		
		Widow	32%	No education	21%		
				Inc. high school	0%		
		Not mentioned	4%				

Despite their individualities and different levels of engagement in this activity, most are fully involved in the Brazilnut economy, including doing the corresponding paperwork and management, and are present at each stage of the collection process, either alone, with the support of a family member or with functions delegated to a third party, but almost always under their watchful eye.



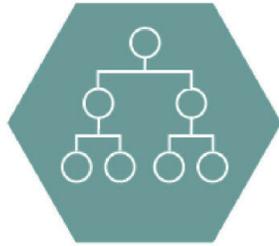
## 2.2 THE PROCESS OF OBTAINING THE CONCESSION

GRFFS's database<sup>16</sup> reveals there exist more than 1,120 Brazilnut concessions outside NPAs, 34% of which are held by women<sup>17</sup>. After the interviews and focus groups with 36 women, four ways to acquire and access concession titles were identified, namely through a) historical family operation, b) their (conjugal) partners', c) external opportunities and d) connections with professionals in the local Brazilnut administration.

16. Database used by the Castañas Project to prepare this research. Updated as of June 2017.

17. They cover a total of one million hectares. It is estimated that 57% of the concessions are located on the margins of a road or land access route, while the remaining 42% are reachable by river (SERFOR, 2019).

# OBTAINING A CONCESSION



## Brazilnut harvesting as a family tradition

CUMULATIVE %

40%

DISAGGREGATED %

60%

40%

- Inheritance/transfer from parents
- Acquisition/purchase to continue family tradition



## Influence of conjugal partner

CUMULATIVE %

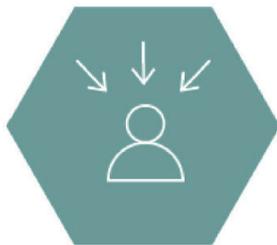
20%

DISAGGREGATED %

60%

40%

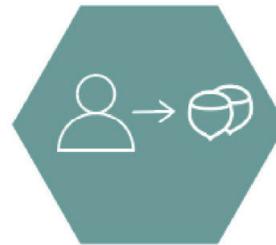
- Inherited from deceased partner
- Transfer in life



## External opportunities

CUMULATIVE %

28%



## From professionals in the Brazilnut industry

CUMULATIVE %

12%

Total CUMULATIVE %

100%

## a) Brazilnut harvesting. A family tradition

As with many other rural productive or extractive activities, Brazilnut harvesting is carried out mostly by members of a family unit. Many Brazilnut harvesters learn the trade from their parents at an early age, and strongly identify with this occupation. In fact, 40% of the interviewed concessionaires said they were influenced by their parents to engage in this trade.



*"It's the only activity I've known since I was little. It's my own thing. And it was largely my parents that gave me the opportunity".*

Out of this 40%, 60% received the concession by transfer or inheritance. Unlike elsewhere around the world where daughters do not enjoy the same rights as sons to inherit land<sup>18</sup> or where Brazilnut gathering is regarded as a masculine activity<sup>19</sup>, in Madre de Dios, women gain access to the land through inheritance or transfer seemingly without impediment.

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The remaining 40% of this group, following family traditions, sought to acquire a harvesting concession through third parties to continue the activity of their parents. The acquisitions occurred either directly or indirectly. In the latter case, the purchase was made by the concessionaire's parents and the resulting debt was paid by the present concession holder.



*"My father was a Brazilnut concession holder many years ago. A neighbor wanted to transfer his concession, so I became a concessionaire".*

18. According to the World Economic Forum, there are 34 countries where daughters do not have the same inheritance rights as sons. And in 35 countries, widows are vulnerable to their husband's family or their own sons.

19. Both from an internal and external perspective.



*"My mom and dad have been concessionaires since I was little. The opportunity came up and we [she and her husband] decided to buy a concession. We had money, they lent us some more and we acquired it seven years ago".*



*"My mother acquired the concession for me, but since I was a minor, she was my legal representative. When I became of legal age, I got my citizen documents, started working and with that I paid my mother".*

## **b) Acquiring a concession by partners' initiative or influence**

About 20% of the Brazilnut women concessionaires mentioned their concessions were initially held by their conjugal partner. Of these, 60% said that they took it over when their partner died. They then took on a leading role and responsibility for the concession, some without any prior knowledge.



*"The holder was my husband. He passed away and I changed the concession in my own name".*

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The remaining 40% acquired the concession because their partner chose to make the transfer during their lifetime as a token of affection or to have the possibility of managing a second concession, among other reasons:



*"Thanks to my husband, who transferred to me his Brazilnut concession because he loved me very much. Due to my poor health, I spend more time in town while he spends more time on the concession. That is the basis of all our work. I stay here longer doing the paperwork, putting things down in good order and looking after my kids".*



*"Through a transfer from him to me. Ever since, I have engaged (in this activity). He also has another concession. He manages (both concessions), but he tells me everything, how to proceed, what we have to do".*

20. The actual numbers of Brazilnut concessionaires receiving a concession by transfer from their partners may be higher than those represented by this sample.



*"My partner had his Brazilnut concession but he transferred it to me I started managing the concession".*

Even in cases of living partner deed transfers, couples continue to work together, sharing tasks, although the leading role is performed by the new concessionaire. Whether due to death or transfer, the new transferees declared that before obtaining the concession they had no previous experience in this trade, which made it particularly difficult for them to engage in nut harvesting.

### c) External opportunities

Twenty-eight percent of all holders joined this trade through the acquisition or purchase of a concession. Access to these concessions does not necessarily arise from previous activity in this industry, but rather responds to diverse emerging opportunities and personal motivation, from their own initiative, or third-party proposals that allow to increase household incomes compared to farming and which can be run side by side with small businesses. Moreover, venturing into a new activity is a way for the women to reaffirm their identity, become empowered and escape violence and mistreatment.



*"(...) The business was only his (he said), for him to have money to drink, for his drunkenness. I peeled nuts to save a little money to support my children, but I did not make enough to raise them. When we got divorced, the concession was in his name. I left him the farm that we had bought together. He abused me, he insulted me. He called me a w\*\*\*e who took away his concession from him. An engineer [from INRENA] helped me and I filed a claim. The engineers helped me to get the concession in my name".*

### d) Through connections with local professionals related to Brazilnut sector<sup>21</sup>

Five cases were identified of holders who do not fall in either of the previous three access modalities. Interviewees would have accessed Brazilnut concession titles through family members or conjugal partners involved in forestry activities or are linked to the government institution in charge of managing the concessions, and additionally show little knowledge of or interest in Brazilnut harvesting.

None of the five concession holders work the concession directly. One concession is inactive, two have been given under contract to neighbors and the remaining two are run by a family member or partner. Two of the five holders do not regard this activity as economically profitable due to low productive density and difficult access to the concession plot.

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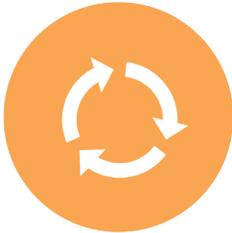
21. Government institutions involved in forest management.



The knowledge of these five concession holders about their concession is limited, as is their involvement in the concession and its management, for which reason these latter roles are performed by third parties or relatives. Therefore, they do not exercise an active role but rather an indirect or “nominal” title holding.

## 2.2.1 Exercising their entitlement

Depending on the degree of participation of the holders in the management and decision-making regarding the concessions, their concession may be considered:



### ACTIVE OWNERSHIP

**Active:** Holders are one hundred per cent involved in each of the value chain stages, decision-making and management of documentation, either independently or, to a lesser extent, in collaboration with their partners and families.

