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### **Gender and Agriculture: Gendered economic strategies: division of labour, responsibilities and controls within households in Nyeri District, Kenya**

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**Abstract:** In Kenya, a majority of people derive their daily livelihoods from agricultural activities. However, agriculture exhibits distinct gendered asymmetries, which exist in regards to responsibilities, controls and tasks, both within and outside of the farm. Recently, with the reformation of the Kenyan Constitution in 2010, formal steps have been made to ensure a higher degree of gender equality. Nonetheless, land ownership and formal income generating activities are still associated with men. In this study, we investigate the interrelation of gender roles and agricultural production within smallholder crop-livestock systems in Central Highlands, Nyeri County by combining natural and social science methods. The objective of this study is to link findings in the division of labour among sexes with data on gendered domestic economics, collected during a 10-day fieldwork through qualitative interviews, questionnaires, matrix ranking, nutrient flows and soil analysis. The analytical focus is placed on domestic economics and hence we seek to expand the understanding of how formal and informal institutions in terms of culture, norms, traditions and economic structures affect gendered relations and accesses to resources such as manure and cash. Our analysis suggests that the gendered division of labour together with perceptions of crops and livestock as being associated with either men or women constitute the current asymmetrical gender structures. Men and women's separate agricultural activities, responsibilities and controls create different domains of knowledge, which constitute their different positions within the household and the farm. Consequently, men and women adopt different economic strategies because of their uneven structural positions. We argue that men and especially women through engagement in saving groups enlarge their economic agency spaces.

**Keywords:** Smallholders, crop-livestock systems; gender, domestic economic strategies, resource control, domains of knowledge.

### **Introduction**

Our research is formed to understand the interrelation of cash-crops, subsistence crops and gender. This is connected to the social room for manoeuvre of men and women, where both social gender norms, formal and informal institutions is critically analysed. The nature of land ownership in the post-colonial era in Kenya is still inherently associated with men. This is deeply rooted in the implementation of the Swynnerton Plan from 1954, part of a comprehensive development program aimed at transforming agriculture into a market-oriented sector steered for export production (Kiriti & Tisdell 2002). It comprised registration of land holdings to male farmers and encouraged them to shift subsistence practices towards cash-crop production, predominantly coffee, which marginalised women since their land access and property rights decreased (Ibid.). Thus, land registration consolidated men as the *de jure* owners of land who resultingly began to control the coffee production (Ibid.). Consequently, women in the so-called coffee-society were relegated to subsistence farming, housekeeping and carers of their husband's land

(Ibid., Mbataru 2007). The imprints of the post-colonial policies are still visible in Nyeri County, with a gendered agricultural production and male dominated land ownership.

The changing circumstances surrounding the agricultural production in the post-colonial era have influenced the relationship between gender and land in both a cultural and economic sense. Our study is primarily based on literature by Mbataru (2007), Kiriti and Tisdell (2002), Johnson (2004) and Heyer (2006). The three latter converge on the cultural connection between men and cash-crops and women and food crops respectively, and how men and women in practice divide work and outputs unevenly. The consensus extends to women's marginalised position in relation to their large responsibilities for the family in combination with smaller economic options due to low access, control and ownership of resources. In contrast, Mbataru argues that women have gained more economic possibilities and more power in the domestic economy at the time when coffee prices went down, as they acquired some of the responsibilities that men had when coffee prices were high.

## Methodology

During a 10-day fieldwork in Nyeri County we gathered interdisciplinary data on the interrelation of gender and agriculture. In addition to organised semi-structured and group interviews, we used questionnaires and soil samples to gain access into intimate gendered spaces and households with the stated objective of investigating crops, labour division and soil quality.

Different methods shed light on diverse issues but new knowledge and synergy also arises from their intersection. To study the complexities of gender specific agricultural and economic strategies it was fruitful to link social and natural sciences as this provided a better grasp of local intricacies and a solid ground for data triangulation. Matrix ranking and Nutritional Flow Maps (NFM) complemented each other by presenting household tasks, flows of goods and their hierarchy. A further approach was to correlate soil data with soil perception maps, wherein we asked female and male farmers to map plots and explain their quality separately or together. Furthermore, we correlated soil quality and means to improve it with gender perceptions. Hence, questionnaires, soil samples and NFMs are not only quantitatively useful, they also provide qualitative data on people's behaviour, response and negotiations (Bernard 2011). Accordingly, observation is a constant practice, and in the collection of questionnaires, how respondents act and how the environment's influence them reveal new knowledge (Hansen & Andersen 2000).

