

GENDER CONCERNS IN BANANA PRODUCTION AND MARKETING: THEIR IMPACTS ON RESOURCE POOR HOUSEHOLDS IN IMENTI SOUTH DISTRICT, KENYA

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Abstract

In Kenya, the general decline in traditional cash crop production has contributed to a major shift to other subsistence crops from the mid-eighties. A majority of small scale farmers have replaced the cash crops with banana farming. Previously, banana was considered a semi-subsistence women's crop. The shift of banana farming from subsistence to commercial production has attracted many men and women into the industry. However, this has changed gender relations in the households and banana farms thereby generating gender concerns. The objective of this study was therefore to assess the gender concerns in banana production and marketing, their impact on resource poor households and make appropriate recommendations. The paper is based on a study carried out in Imenti South District, Meru County in the year 2011. A stratified random sample of 125 farmers was selected. Four focus group discussions (FGDs), eight key informants (KIs) and two case studies were purposively sampled. Semi- structured, structured questionnaires interview guides and observations were collectively used to obtain the data. The study showed that women have control of bank accounts, banana income and are hiring own land to plant bananas. However, this has brought intra-household gender conflicts especially in resource poor households further disempowering men who have resulted to drinking local brew and burdening women more. The potential of bananas to raise the standard of living among the resource poor is thus not being realised. There is need for awareness creation among stakeholders on gender mainstreaming which will lead to policy formulations. Such a move will assist in defining ways of introducing any technology that changes a woman's subsistence enterprise into a commercial undertaking. The study further recommended empowerment of men and women in resource poor households through formation of gender responsive farmer groups.

Key words: Banana, Production and Marketing, Gender Shift, gender concerns, Imenti South District, Kenya.

Introduction

In Kenya, the general decline in traditional cash crop production has contributed to a major shift to other subsistence crops from the

mid-eighties. Majority of small scale farmers have replaced the cash crops with banana farming (FAO, 2006). Banana was one of the

five pro-poor agro-enterprises¹ selected during a three-month scoping study which was carried out through desk study and literature review; field study; interviews with key informants; focus group discussions; farm visits; stakeholder consultations and a stakeholder workshop. Stakeholders in these forums agreed that the following five agro-enterprises; banana, African leafy vegetables, passion fruits, beekeeping and rearing of indigenous chickens, were best placed to lead to improved household welfare and increased incomes among resource poor farmers and vulnerable groups, especially women (KARI, 2009). However, despite the commercialization of bananas, the standard of living among a majority of small scale banana farmers is still very low. Gender issues as far as banana production and marketing is concerned seem to have been overshadowed. In reality, there is a change in intra-household allocation of duties which has generated gender conflicts (World Bank, 2008). This fact has rendered the potential of bananas to alleviate poverty not being effectively exploited. A study by Miruka and Maina (2009) in Imenti South District indicated that banana marketing has always been primarily a woman's activity. Results from a socio economic research indicated that as men realize bananas are earning more money than their traditional cash crops; they are releasing more land for planting bananas to women or shifting to banana production (Muyanga, 2008). The challenge is to make sure both men and women, especially from resource poor households, are empowered in access to and control of productive resources in commercial banana farming. There is therefore immediate need to generate knowledge that will assist the government and other stakeholders on how to mainstream gender issues into pro poor agro-enterprises policies for their full potential to be realized in order to raise the standard of living

among the rural poor. The objective of this study was therefore to explore the gender issues in banana production and marketing and their impact on resource poor households and then make appropriate recommendations on the way forward.

Thus, this study was responding to the following specific objectives:

- 1) To identify the factors explaining the gender shift in banana production and marketing
- 2) To assess how the gender division of labour in the household and banana farms are linked
- 3) To identify who has access to and control of productive resources in banana production and marketing
- 4) To make recommendations on gender mainstreaming in banana value chain

Materials and Methods

Imenti South District in Kenya was chosen due to the fact that it has three major roadside markets where men and women farmers concentrate on selling bananas as a major activity.

Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

To achieve the desired representation from banana farmers cum traders in the population, stratified random sampling was used for the survey. With assistance from extension officers, a target population of 620 banana farmers was prepared from which 125 respondents, 62 men and 63 women were selected for the survey (Table 1).

¹ Pro-poor agro-enterprises are those that have an impact on both food security and income generation.

Table 1: Composition of the respondents sampled for the household Survey

Division	Men	Women	Total	%	Target population
Nkuene	29	33	62	21	300
Abogeta	19	20	39	20	200
Igoji	14	10	24	20	120
Total	62	63	125	20	620

Source: Own survey, 2011

Methods of Data Collection

Household Survey

Structured and Semi-structured questionnaires were used for the household surveys. With the help of four research assistants, questionnaires were administered face to face.

Key Informants (KIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

This being a gender differential study, FGDs and KIs were used in order to obtain in-depth information on concepts, perceptions and ideas from men, women and youth concerning gender issues in banana value chain. Four FGDs comprising of men alone, women alone, and a mixture of men and women were purposively selected from the District (Table 2). Efforts were made to make sure all categories of groups were involved which

included social status, age and marital status. Likewise, eight KIs were purposively selected (Table 3). Key informants included people grounded in the community and have particular or 'expert' knowledge about the area, its people, their livelihood and activities in banana production and marketing in the area. Interview schedules were used for Key Informants and FGDs.

Data Processing, Analysis and Presentation

Qualitative data were organized around themes related to research questions and analyzed manually. Quantitative data were processed through manual editing and coding and eventually analyzed using descriptive statistics and all data analyses were performed on the SPSS computer software version 16.

Table 2: Composition of Sampled Key Informants

	Male	Female	Total	Target
Extension officers	2	1	3	33
Farmer Field Schools Leaders	2	2	4	9
Administrative Officers	1	0	1	3
Total	5	3	8	45

Source: Own survey, 2011

Table 3: Composition of Sampled Focus Group Discussions

	Male	Female	Total	Target
Gaatia Umoja FFS	7	5	12	26
Wendo Enterprises	0	12	12	21
Ntharene market traders	0	12	12	81
Bora banana production	11	0	11	30
Total	18	29	47	158

Source: Own survey, 2011

Results and Discussions

Factors Explaining Gender Shift in Banana Production and Marketing

In terms of income generation, banana was ranked number one by a large proportion of respondents (45%), whereas coffee, which is a

traditional cash crop, came a distance second (13%), (Figure 1). Further, it was revealed that in a period of 5 to 10 years, more men (24%) than women (15%) are growing bananas for cash value (Figure 2).