*"In the Brazilnut season, I will assure they are doing a good job. Any time, in the afternoon or in the morning, I'll be there".*



### PARTIAL OWNERSHIP

**Partial concession:** The holders maintain some control, but the main responsibility falls on family members or partners. This is due to personal limitations and conditions, such as being elderly, having health problems, having a low level of education and even being illiterate. Despite this, some have sought strategies to overcome these adversities to remain linked to the forest and maintain a certain degree of control over their concessions.

*"I can't read very well, I almost don't like reading, but there are parts that I read and I try to understand, and so I've learned a little. I know that I shouldn't give a power of attorney to anyone because they'll do bad things with my concession, and I'll look bad".*



### INDIRECT OWNERSHIP

**Indirect management:** From the legal standpoint, women concessionaires are responsible for their concessions but do not manage them in practice. They sign documents but do not show interest, control, or knowledge of activities in their concession. This type of arrangement can create a risk for the concessionaire in case of inappropriate conduct by the third-party management.

*"I'm not afraid, I don't flinch, I want to work. (The Brazilnut) is not only for a man. I am like a man, I think, and I am not only into Brazilnut. I also manage a fish farm, a pig farm, a cattle ranch".*

## 2.2.2 Importance of concession holding

Access to a Brazilnut concession encompasses a dimension that is more complex than the economic and administrative dimensions. The right to land is intimately linked to the economy, but also to political and social empowerment, access to health, to personal and collective well-being free from violence, as well as to the environment (Corts, 2016; Nobre and Hora, 2017). According to these principles, for the interviewed titleholders, access to a concession means:

**Autonomy:** In most of the cases recorded, the women Brazilnut concession holders become owners by their own decision. Some have been involved in the activity since they were little or young, have worked with their families, under contract or shelling Brazilnuts. They obtained their concession with the help of their family or through a loan, something that would not have been possible a few decades ago, when economic dependence and lack of real property or assets of their own prevented women from applying for credit. Their financial conduct was subordinated to their husband, father, or a male member of the family.



*"I have been a Brazilnut concessionaire since 1975. I worked for two years on a contract with someone else and then I bought the Brazilnut concession that I have now".*

**Security:** A concession provides security on two levels. (i) On the land area itself, because the plot belongs to them, and they can dispose of it as long as the established regulations for harvesting and ecological balance are respected. And (ii) job security and economic independence as it assures work and incomes for them and for future generations.



*"When my son was born, my mother acquired the concession and told me not to sell it because no matter what happened the land was going to be there. (Later) people came to me with money in hand to buy my concession and told me to go to Puerto (Maldonado) and set up my shop there with that money, but I didn't and told them that the Brazilnut was for educating my children. (...) The Brazilnut grove is a blessing, it's like a bank. Money doesn't rain on you but it drips".*

**Continuity and generational succession:** Those who have traditionally held a concession and those who have been granted a concession by their partners intend to continue their business and thus "care for the future generations". Knowing that the activity will not disappear but will remain in the hands of their descendants gives them peace of mind; 51% of respondents want their children to be involved in field and management tasks.



*"(The concession) was left to my husband by my father-in-law and then my husband (who passed away) passed it to me. Now it's in my hands and will leave it to my children, my grandchildren"*

**Education:** The Brazilnut provides an opportunity for access to education for the holders and their children. Without this activity, many of them would not have been able to study for lack of financial resources. They expect their descendants will become professionals without being disconnected from the Brazilnut:



*"It is the central activity; the whole family works on it and focuses on it. And everyone benefits from it. Brazilnuts gave me a job and have given work (to my family) and I have educated my children".*

**Violence-free life:** One of the interviewees was able to end a violent relationship that did not allow her to grow personally, financially or provide for her family. Making her own decisions, and her family's and institutional support (INRENA, former GRFFS) helped to take over the whole concession she held with her ex-partner. Today, she is fully devoted to the Brazilnut business and one of her priorities is to educate her children.

Despite remaining gender gaps,<sup>22</sup> rural women play a fundamental role in their families and their communities' development. For these women, Brazilnut harvesting is not only an economic activity, but also carries a personal and social benefit. It functions as a trigger for autonomy and independence, serves to guarantee access to education and allows for the sustainability of the forest and the Brazilnut industry over time.

## 2.3 PRODUCTION AND COMMERCIALIZATION: ROLES WITH THE BRAZILNUT ACTIVITY

Despite being a family economic activity, the Brazilnut harvesting is thought as a masculine occupation, even by the women themselves because of the social tradition and the existing patriarchal structure. Physical strength or ability to move freely in the forest are characteristics traditionally attributed to men that hide women's role in the rural world. Women are relegated to the care of the family, the home and to secondary roles in rural activities.

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22. Teenage pregnancy rates, illiteracy rates among women, rates of violence and limited access to land and resources, among other gaps.



*“A woman is not like a man when it comes to work. A man goes to the forest to check his concessions, the condition of the roads, of the camps. They check everything, but a woman can’t. Sometimes you can’t get around, you don’t even know how to ride a motorcycle. Maybe if you knew how to ride a motorcycle you would go check your concession personally”*

However, even women Brazilnut workers who see being a woman as a constraint in terms of working the field oversee their concessions. Some play an active and vital role in the field, combining household chores and field work to assure the sustainability of their economic activity. The more self-confident women Brazilnut harvesters participate in various tasks in the field without ever feeling that being a woman is a constraint.



*Even though it’s more a job for a man, women do it, even if it’s with support from others, and some alone, depending on their abilities. And it’s good because now we are all equal. Now women and men are equal, we don’t have to wait for a man to do things for us. Maybe when strength is needed you may ask for help, but that’s normal. When it comes to talking and thinking women are the same as men. They win us only in strength”.*

The three main stages of the Brazilnut harvesting chain are: (a) **harvest**, which includes the gathering and crushing of the Brazilnut pods and the transport of “barricas” or sacks with seeds to the camps or drying plants; (b) **post-harvest** when the drying and shelling of the fruit happens; and (c) **commercialization** of the product.



## 2.3.1 Harvest

Before December comes, concession holders begin to get ready to head for the forest. One of the first tasks is to manage the logistics of Brazilnut production. This mainly involves clearing roads and setting up camp. To do this, they must stock the camps with food to survive during the four-month harvesting season —December to March— and make sure they have all the necessary tools such as sacks, machetes, chainsaws,<sup>23</sup> fuel and raffia (rope).



*“You have to set the day you are going to leave for the plot and buy supplies, arrange tools and equipment you may need, like sacks, machetes, rope to pull trees, raffia (...), if you have a power bush cutter to blaze the trail, that too. A chainsaw is indispensable to cut fallen trees that cut roads. You have to clear them out of the way to let vehicles pass, organize your vehicle, fine tune the vehicle you are going to take to the forest, buy your fuel, organize your trip”.*

The presence of women concessionaires in the forest depends on whether they carry out other economic activities, whether they have families and small children to look after, their age and physical condition, as well as the degree of support they receive and require from their partners or family members. This does not change their knowledge of their concessions since most of them know how to reach their plots (89.4%) and know their neighbors in the surrounding areas (92.3%).

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**Prior to harvesting**, there are decisions involving the management of funds for the harvest and the hiring of personnel. In both cases, the responsibility falls mainly on the women owners. 57% of Brazilnut concessionaires manage the funds themselves and 42.3% hire the staff.



