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## Empowerment of Women Farmers through Linkages to the Academia in Kenya

IZEM GÜNYAKTI

*Humboldt-universität Zu Berlin, Faculty of Life Sciences ThaeR-institute Resource Economics, Germany*

### Abstract

Kenyan women farmers' indigenous knowledge and practices of African Indigenous Vegetables (AIVs) have been attracting the academic interest since the 1990's. It is expected to empower and increase the well-being of women farmers through more profitable production and marketing of AIVs. However, in 'patriarchal' societies, where women's access to resources restricted in favour of the male members of the households, women's participation is limited. Local universities and producer organisations are seen as key actors in helping to create a value chain that eradicate such gender-based restrictions.

To understand “how university research engagements with women farmers contribute to the effectiveness of their own research and to the empowerment of women farmers engaged in AIVs production and marketing networks?”, an explorative case study was organised in Kenya. At to total, 87 semi-structured interviews with academic scholars, students, extension officers and women farmers and 4 focus group discussions, only with women farmers, were conducted to collect data. The last group of interviewees selected from two distinct areas in Kenya: a partly commercialised context (Kakamega) and in a fully commercial context (Kiambu) of AIVs.

The analysis shows that in engaging with women farmers local universities agricultural faculties seek multiple types of value. Enabling this value will most likely happen by a long-term, integrated approach to agricultural research, that takes into consideration women farmers' indigenous knowledge and practices. Although all participants agreed on women farmers' primary role in AIVs' production, generation and, dissemination of AIVs' knowledge, there is still a persistent negative perception among the academia towards women's indigenous knowledge and practices. On the other hand, while the academic knowledge is an important resource for women farmers of AIVs, all participants were aware of women's gender-based constraints to access it.

Local prospects indicate that universities agricultural faculties require adopting integrative approaches that take into consideration women farmers' indigenous knowledge and practices to increase ecological, social and economic premises of AIVs. However, research costs and reduced public extension services, the lack of documented materials, low market shares of AIVs are seen as some of the challenges doing so.

**Keywords:** African Indigenous Vegetables, research engagements with women farmers, women farmers' indigenous knowledge and practices