

# Why not rip it up and start again?

## Questioning gender inequality in the cocoa value chain

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The gender institution is one of the most taken-for-granted institutions in society. Inequality is a frequent, but not insurmountable, by-product of its institutionalisation (Lorber, 1994), residing in the gender order (Connell, 1987), organisational gender regimes (Acker, 1998) and importantly, every day practice (Gherardi, 1994; Acker, 1992). This paper details a case study of a long-term corporate social responsibility (CSR) partnership whose aim, to disrupt the gender institution within the Ghanaian cocoa value chain, has been frustrated. A number of businesses have begun to engage in what has now been called 'gendered CSR' (Karam & Jamali, 2013), chiefly through 'women's empowerment programmes' in value chains (Bexell, 2012; Prugl, 2015). However, little is known about the operationalisation of such programmes (Tornhill, 2016) and the different micro-level practices actors may use to disrupt, or maintain, the gender institution.

We identify 'Questioning Work', through which actors are able to reinvigorate gender equality efforts, as they theorise, reflect, relate and question the multi-layered gender institution cognitively, organisationally and occasionally, at the field level. We thereby show how Questioning Work 'makes' institutions, and their effects, visible. First, individual actors 'see' the multi-layered nature of gender inequality, and how the relationships between multiple levels of the institution are the core of continued inequality. Second, Questioning Work enables actors to collectively 'make visible' the gender institution and come up with new strategies for gender equality in the value chain. We therefore contribute to the theory of institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence, Suddaby & Leca, 2009) by not only showing how actors attempted to disrupt the gender institution but how this work relates to the type of institution actors are 'working' at. For ingrained and largely 'invisible' institutions such as gender, we argue that CSR efforts require individual actors to 'see' the multiple levels in which inequality resides and reproduces, in order to collectively 'make visible' and disrupt the whole.

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