*“And then after that, in the bush if you have someone who knows your concession or else yourself, you direct (the harvest), talk to the workers and tell them how you expect them to do things. You tell them what you will pay (per sack) and how many they have to fill and then you strike a deal with them”.*

**Harvesting** is done by the women themselves with their partners and families, or by external personnel or their own relatives (extended family) who will collect and split the pods and transport the sacks. Regardless of who does the harvesting, most women Brazilnut growers consider that their presence in the field is vital for the sustainability and continuity of the activity now and in the future.

23. For clearing roads when large logs fall due to high winds or other natural phenomena.

In this way, they guarantee that nut harvesting is carried out in accordance with the provisions in their concession contracts and the requirements of the purchasing companies.

Close to 17% of concessionaires mentioned that they are directly and personally in charge of **organization and management** of the harvest, while 23.1% indicate they work with other family members.



*“When it comes to work, when I go there, I won’t leave until the harvest is over. I go, no question, I will get into it. And I will be there until I finish, I can’t drop out. I can’t leave things half done; I don’t like it”.*

However, a little more than 50% said they delegate monitoring to family members (26.9%), partners (25%) and hired personnel (5.8%). Even so, they do not stay on the sidelines, but are present in the field in some way or another. For example, they work on camp tasks, an activity that is equally important for the harvest.

Most of the female holders said that the activities in the fields are the hardest and the ones that require a man’s strength. However, there are some women who carry out some of or all the activities, from collecting pods to transporting the harvest, “some women carry and gather like men”.



*“Working is easy. As a woman, we can “barriquarear” (carry the “barricas” or sacks), we can break (the pods). Years ago, when I was in my twenties, I cleaned the varador,<sup>24</sup> I have cleaned, I have gathered, I have crushed”.*

When it comes to the **harvest itself**, the titleholders take charge of these activities directly in collaboration with their partners or family members, or they can hire “barriquareos” (people who carry the sacks), usually men. Hiring of men does not mean only a matter of strength and masculinity —“men carry more”— which even some of the holders challenge - “strength is just a habit and skill, I have seen many women ‘barriquarear’ just the same, and carry heavy loads,” but that also depends on their health, family responsibilities and age.

24. This refers to the cleaning of roads using a machete to remove branches or other debris that may cause harm to the person on the road. The main road -or *estrada*- is known as *varador*.

The hired **barrigueros** are external workers who in turn hire personnel for the collection, crushing and transport of the Brazilnuts. Payment depends on the market price of Brazilnuts.

Once **the pods are split**, the sacks are filled and taken to the camp by the barrigueros. The concessionaires check the condition of the Brazilnuts to ensure, for example, that the sacks do not contain pupae,<sup>25</sup> since the quality of the product determines the chances for sale; 58.1% of the concessionaires carry out complete or partial verification of the product, sometimes at warehouses or “payoles” where the Brazilnuts are spread out for subsequent drying and selection. Those who do not do this, harvest and immediately sell the nuts<sup>26</sup>. 93% of the Brazilnut growers know their plots yield, an important fact for selling.



25. Small residue of the fruit that should be discarded but is sometimes placed (accidentally or intentionally) in the sacks, to add weight.

26. Information obtained from surveys.

**Transporting** of the sacks is the last phase in the field and the one that requires the most physical strength. The role of the “barrigueros” is to fill the sacks (approx. 70 kg) and carry them on foot to the gathering point. The “barrigueros” say they need vehicles to carry the nuts more easily and faster using a motorcycle or a loader. However, some Brazilnut growers do not consider this request as valid and think the barrigueros just want more comfort.

Among the difficulties in **hiring** workers to carry out the described tasks, they mention the high turnover of workers due to the seasonality of the activity, their low availability due to the difficulty of access to some concessions, the impossibility of establishing long-term labor relations, and theft or mismanagement during harvest. Women add the risk of being alone in the camp and hiring only men to work for them.



*“One has to move around, walk and run many risks, even more so by women who are alone. Men have abused them, and they are a risk. Many women, or most of them, go to work with their whole family, and it is more complicated if the woman works alone. So, I recommend that you look for people you trust and never even think of working alone”.*



*“Sometimes it’s scary. When I was alone and was always by the roadside next to the Brazilnut field but thank God, nothing has happened. (...) You can work, but you need to know the people you work with”.*

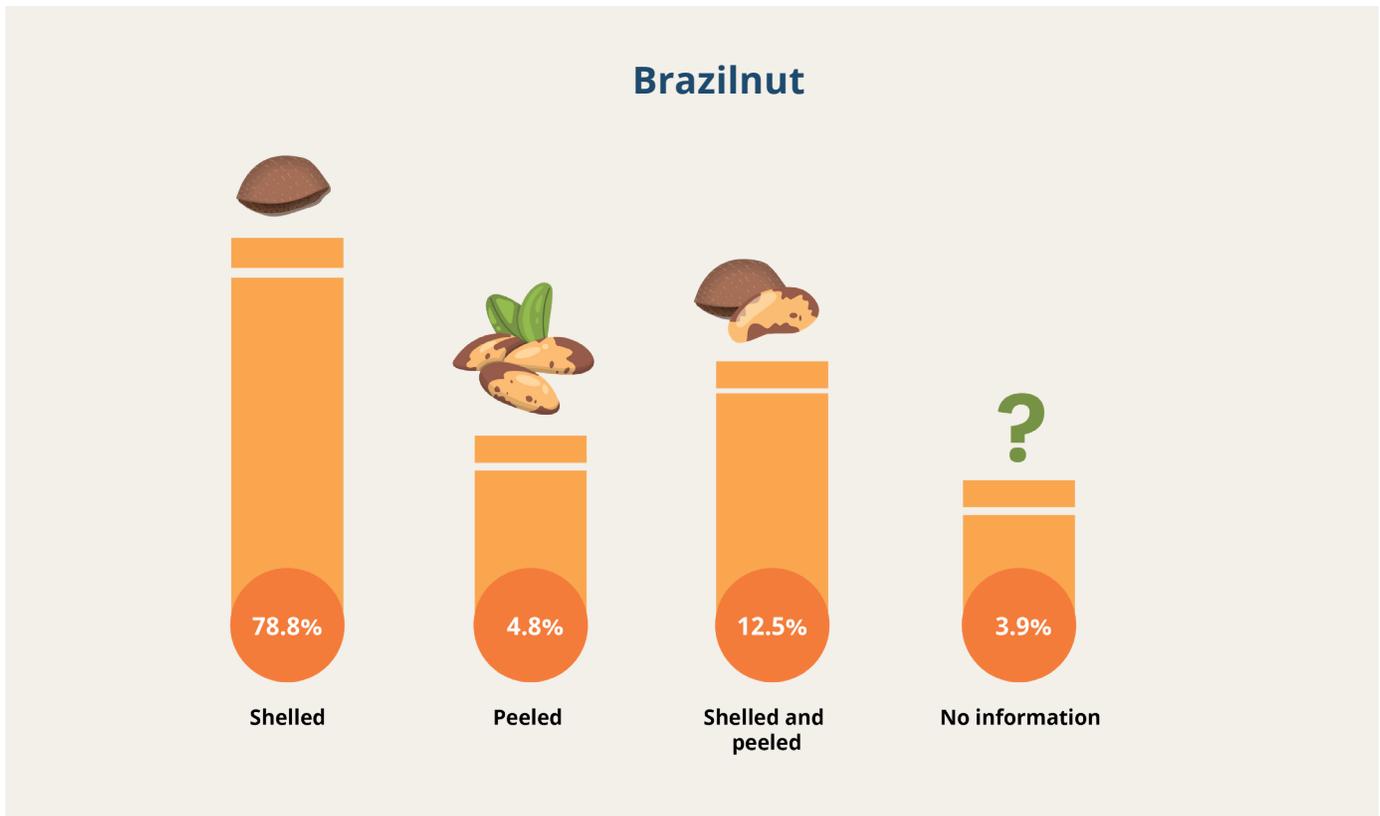
### 2.3.2 Post-harvest

It is the stage prior to commercialization and includes the care and handling of the product that determine what price it will fetch in markets.