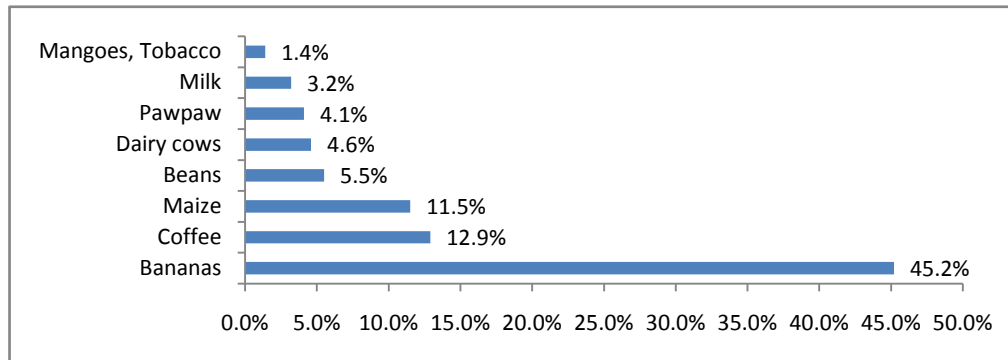


Figure 1: Place of Bananas as an Income Generation Enterprise

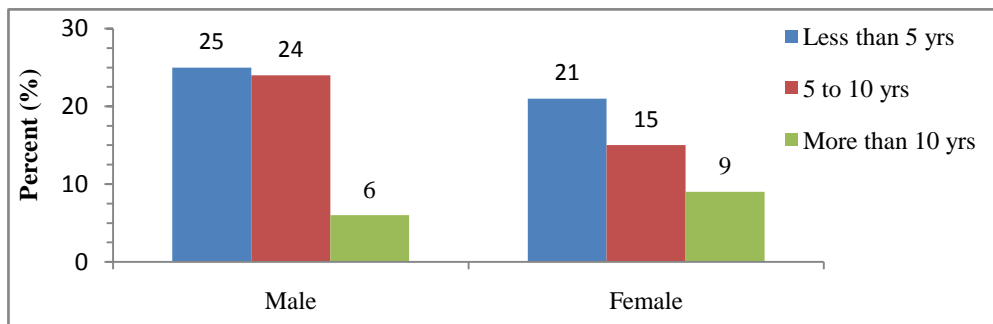


Figure 2: Banana growing trend by gender

Figures 1 and 2 support the fact that there is a shift from traditional cash crop coffee, which was a man's crop, to banana enterprise which was a subsistence crop, largely managed by women. These findings support an earlier study by FAO (2006) who also argued that majority of small scale farmers have replaced traditional cash crops with banana farming. The results further confirm an earlier study by Muyanga (2008) who demonstrated that when a crop turns commercial, men tend to take over its ownership. He further indicated that as men realize bananas are earning more money than their traditional cash crops; they release more

land for planting bananas to women or shift to banana production (Muyanga, 2008).

Gender Division of Labour in Household and Banana Farms

The twenty four hour activity framework indicated that the resource poor women who sell at roadside markets are heavily burdened by household responsibilities. Further, this study found that majority of men in resource poor households never takes part in the domestic chores. This has a negative impact on both the socio-economic well being and food security of the community, an idea supported by Chafetz (1990) theory on gender equity.

The theory asserts that division of labour in society is defined and distributed based on a person's sex, which gives men a material and power advantage over women. As a result women are burdened with domestic chores,

which undermine their effective competition with men for resource-generating work outside the household. Figure 3 shows some of the women who spend all day at Ntharene roadside market.



Figure 3: Some resource poor women who spend all day at roadside market discussing daily calendar

FAO (2004) acknowledges that the gendered division of labour that is assigned to women off-farm, on-farm and in the household leads to heavier workloads for women in comparison to men. Most of this work is unrecognized and unpaid, so that women are

often overworked and underemployed in terms of income received. This has implications on food production and commercialization. Further results indicated that in banana farms, men are highly involved in banana production and marketing activities (Figure 4).

