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## Collective Action, Gender and Food Security

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### Abstract

Collective action and institutional arrangements can play a crucial role in facilitating subsistence and commercial horticulture, increasing food security and improving gender equality.

Due to gender inequalities in land distribution, women's lacking access to capital and low decision making power, hunger and malnutrition often have a particularly impact on women (and children). This is especially the case with smallholder farmers where women represent the majority. On a structural level, women in Kenya are seen as being responsible for the provision of food (and therefore for the food security of the household) as well as for the (horticultural) food production. One reason for the latter is that subsistence crops like African indigenous vegetables (AIVs) are considered women's crops. Therefore assigned gender roles cannot be neglected in a food security assessment and are taken into account in this study.

Literature shows that collective action can offer an alternative to markets or strengthen market positions. The latter can be particularly important for those groups that are in a disadvantage in market relations, the former for those lacking the access to markets. Both aspects are especially important for women since their access to markets is limited in various ways.

The study assesses what impact collective action and institutional arrangements have on food security and women's issues in horticultural African indigenous vegetables production systems (subsistence and commercial) in Kenya. The authors thereby examine the interlinkages between collective action, gender relations and food security.

The interviewed women self-help groups include individuals who share a certain common interests (food security and AIVs production), face collective action problems (e.g. within the production and marketing of AIVs) and have certain rights and responsibilities (within the women self-help groups), meaning the group has institutionalized rules for collective decision-making.

Therefore, the authors supported by the research project “HORTINLEA-Horticultural Innovation and Learning for Improved Nutrition and Livelihood in East Africa” employ semi-structured interviews to identify collective actions of producer organisations (women self-help groups) and the underlying institutional arrangements.

**Keywords:** Collective action, food security, gender, institutions, Kenya

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