*“I think that all Brazilnut concessionaires should pay attention to the handling, try to ensure that the Brazilnuts are not contaminated. In a shed, there are rules to follow: it must be a dry place with plenty of ventilation. A Brazilnut that is rotten contaminates the rest, it’s like a virus and that’s what our economy depends on, on us. Little by little”.*

In terms of handling, Brazilnuts can be kept in their shell or peeled. 78.8% of the holders surveyed indicated that they sell shelled Brazilnuts, 4.8% sell peeled Brazilnuts and 12.5% sell both. In most cases, the decision is made by the owner (48.1%) or together with her family members (33.7%).



In one focus group it was mentioned that shelling used to be a regular activity in the past, but now it is not a frequent practice. Shelling implies additional costs to pay the shellers, transport and logistic expenses (food, lodging, etc.), which many times the final price of the shelled nut does not compensate. The “yield (of shelled Brazilnuts) is higher” and the risk of product loss is lower. If they can get S/. 100 per sack of shelled Brazilnuts, they get S/. 180 per sack of peeled Brazilnuts, additional costs not deducted.



*“I don’t peel because I have to take them there (peeling place) and it’s much more expensive. Peelers are usually women. You must bring the food and pay them, not as much as here (in the city) because you spend on food and lodging. So, I have decided that it is better to sell nuts in shell because I get almost the same profit margin. When you peel them, the nuts are good but the companies cheat. Rather than selling for too low a price, I’d better sell them in shell”.*

Those who choose to peel Brazilnuts usually take what is collected to intermediary or export companies with peeling machines. However, Brazilnut concessionaires fear that they will be cheated on the quality or quantity of the Brazilnuts they leave behind.

One of the limitations of this research has been not to consider the other women involved in the different tasks of the Brazilnut activity, as is the case of the peelers. These workers are hired by the owners, the collection plants and the peeling or exporting companies. Currently, it is estimated that 80% of the workforce hired for the agro-industrial processing of Brazilnuts (mainly the peeling work carried out in the plants) is made up of women (SERFOR, 2019). Brazilnut workers do their job under very precarious conditions; the peelers do not have the economic backing and security provided by the ownership of a concession. They often work in difficult conditions where the income generated does not compensate for the intense hours of work, without being able to negotiate salaries or schedules because they are seasonal activities without any type of regulation or labor protection. In the Brazilnut sector, precariousness shows in almost all stages.<sup>27</sup>



*“It is all about the concession owners. What about the peelers? They pay us a pittance, we work hours and hours in difficult conditions (bad seats, etc.) and nobody looks after our rights. (...) It’s a chain, because the Brazilnut concessionaires complain that they spend a lot on labor, that now the barriqueros want to charge more, almost 50% of the sack (...)”.*

There is a **deep sense of unease on the part of the peelers towards those who hold the ownership of a concession.** However, **the relationship between holders and peelers has not been explored in this research.** Some concession holders do care about providing work for other women like themselves because they acknowledge the difficulties they face. This concern could be extrapolated to the peelers.



*“I always give them work. To mothers like me because you have to work. Not only men work, or are worthy persons and earn money; women think so too, and we can work and get ahead”.*

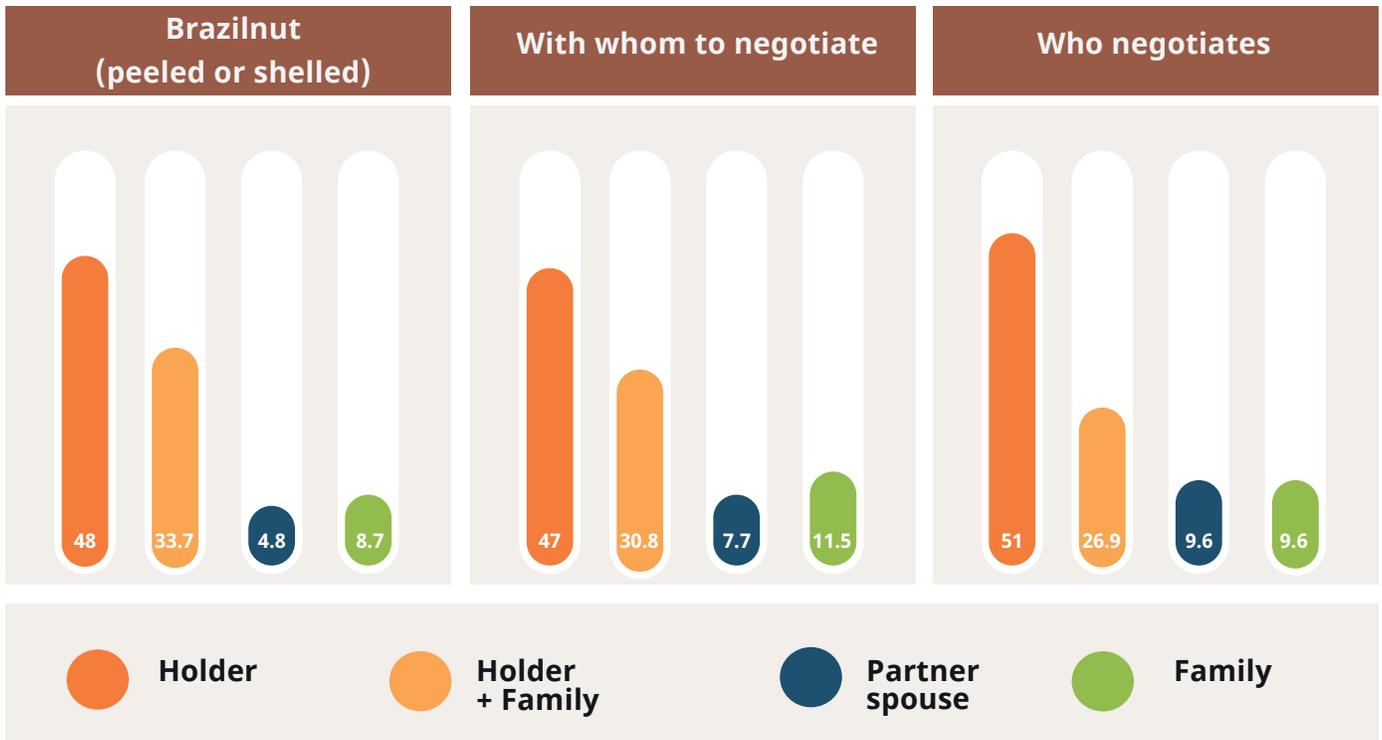
### 2.3.3 Commercialization

Once the Brazilnuts are in storage or at a gathering point, they can be commercialized, either in whole or in parts. Some Brazilnut concessionaires also choose to keep it in storage while they wait for better prices.