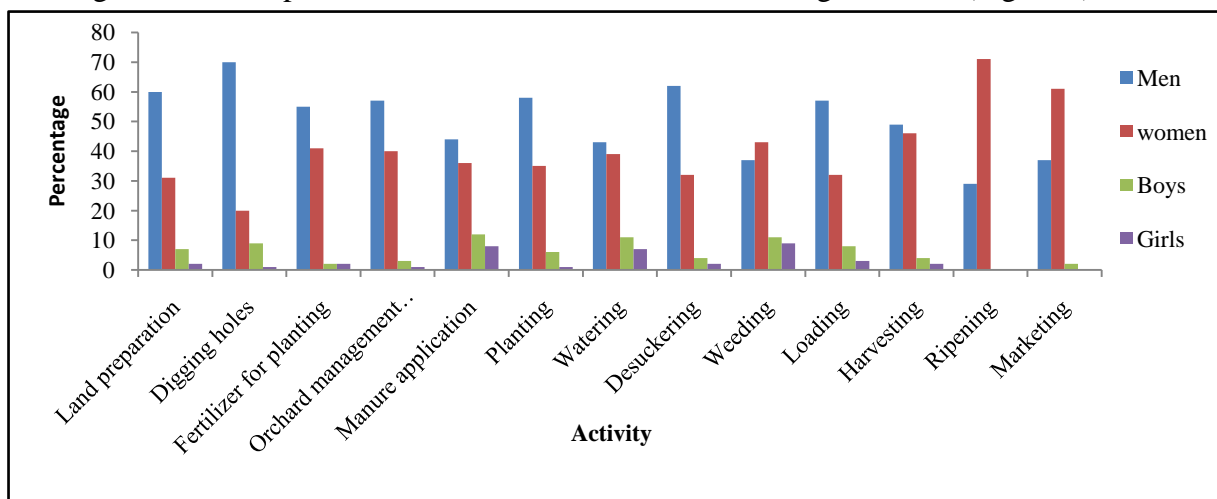


Figure 4: Banana Production and Marketing Activity Profile

Figure 4 shows that specific activities like, land preparation to de-suckering, loading and harvesting, are predominantly performed by men. Women on the other hand, are largely involved in weeding, ripening and marketing activities. These results affirm a study by NALEP², (2009) conducted in Kenya that showed that in both small scale and large scale agricultural systems, women are assigned the perceived less tasking roles, (weeding, harvesting, and ripening), while men concentrate on the more “difficult” tasks like (ploughing, planting, among others), all which appear technical. The results further affirm that banana production and marketing has shifted from subsistence to commercial enterprise as noted earlier.

Banana and Youth Employment

The study observed that banana enterprise has created employment for the youth. This has helped improve their livelihood and kept them away from idleness which leads to deviant ways and indulging in alcohol. Oral Informant (O.I)³ Helen M. had this to say concerning the young men:

There are about 100 young motor bike owners at Ntharene market who are below 25 years. Only 1 is a woman. Young women are actively involved in banana marketing at roadside markets. They hire motor bike owners to transport their bananas.

This scenario is supported by quantitative results which showed that hired motorbikes came first as a means of transporting bananas to the market (Figure 5). Figure 6 shows different ways young men engage in banana marketing.

Ownership of Land Title Deeds

The findings indicated that 94% of land title deeds are possessed by men (Figure 7). The

study further reveals that a majority of those who possess title deeds are over 36 years (Figure 8).



Figure 5: Means of transporting bananas to market ranked

² National Agriculture and Livestock Extension Programme

³ An Oral Informant is a Key Informant in the study area.

