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Women empowerment in agriculture: pro-weai analysis of small-scale potato farmers in narok county, Kenya

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Abstract

Women’s economic empowerment has become a critical element in the gender-transformative agri-food systems and sustainable development. This study assessed the empowerment status of women small-scale potato farmers in Narok County, Kenya using the project-level Women Empowerment in Agriculture Index (pro-WEAI), a standardised, validated and holistic metric, of women’s empowerment within agricultural households. Multistage sampling method was used to select and identify 483 small-scale potato farmers in both dual-adult and female-adult only households from four wards in Narok North Sub-County from whom primary data was collected using structured pro-WEAI questionnaires. Descriptive results showed that women lag behind their male counterparts in terms of literacy levels, access to agricultural information, ownership of mobile phones, financial account ownership, access to credit source information, and were less likely than men to engage in off-farm income generating activities. The pro-WEAI results showed that women small-scale potato farmers were highly disempowered in the instrumental and intrinsic agency domains as compared to men, but more empowered than men in the collective agency domain. The overall pro-WEAI score for women small-scale potato farmers was 59.8 %, reflecting significant gender disparities in terms of access to resources and agency. These results indicate that while national averages portray significant progress in achieving gender parity, women in some rural communities like Narok County are still marginalised due to the prevailing gendered social norms. Therefore, policymakers and development organisations should consider addressing existing norms on intrahousehold and community relationships, by conducting community-based gender campaigns that engage both men and women, raise gender awareness and encourage proportionate sharing of household roles. Additionally, creating a more supportive environment for women to access productive resources, and participate in agricultural and household decision making will contribute to women’s empowerment and advance gender equality at the grassroots level.

Keywords: Agency, agriculture, gender equality, Kenya, potato, pro-WEAI, women’s empowerment