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## Measuring women’s agricultural empowerment using a-weai: evidence from smallholder farmers participating in homegrown school feeding programmes in Kenya

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### Abstract

Efforts to enhance food and nutrition security in Kenya have increasingly emphasised approaches that integrate agriculture, water and sanitation, education, health, and gender inclusion. The Homegrown School Feeding Program (HGSFP), which procures food locally from smallholder farmers, presents an opportunity to strengthen local food systems while promoting women’s economic participation. By creating markets for local produce and generating employment, the programme has the potential to improve household welfare and food security. However, women’s involvement and empowerment within the HGSFP remain limited due to structural barriers such as unequal access to resources, credit, and decision-making. This study assessed women’s empowerment within Kenya’s HGSFP. The study was conducted in Kajiado, Isiolo, and Nakuru counties. Using cross-sectional data from 799 households and the Abbreviated Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index (A-WEAI), the overall A-WEAI score was 0.591, revealing wide gender gaps. The results revealed that 80% of women were disempowered compared to 56.3% of men, and only 30.1% of households achieved gender parity. Key drivers of women’s disempowerment were workload (22.21%), asset ownership (16.86%), and income control (15.87%). Men dominated ownership of land, livestock, and major assets, while women had more influence in food-crop and small-livestock decisions. To close these gaps, government and financial institutions should introduce flexible, low-collateral credit schemes tailored for women farmers. This can help them acquire or expand productive assets, increase farm productivity, and improve household food security. Additionally, policies supporting the growth of women’s farmer cooperatives and self-help groups linked to HGSFP markets can foster collective agency, leadership, and bargaining power, while also improving access to extension services.

**Keywords:** A-WEAI, Gender parity, Homegrown school feeding program, Women’s empowerment