## Results and Discussion

### Gendered crops and responsibilities

In line with Mbataru (2007), Kiriti & Tisdell (2003a, 2003b) and Heyer (2006) our findings reflect gendered differences in access to ownership and that crops are culturally tied to gender, aligned with the perception of the crop as either for cash or subsistence. Thus, as one male farmer explained "*livestock is the man's property, just as the woman is*", cash-crops and livestock primarily belong to men, while most subsistence-crops are controlled by women, but rarely owned by them.

Livestock is important to the household since both chicken eggs, cow and goat milk are used for consumption and sale. Further, manure produced by cows and goats is vital for the production of both cash and subsistence crops. Hence, napier grass, used for fodder, has an ambiguous purpose as it is not used for sale, but is cut by the woman for the cow, which belongs to the man. The continuum reflects a cultural categorisation where the perception is fundamental, rather than practice. We argue this, since household practices were not homogenous, while cultural categorisations were. For example, some crops were both cash and subsistence crops, but were perceived only as subsistence crops because of the low price. An example is maize, often sold by women, but primarily grown for household consumption.

*"It is so little. It's unimportant, so he just let me deal with it".*

Hence, as this women stated maize has a low value, which leads it to be perceived as a female's crop, even though much of it is sold. The gendered average perception of crops and livestock is illustrated in Figure 4.1.

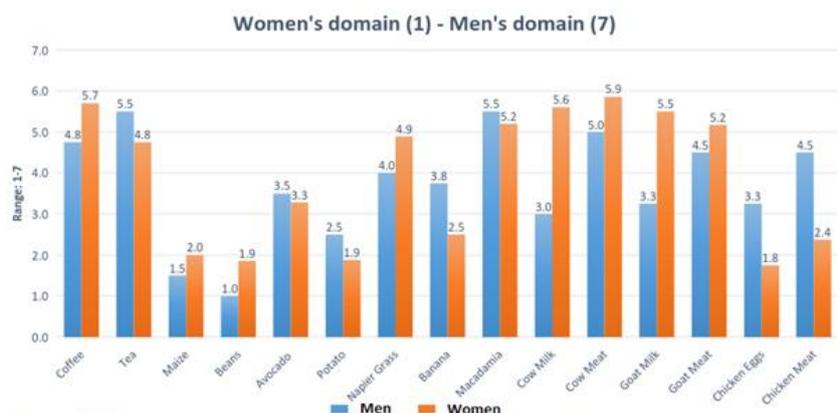


Figure 4.1 Matrix ranking of the average gendered perception about the gendered domain of a crop.

### Gendered access: resources, rights and knowledge

Each household has access to limited resources, therefore the allocation of them is of critical importance for its survival. Men value cash crops higher as destinations for manure and often neglect food crops. Women apply it more equally between all the crops, partly because they realise the income potential of the food crops. This implies a connection between control of crops and application of manure as we have found in the NFMs. Our example shows that women sell more varieties of agricultural products than men. In fact, husbands were not aware of all women's economic activities. A complex system of perceptions of responsibilities as well as rights lead to an asymmetry in the way men and women handle their farming production (See figure 4,3). A consequence is that men as land-owners have access to formal markets, while women sell through informal markets. In this way, men are bound by strict regulations and also protected by laws.

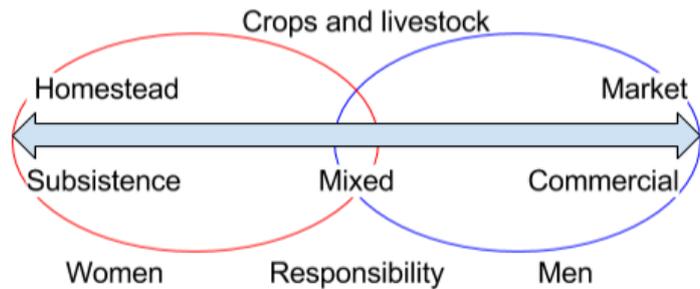


Figure 4.3 Gendered perception of crops and livestock continuum.