27. A similar situation is reproduced with the barriqueros.

The graph below shows the high participation of Brazilnut concessionaires in the different decision-making instances during the marketing process:

**Who makes the decision in the commercialization and negotiation of the Brazilnut? (%)**



As mentioned, Brazilnuts are usually marketed in shell (78.8%). For this, the first step is to look for a “good price” and companies that are willing to pay it. The main concern of the sector is the ever-fluctuating price. The challenge lies in finding a bidder who will give them a fair price, be honest and provide security in the contract.



*“(…) Look for the highest bidder, obviously. In my case, if I’m going to sell here (in the city) to a company, I visit all the companies to see who offers me the most. I don’t marry anyone but the highest bidder”.*

Determining a good price in the market is not an easy task. Being a new concessionaire is a disadvantage. Being a woman is also a disadvantage, since they do not have the time required for negotiations due to their responsibilities at home. Even so, 88.5% of the “castañeras” say they know the amount of the payments they receive per barrel from year to year.

Some companies use the “habilito” scheme which consists in granting advances to castañeras to harvest nuts on their plots. This situation forces the Brazilnut concessionaires to sell to a single entity and at the price imposed on them, limiting the access of the holders to better prices.



*“For commercialization we must look for companies, because the companies give us the loan, they finance us, they give us an incentive to be able to harvest the concessions. Then, based on that, we go in, we look for people to gather the nuts, and with that we will pay back, and keep the rest”.*

For those who work with the same company every year, the remaining task is to reach a good deal.



*“My mother [also a Brazilnut concessionaire] and I take care of the business. We deliver to a specific company (...) she has known for 15 years. So, if they have to pay more, they always pay more. Since my mother has been working for years with this company, if the company says, ‘I will pay you this much’ and she refuses and asks for a higher price, they will. She gets good deals, she’s special. Then I can sell my harvest at the prices she gets because she won’t lose money.”*

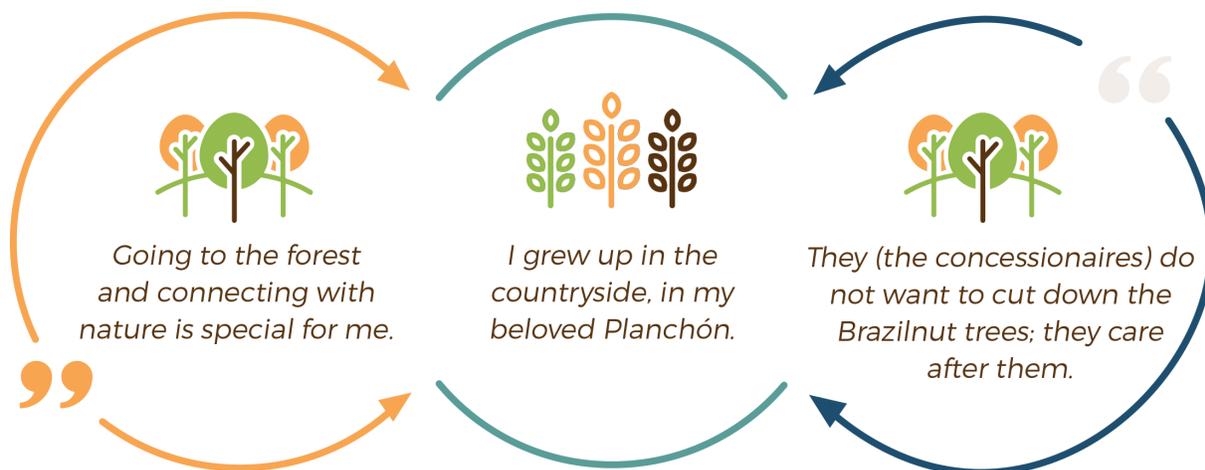
For the castañeras, this negotiation requires special skills that, according to some, are the domain of women, such as having “a strong personality”, the ability to convince and strategies to bargain without settling. Although these skills are not enough when the companies are not reliable or “are liars”. Sometimes, women Brazilnut growers do not know the market prices because the information does not reach the forest and some companies take advantage of this to make a higher profit. Faced with urgency and pressing needs, the Brazilnut growers have had to adjust to the changing and low prices they are offered.

Although this unequal power relationship can be reversed, they need social skills and information, as well as recognition as subjects of rights capable of looking after their own interests and those of their environment.



*“I set the rules as the owner of the product, as the concessionaire. I tell him ‘look, I’ll give you my product at that price, and you will write a document at that price’. And then he says to me ‘the price has gone down’. I replied, ‘and what do you want me to do? You cannot argue the price has fallen, I sold it to you when it was 450, so you pay me 450 (...)”.*

## 2.4 WOMEN CONCESSIONAIRES AND THEIR FOREST



Many of the Brazilnut concession holders have been linked to the Brazilnut and the forest from an early age. They went to the forest when they were children and engaged, as much as possible, in productive activities. In this way they not only learned a job, but also learned to care for and respect nature. The forest translates into a way of life that they want to preserve despite existing challenges.



*“Whatever happens, I don’t want to sell my Brazilnut field, even though they tell me that they are going to take it away from me or that there are other risks, I turn a deaf ear because I want to manage it while there is life in it. The forest is wonderful for me, it is my way of life, it is peaceful and it relaxes me”.*

Care and preservation are aspects that are integrated into the relationship they have with the concession area and the cosmovision of the forest. It affects them to see the illegal felling of trees or that the fruits of their concessions cannot be harvested.



*“When you have this job and you see your Brazilnut field going bad, by force you must work, even if it’s all by yourself. It hurts because it’s your own thing”.*

In short, the forest is “beautiful, but complex”. For the holders, it has life and spirit and for that reason it is necessary to treat it with respect, as if it was an old and wise person. Greetings, asking permission, making offerings, are protocols that they follow when they enter their fields to guarantee or establish a good relationship with the environment and to be worthy of its resources.



*But I have a lot of respect for the forest. When I go into the forest I greet it, I ask permission to walk on its trails. I’m like that, seriously, I do appreciate it a lot because it’s very dangerous”.*

More than one of the title holders play the role of guardian of the forest, worrying about all those illegal actions that take place within the forest, such as illegal extractive activities and the opening of new roads that, although they open access to the concessions, also attract invaders.



*“You know how I see it, it’s a matter of how one treats nature because it is the mother of the forest, and my brother has cut down wood for me. So, it is on him because I am a caretaker, I don’t even want a single cetico [a kind of tree] cut down”.*

## 2.5 CONCESSION MANAGEMENT DOCUMENTATION

Brazilnut concession holders must handle several documents to access, manage and maintain title to their plots. This documentation is highly technical and can be complex. Its preparation, review and filing to the relevant authority is the responsibility of the concessionaires, who have to interact with different professional and technical staff in the sector.

### 2.5.1 Basic knowledge of management documents

Most of the surveyed women holders claim to have some knowledge about the documentation that must be submitted to the forestry authority (89.4%),<sup>28</sup> as well as the purpose of one or more of the documents (78.9%). The most frequently mentioned are the Management Statement (DEMA) or the Annual Operative Plan (POA) (92.3%), the Forest Bill of Transport (GTF) (21.9%), the Annual Execution Report (IEA) (17.14%), the Concession and Approval Contract and the Intermediate Forest Management Plan (PMFI) (12.4% each). These documents are generally known but not in detail.



*“Of course, because one reads what they tell us there... and several things that we already know by heart, the DEMA, for example. I watched what my husband was doing and when he died, he passed the DEMA to me”.*

The **DEMA** is a document all know perfectly well, while knowledge of the rest depends on the degree or level of involvement of the concession holders in the management of their concessions, the level of difficulty of each, as well as the socio-demographic profile of concessionaires.