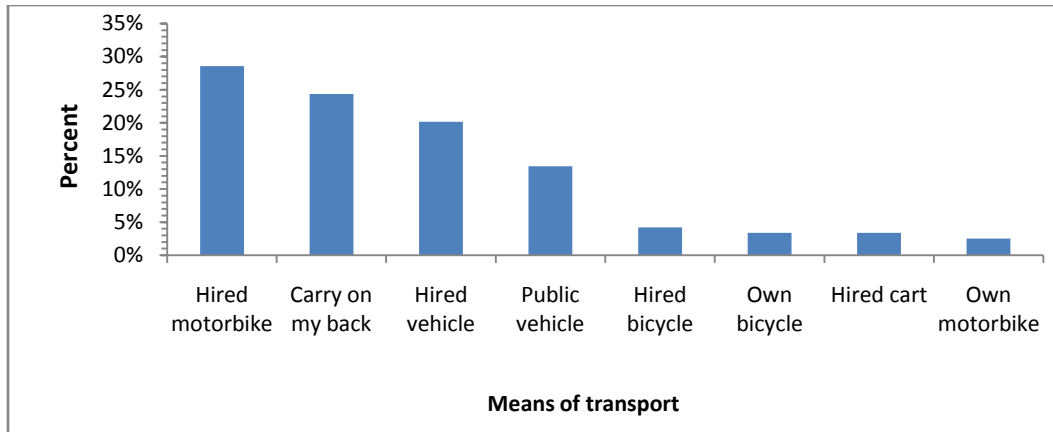


Figure 6: Young men engaging in transportation and off-loading bananas

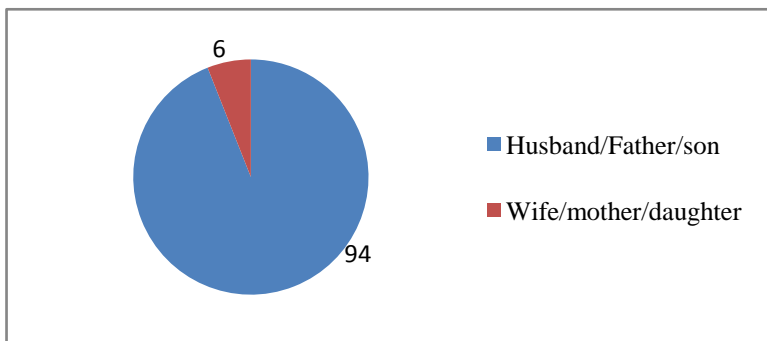


Figure 7: Ownership of Land Title Deeds by Gender

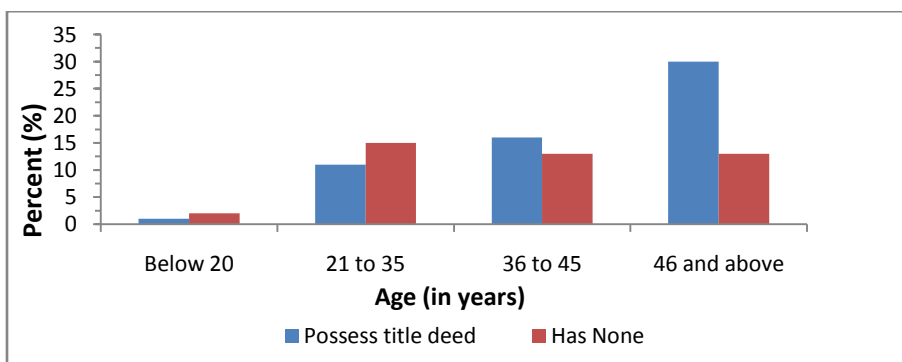


Figure 8: Ownership of Land Title deeds by age

Access to Productive Resources in Banana Production and Marketing

These findings support other studies that indicate that globally, women’s land ownership rates lag behind those of men. In

much of sub-Saharan Africa, few rural women own agricultural land: only three percent in Zimbabwe, 11 percent in Benin, and 25 percent in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Likewise, the study results support the fact that land inheritance is highly through

sons (Alderman et al, 2003). Rights of control over land are important since they determine access to other assets and benefits, such as credit and membership to farmer's organizations. Current empirical evidence has underscored the economic cost of ignoring gender and human rights issues in development. By equalizing factors of production (land, inputs and skills) between men and women, productivity goes up by as much as 20% (Economic Commission for Africa, 2004).

Boserup (1970) argued that men allocate the best land for their cash crops while the women's food crops are grown on the poor land or the land that is far away from the village. As the cultivated area is expanded, all the additional work is usually also the responsibility of women and children. Despite this gender imbalance, she concluded that women are not passive partakers of development but they actively participate in development (Boserup, 1970:48).

During the 1980s, Davison (1988) argues, women's lack of title deed was the major constraint on agricultural production. In the 1990s Mwale (1996) placed this as third priority arguing that few smallholders receive credit and that land titles often are not accepted as effective collateral for agricultural loans by commercial banks. This position is supported by a major paper on gender (Agricultural Sector Investment Program (ASIP), 1996) that points out that regardless of tenure, women manage land and make agricultural decisions. Women, in fact, have access to land because they develop multiple strategies that include purchasing, hiring, borrowing, joining parcels, pooling land and squatting (Chaiken, 1997; Khasiani, 1995).

Access to and Control of Productive Resources in Banana Production Marketing

Results indicated that labour, inputs, time and decision making in the banana value chain are predominantly controlled by men (Figure 9).