Men were understood as responsible for the main coverage of larger household expenses such as school fees, health care and construction work, while women should cover the daily expenditures such as food, household items and clothes. Most men emphasise that they should have the final say in decisions over procurement of bigger household assets. A structural reason for the asymmetrical division of rights and responsibilities is the land ownership since the implication of men bestowing land is that they are considered heads of the households and also the major decision makers (Rocheleau et al. 1996). However, the field was more complex than the division of labour within the farm since in most households either of the spouses had an income generating job in a nearby town or in Nairobi. Even so, the dialectic between the spatial division within the house and farm and division of tasks leads to different modes of existing for the spouses, and thus structures the domains of knowledge, farmers access. This dialectic reproduces an *insider-outsider* role of spouses. The wife becomes the insider with more knowledge of domestic economics and dynamics, even when she is not a farmer. On the other hand, the husband has access to "outsider-knowledge" from banks, cooperatives and extension officers. The gendered structure in the household does then not only influence the division of labour, but also men and women's modes of existing in relation to their land and household.

### Different knowledge and economic strategies

We argue that the different gendered domains of knowledge lead men and women to focus on different things when making economic strategies. To women knowledge about the household and farming is fully integrated, while for men knowledge about farming and either politics or large scale economy are integrated. In general, men are less concerned about limiting their use of money on crops than women, as men typically will have cash-outcome prospects from their crops and therefore have access to larger sums of money. Men therefore have more options in levelling the quality of soils than women, who must rely on insider-knowledge to make their yield higher, such as crop diversification which allows women to place their crops in relation to each other according to soil quality. This knowledge is a consequence of the gendered relation to the soil due to division of labour.

This point could be seen to be changing, as women are starting to gain access to investments and larger sums of money. Consistent with Ochanda (2013), women tend to participate in merry-go-rounds where each member on a regular basis contributes a certain amount of money to a common pool, which members then can withdraw to use on what is needed e.g. household procurement, personal investments or school fees. Some men's groups were similar to these, others were established with an eye for group investments, a finding that also applies to a number of women's groups. Moreover, men's groups were mostly associated with their occupational status such as the pastor's group, butcher's group and 'boda-boda' group (for taxi drivers). Hence, the prevailing reasoning of both men and women of joining groups is tied to an economic objective of collecting money to expand economic options (Johnson 2004).

The self-help groups further represent an interface wherein formal and informal activities become enmeshed and hence blur the boundaries between formal and informal spheres. According to feminist

political economy scholar Mellor (1997), the exclusion of women from formal economic spheres is tied to the exclusion of nature from economy. Women's economic activities with nature become entrenched in informal economic systems, legally closed off from male controlled ways of formal protection (Ibid.). Our findings suggest that women are challenging this structure by engaging in groups, which facilitates an entrance into formally sanctioned economic spheres such as bank loans.

### Conclusions and Outlook

Our analysis exemplifies how, both men and women integrate household responsibilities and economic considerations, e.g. around manure and land use choices. We argue, that men are not inherently more "economic" in their decision making - and thus more "irrational" if they spend money on alcohol - and that it is simplistic to explain women's investments in children or kitchenware because of their "domesticity". Instead, it is useful to analyse economic strategies by reference to the farmer's domains of knowledge. Men and women make decisions according to the parameters available to them, and through groups they seek to maximise their options and secure their future livelihoods.

Mbataru (2004) argues, that women are becoming the new men by acquiring property and taking roles priorly labeled as masculine and being financial providers by paying school fees. Our findings shows that this development is not currently present, as of 2016, in Nyeri District, where land ownership and division of labour continues to be highly gendered. Accordingly Mbataru's concepts of power do not hold up to date, when he argues that women's knowledge actually gave them legitimate power, as opposed to subaltern systems and unauthoritative actions in opposition to male hegemony, in order to create a space to feed their family. Thus, our findings are more consistent with Kiriti and Tisdell (2002), who argue that crops cultural perceptions as gendered continue to influence domestic economics. However, we also find that both men and women are employing group membership as strategies to enlargen their own economic agency spaces.

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