### 2.5.2 Understanding documents and procedures

Some titleholders have difficulties in managing and understanding documents due to factors such as level of education, illiteracy and the use of technical language in documents.



*“The illiterate man or woman has problems and now the challenge would be to direct them to their children, to young people who can support them. In most cases they (the concessionaires) are older people”.*

Inability to read, fill out or sign the documentation generates insecurity and reduces their confidence to “talk, ask questions or resolve doubts”. This leads to different degrees of dependence on partners, family members or third parties. Autonomy becomes proportional to the degree of education:

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28. They know one or more management documents.



*"In the case of documents, because you have to know them you have to ask for help. I have studied, but only up to the first year of secondary school, not enough to know what to do with the documents, there are things I don't understand. The good thing is that I know how to speak, and I ask what I don't know. They guide me and I do it".*

For titleholders with a basic education, the complexity of the technical language is a barrier that prevents or hinders them from managing documentation and affects their independence, as they have to resort to third parties to prepare the documents and help them interpret them. Delegating these responsibilities, totally or partially, depends on the bond and degree of trust they have with the people who assist them.



*"In my case, I have a consultant who helps me and prepares the documents. I trust him, so far he has not failed me".*

There are concession holders with basic and intermediate levels of education who play down the importance of education and rather place value on their experiences and abilities.





*“I do everything. The most useful thing is the experience and the information I have to prepare the documents (...) Knowing how to read is also basic, I find out about everything. My children also help me a lot, they have more education, but more than anything I’m giving them my experience. The most difficult thing can be to review the documents, to understand the documents, but you need to understand them”.*

Some concessionaires are willing to seek guidance from both forest authorities and specialist advisory staff, as they see documentation management as their responsibility as concession holders.



*“I was shocked by the documents the first time. I didn’t understand anything, but if you communicate, if you ask, if you go and say ‘how do I do it’ or ask for advice from the offices, (you learn)”.*

For concession holders with technical or higher education, the documentation is clearer, especially when it is accompanied by vital field experience.



*“My family has managed the concession since 1999. Before that it was in my father’s name. (Brazilnut harvesting) is a family activity; I oversee the documents because I studied forestry engineering”.*

### 2.5.3 Participation in preparing, reviewing, and filing documents

The three stages of concession documentation management —document drafting, review and filing— may involve fieldwork, desk work or both.

#### a) Drafting

Drafting involves making decisions related to costs and budget management, the choice of the technical specialist in charge of drafting and field work. The technical staff is usually the same year after year since in most cases a relationship of trust is established.

**Budget management and hiring of technical personnel.** 70.2% of the concessionaires participate actively and individually in budget management. 67.3% are individually in charge of hiring decisions. A smaller percentage (17.3%) manage and make decisions collaboratively with their family members.

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29. Engineers can charge for their work around S/. 8,000.00 for PMFI and S/. 3,500.00 for DEMA (information obtained through the survey).

**Accompaniment in the field.** Most of the holders (66.3%) delegate this task to their conjugal partner, family members or hired external personnel. Those who state that they are present in the field accompanying the technician individually (2.9%), in the company of a family member (26%) or a third person (2.9%) are about 30%. This could respond, in part, to the fact that culturally, field tasks have been assigned to the public sphere, which is the domain of men and validated by gender stereotypes due to the physical characteristics they require.



*"I have to let my husband enter my field, while I'm looking at all the documentation. He tells me 'I'm going to go check. When he can, he takes me [to the field] during the week and brings me back. But I stay here to prepare my documents, to get everything in order, the national registry, to get all the documentation. When I was healthy, I used to walk around with him, with difficulty and falling down, but I walked".*

## **b) Review, filing and follow-up**

Once the documents have been prepared by the technical staff, around 60% of the holders review the documents themselves or request support for this purpose before filing them with the GRFFS. The remaining percentage (40%) does not review the documents before filing; 83.7% of the holders are responsible for filing the documents directly and 60.6% do the follow-up themselves; 60.6% of the concessionaires said they do not know how to assure the documents are well done beyond certain basic data (personal data, concession data, Brazilnut production, etc.). Having information and knowledge about the procedures for document revision could avoid or reduce the cases of document fraud against the concession holders.



*I would like to learn how to check the documents. Once they tricked me and reduced the area of my concession with a forged document in which I gave up a few hectares. I realized it after some time, because my management document showed a smaller acreage than the real one".*

In general, in order to remediate this lack of knowledge, some of the Brazilnut growers interviewed and surveyed consider that the Government and forestry institutions should play a fundamental role in: (i) recognizing the role that Brazilnut growers play in forest protection and providing them with protection; (ii) providing training on issues such as contract management, forestry and concession regulations, documentary procedures, forest management and protection, etc.; (iii) streamlining paperwork; and (iv) acting in a timely manner in response to complaints related to damage to concessions.

## 2.5.4 The relationship with the regional forestry authority: perceptions

The holders' perception of the forestry institution during the documentation management process is not entirely positive. They recognize the importance of establishing a good relationship with the authorities for effective concession management. Most feel that they have a good relationship with the forest authorities (70.2%), while the rest have a fair to poor relationship.

According to the deedholders, good disposition is not homogeneous among the staff. Only some officials "treat you well and explain things", others do not. Good attention depends too on how one approaches officials. "If you speak nicely to them, they will help you immediately ". However, this does not guarantee efficiency or good paperwork. There are moments when the holders have to "get tough" to get approval for their documents.



"It's a waste of time having to go there, sometimes they keep you going in circles. I tell the people at INRENA (GRFFS): 'I'm not leaving until you pay attention to me. You need to tell me when to come so I won't waste my time.'" That's what I tell the lady because she walks you around and walks you around, and that's unfair".

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On a personal level, the relationship with authority is "a bit difficult" due to the attitudes and social skills of the staff, where there is an absence of patience, kindness and empathy.



"Sometimes they are not empathetic and can be abusive towards users".

At the institutional level, relations become complex due to high staff turnover, bureaucratization, and lack of transparency in terms of waiting times and outcomes of procedures.



"The constant personnel turnover within GRFFS hurts us. I end up carrying my product without a bill of transport to sell it".



"They are lazy and slow to do paperwork, care is not good, business hours are short (and holidays are long), and you have to treat them politely, so they don't mess with you".





*"I was 21 years old, and I cried at INRENA to get that document, I cried. (...) I had my baby, I went with him, and they told me come back on a given day' (they constantly postponed the date). Whether you want to or not, it's a waste of time to have to go there, to invest your energy. Sometimes they drive you mad, sometimes they lie to you".*

The surveys and interviews also found evidence of corruption and irregularities such as the issuance of illegal permits and forged signatures:



*"There are many irregularities, and expect you to bribe them, but they respect me because they know I'm not used to that. I like things to be straight and that's the way they must be. Yes, I know of cases where there are irregularities, I know them all".*



*"They have forged my bill of transport. But authorities accept and approve these forged documents."*

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Other constant elements in the surveys were complaints about abuse of power and discrimination due to social status, lack of resources and illiteracy:



*"The officials treat us badly, they humiliate us because we are humble, I struggle against that".*



*"Now they pay attention to me, they don't look down on me as before. My plot was grabbed by strangers, and they took away my land with a forged signature".*

And, finally, the women highlighted above all the lack of immediate response to complaints about land grabbing or illegal extractive activities. One of the respondents said:



*"Along the Pariamanu River there is a lot of mining, and we report it orally and in writing, but at the end of the day they do not care, they don't listen. And if they do listen to you, someone alerts the illegal miners, they hide and then threaten us".*

## 2.6 BRAZILNUT CONCESSIONAIRES AND ASSOCIATIVITY

Interviews and focus groups mentioned the importance of participation and “attending meetings”: “I have seen that in the meetings (of the associations) most participants are women”. However, it remains to be seen how much of this translates into actual involvement, decision making, information management, and performance.

### 2.6.1 Brazilnut associations and perceptions

The Forestry and Wildlife Law 27308 from 2000 was a turning point in the Brazilnut economy (MINAM 2014), by seeking sustainability in the use of the resource and facilitating the emergence of various state and private organizations working jointly. This happened simultaneously with incipient and weak associativity with limited management capacity (SERFOR 2019) due to inadequate internal management, mistrust and the few results that they have achieved as a guild.

To date, there are approximately 20 associations, including:<sup>30</sup>

- Association of Brazilnut Concession Holders of Madre de Dios (ASETCAMD)
- Association of Concession Holders of Organic Peruvian Amazonian Nut (RONAP)
- Association of Brazilnut Concession Holders of Alegría (ASCA)
- Savaluyoc Association of Brazilnut Concession Holders
- Monterrey Brazilnut Concession Holders
- La Novia Brazilnut Concession Holders Association
- Planchón Brazilnut Concession Holders Association

In this universe of associations, only 11 belong to the Federation of Brazilnut Producers of Madre de Dios (FEPROCAMD).

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30. These associations were mentioned by respondents because they are members of, have held a position in them or have heard *about them*.



*"I participate in RONAP. I was working with a company called Candela Perú<sup>31</sup> for 30 years or longer, and with the company it was agreed to create an association. They chose us and looked for us because we worked with them, we were about a hundred or so partners who agreed to form an organization. That's when it was born, with the participation of Candela who began to guide us".*



*"The Association of Brazilnut Concessionaires of Alegria (ASCA) started with 10 or 12 people and then we started many projects, we built our plant in Alegria and we moved forward. For almost 5 years I worked hard on several projects for the organization, and we created a company. I left for purely personal reasons, I had other responsibilities and bank loans to pay back, my children went to school, and no one has given me a penny. Going to Alegria and back cost me an average 30 soles and it was a waste of time".*

Belonging to an association has positive consequences for those Brazilnut concessionaires who join as it gives them the opportunity to work as a team and achieve benefits such as selling Brazilnuts at a better price or having support during times of economic crisis. Often, the success of the associations depends on the work of the leaders.



*"Being an association, we supported each other as a group, and we could sell the product together and access better prices".*

Not all the concession holders belong to an organization. 43% of the women surveyed did not feel adequately represented, 10% felt partially represented and 32.4% felt that they were represented, the remaining percentage (15.2%) did not answer. Dissatisfaction often stems from personal experience after having held a position of responsibility within these organizations. This climate of distrust is due to factors such as corruption, personal interests, inadequate and inefficient management, which is crucial for them because it directly hurts their business, for example, by not pressuring the authorities to control the irregular imports of Brazilnuts from Bolivia or Brazil.

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31. Alternative trade organization founded in 1989 and dedicated to the transformation and commercialization of organic products in value chains based on Peruvian biodiversity. In 2002, it supported the setting up of an Association of Gatherers of Organic Amazonian Nut of Peru (RONAP). Source: <http://www.candelaperu.net>



*"I know leaders who are the first to take advantage of any potential benefits and that created distrust. So, the Brazilnut concessionaires do not trust anyone and refuse to get involved if they feel that at the end of the day, they do not get any benefit".*



*"(The association) was a fraud and they took money from us concession holders".*



*"The leader has to make sure things get done. It's a matter of authority, because authorities don't do their job as they should, Brazilnuts from Bolivia, from Brazil are imported illegally..."*

Similar dissatisfaction is mentioned about the Federation, although to a lesser extent because the Brazilnut gatherers are less familiar with this entity. Those who are, think management is inadequate, and said that the Federation has not resulted in any benefit for the Brazilnut industry and that they are "forgotten" and "not guided" to manage their business.

## 2.6.2 Levels of participation

At the time of the survey, between 2018 and 2019, 51% of women concessionaires were members of their respective associations or the Federation, presumably 15% more than pre-survey participation (36%). This increase may be due to more women having concessions.



*"Now there is a lot of participation of women since there are many women who are now concessionaires. (...) Years ago, the great majority were men, now women also have that option. Women also participate in the associations and take up positions on the boards of directors".*

Some concessionaires actively take leadership roles, while others participate only at meetings (52% have intermittent to regular attendance). Other concession holders get involved without "formal" or recognized "participation", such as when they accompany their conjugal partner leaders and take charge of chores required as part of the association's work (like preparing meals for meetings). Despite the structural machismo of associations' leadership, some women have made their way into the local organizations, the Federation and the Brazilnut Technical Roundtable.



*“When I became a leader for the first time, the leaders were all men, and they all had their concessions along the rivers. I was the only woman along the road and for them it was a revolution. They would murmur, they’d say ‘what’s she saying, what’s she doing’. They told me later that they said ‘that lady should go wash the pots’. When later I started to manage things (take the reins of the association), to make them feel my presence and hear my voice, I gained their respect. (...) Now there are women, there are leaders, but you have to be able to read, reading helps a lot”.*

Although great progress has been made, there are still factors that preserve the existing gender gap and inhibit women’s more active participation in the associations or in leadership roles, in particular:



Fear of speaking  
in public



Education



Age



Time spent  
on care

Despite these factors, 24% of the surveyed Brazilnut concessionaires have held a leadership position as president, vice-president, prosecutor, spokesperson, and treasurer of their associations. There are Brazilnut concessionaires who have chaired an association for up to five terms.





*"[She's been in office for 4 years] First there had been several presidents and they had created a lot of problems. When I was elected, I said: 'I'm going to see what I can do'. Because to be president you need certain skills. (...) First I had doubts, but the majority of members thought the president should be a woman so I won the election. I was elected because I punctually attended all meetings, had no debts and paid back my loans, and I was always there. Like in a dream I accepted to be president. It was a responsibility".*

Similarly, they have held similar roles as lieutenant governor or sector chairperson and leadership positions in grassroots organizations such as mothers' clubs and the school breakfast committees (Vaso de Leche),<sup>32</sup> etc.

One thing that seems to characterize women concessionaires who take office is their initial doubt about their abilities. These are never decisions that are made lightly. Accepting a leadership position is a responsibility as concession holders and because of the emotional bond they have built with their respective associations. It also involves an additional workload, on top of care and household chores.

This experience provides them with learning opportunities and strengthens them as subjects of rights and decision makers. They encourage and teach future generations of Brazilnut concessionaires to get involved and think collectively for the common good. Holding a concession opens the door to resources and economic independence, as well as to a world of possibilities as social and eco-political subjects capable of taking up leadership roles.

### 2.6.3 Limitations and challenges

Among Brazilnut concessionaires surveyed for this study, 72.1% consider themselves capable or partially capable of holding a management position within an association. However, only 43.3% would be interested in participating, compared to a majority of 55.8% who prefer not to get involved.



32. Government social program to provide a daily food ration to vulnerable population groups, to fight food insecurity and improve quality of life.

The reasons are still conditioned by the established patriarchal system and existing gender gaps. The care tasks within the domestic units are not shared with their partners. The vast majority of female Brazilnut concessionaires are single or partnered mothers who must take care of their homes, rear their children and work on their plots, and some even have an additional job.



*"You do have certain limitations to participate in the associations because sometimes you are more of a mother than a worker. Sometimes you see that they don't attend meetings because they are at home with the children, but they have responsibilities [in the associations]"*

The work required in the associations is very demanding and unpaid, so rural women are at a disadvantage because they have less time and economic resources. It is not considered that their daily schedules are different than men's, and this has a direct impact on the level of their involvement. They are also hindered by where the meetings take place, travel distances, schedules or lack of childcare facilities, all of which adversely influences their participation.

In addition to these obstacles, they face the daily machismo and misogyny of some managers who do not hesitate to challenge or discredit their work as leaders and as mothers.



*"When I became a leader for the first time, the leaders were all men, and they all had their plots along the rivers. I was the only woman along the road and for them it was a revolution. They would murmur, they'd say, 'what's she saying, what's she doing'. They told me later that they said, 'that lady should go wash the pots'"*

In some cases, "authorization" from the conjugal partner or husband is required for them to hold a position on the board, infantilizing them and subordinating them to a male figure, denying them the right to have agency and decide for themselves.



*"I know that there are some Brazilnut concessionaires who repress their wives. I have seen many. Some boards wanted to appoint women, but they needed the permission of the (male) concessionaire who refused to grant it. But there are a lot of empowered young people ready to replace their older fathers. And now there are a lot of young women too, so I think there may be better opportunities for women in the future."*

Even so, the *castañeras* are not pessimistic; they realize times are changing. That the transition to the new generations opens a new chapter of more empowered women concession holders, with greater freedom to get involved and make decisions, and associations that are more open to gender equity, dialogue, and innovations.<sup>33</sup>



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33. Information obtained from surveys.

### 3. RECOMENDATIONS AND FINAL REMARKS

Access to a concession does not guarantee that the situation of women in rural contexts will be completely transformed or that gender equity will be achieved. But it can be considered a first step to be taken simultaneously with other complementary aspects such as access to information and documentation, management capacity building, political and associative participation, and rebalancing of family care tasks. The following are recommendations and reflections on some of these issues:

1. **Brazilnut harvesting is a family economic activity and as such, women play a transcendental role that must be recognized, strengthened, and encouraged.** Therefore, making the existing gender gaps visible is necessary to guarantee equitable participation in the Brazilnut sector and to consolidate the empowerment of women Brazilnut concessionaires.

2. **Many of the women concession holders identify with the forest and the activity they carry out.** For the concession holders, Brazilnut forests are more than a source of economic livelihood; they represent the past, present and future of their lives, their families and their communities. Through respect, responsibility, and care, they promote the conservation and sustainable use of forest resources.

3. **To value the knowledge acquired by the Brazilnut concessionaires in household chores that can be useful in decision making, negotiations and investment of revenues earned in the Brazilnut industry.** This has a direct impact on the sustainability of the activity, on family development and on the autonomy and economic independence of women concessionaires.

4. **The documentation for managing concessions is complex and bureaucratic.** Many of the concession holders have trouble in managing and understanding them due to the use of technical jargon and their poor formal education. To change this condition, it is recommended:

● Technical support and training in documentation management, contracts, forestry regulations and concessions and documentary procedures. Local offices could provide personalized guidance to concessionaires and organize training on specific topics.



*“We know how to read, but there are things we don’t understand. We know how to read, but we don’t know how to interpret what we read”.*

- Paperwork streamlining.
- Gender training for local forestry authorities to help remove socio-cultural barriers against women.
- Follow-up on complaints related to damage to concessions such as encroachment and illegal extractive activities. Women are guardians of the forest, and their observations can help curb these illegal activities inside and outside the concessions.
- Create efficient bridges of access and communication between official agencies and forest users. For example, simplify documentation, as well as use accessible, inclusive, and less technical jargon in forms that especially benefit concessionaires who have scant formal education.



## 5. Participation in Brazilnut associations and in political activity.

Their participation strengthens the political empowerment of concession holders as active and informed elements in the industry's decision-making process and in their communities. Likewise, associative participation strengthens their self-confidence, narrows the gender gap in the political sphere, and builds positive references for future generations of women Brazilnut concessionaires.

The greatest challenge lies in achieving co-responsibility in family care and household chores, bridging the gap in political participation, and achieving real empowerment. To this end, we recommend to:

- Adapt the times, places and calls to give priority to their attendance at meetings.
- Encourage providing childcare facilities during meetings so that having children does not become a constraint.
- Create safe spaces for participation, with friendly formats, devoid of hegemonic masculinity culture, where the intervention of women Brazilnut growers is encouraged.
- Encourage the commitment of male Brazilnut concessionaires to take on home care activities through training in gender, care and masculinities.
- Recognize women's experience in household management as a culturally learned and imposed characteristic and extrapolate these learned skills to association management.
- Train women in leadership and empowerment so that they can effectively participate in their associations.
- Strengthen associativity through continuity, which is to say, to prepare potential successors.



*"There's a weakness, both mine and the leaders': not preparing those who will succeed us. That's another very delicate issue to ensure continuity of management. One may know everything, but whoever succeeds you overnight would not know what is being done, who is who, where to go, how to do things. I think one has to prepare our successors".*

6. **There are national and international cooperation organizations that often support the work of Brazilnut concessionaires.** During the interviews and surveys, these are some of the Brazilnut concessionaires' recommendations to these organizations:

- Organize specific trainings targeted only to women Brazilnut concessionaires by age group, addressing specific and practical Brazilnut activity topics, from document management to marketing.



*"I went [to the focus group organized for this research] because I can go out and I liked it, I felt comfortable. It allowed me to know people and get something good out of the meeting. It's not just fun. (...) There has been sharing with other women who have other kinds of experiences, other ways of thinking and doing things. That's how you learn and that's good. That's the way it should be, right?"*

- Improve the calls for proposals so that they are equally accessible to all concessions, reaching all sectors.
- Create spaces for collective learning and interaction among women, to share experiences and ideas, to talk, highlighting the human and emotional sides, as well as the knowledge and management of Brazilnut and other forest resources.
- Organize trainings or field visits, including lunches for them and their families, reducing their housework burden to facilitate participation.
- Complement financial institutions and provide microcredits adapted to the condition of the concession holders, at low interest rates and payment schedules adapted to the seasonal nature of Brazilnut picking, especially at harvest time. One of the difficulties faced by rural women, along with their holding effective property title, is access to credit (Carmen Diana Deere, Susana Lasterria and Claudia Ranaboldo, 2011). For some of the women Brazilnut concessionaires, the problem persists, given that the government does not guarantee access to credit, hindering their economic, social, and personal development.



*"The financial institutions don't want to give us loans. Before we were told our concession could guarantee a loan but now they refuse to take it. (...) We need financial support, but at lower interest rates and for longer periods as we depend on harvests."*

- Organize trainings for male Brazilnut concessionaires on gender, care and masculinities so that they understand co-responsibility in household work and respect these tasks.

7. **One of the limitations of this research is that it did not delve deeper into two essential actors in this activity: the barriqueros and the Brazilnut women peelers.** Both men and women carry out tasks that are traditionally constructed with a gender bias and are located at the lowest end of the spectrum of precarious work arrangements. Their role should be considered in future research since, for example, the peelers have a higher vulnerability index because they are women and, in many cases, indigenous, have no labor rights and are constantly forgotten in the Brazilnut harvesting chain.

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