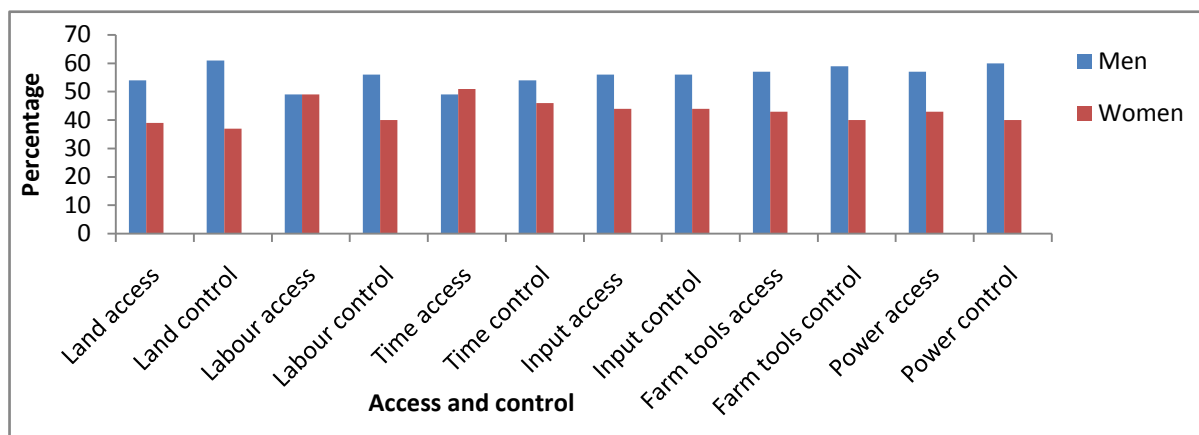


Figure 9: Access to and Control of productive resources in banana value chain

Asked whether they can decide on where to plant bananas, O.Is⁴ Stellah M., Rosaline G., Betty M., et al. had this to say:

If we plant bananas without consulting our husbands, they will uproot them. In homes where women have separated their bananas from their husbands', it has resulted in serious gender conflict in the household. To

⁴ O.Is: These are Oral Informants from FGDs.

avoid this, one has no choice but to adhere to her husband's decisions.

Suda (1996) argues that rural Kenyan women are among the most disadvantaged groups in terms of their structural position in the household and working conditions on the farm. She indicated that women have inadequate access to labour, technology, credit, and other productive inputs. Most women have only possession but not legal rights to land; therefore they fall outside the collateral needed for credit and loans (Suda, 1996:76).

Spring (2000) notes that women usually control their own and their children's, especially female children's labour, but they have little claim on the labour of other family members. In poor households, children may be kept out or drop out of school to perform household or wage-earning employment. Increased commercialization requires more labour, and women, especially in horticulture and dairy enterprises carry out most of the work (Spring, 2000).

Spring (2000) also noted that men use more inputs than women. By law, the large bags of fertilizer are not supposed to be opened until purchased, and the product is not supposed to be repackaged into small units. In reality, a great many stockists break the 25 kilogramme (or larger) bags and repackage the contents into 1 or 2 kilogramme bags to make it affordable to most of their customers. This is especially done for women farmers, who want small amounts for horticultural plots or are cash-poor. Finances, knowledge and crop problems influence usage of inputs like agrochemicals and fertilizers for cereal and horticultural crops.

Access to Credit

The study found that 10% of respondents who had accessed credit through banks are men while 1% is women. As women have less access to collateral, they access credit through sources that do not require such, like "merry

go rounds". According to Ali (2005) women face gender specific barriers to credit facilities due to lack of collateral (often land), low levels of literacy, less time and sometimes lack of cash to enable them travel to lending institutions. The importance of financial capital in agricultural production is well established. For example, a field study in Kenya tested the effects of providing fertilizer credits on maize yields. It found that when women's groups were given credit for fertilizer, their maize yields increased significantly on the group plots and the resulting additional income was reinvested to purchase fertilizer and other inputs in later seasons (Mikalista, 2006). Women in the study area are hiring more land to plant bananas implying that if they had access to extra credit they would achieve more in banana production and marketing than they are currently undertaking.

Access to Banana Marketing Channels

Results indicated that few women (5%) sold their bananas in organised markets as compared to men (25%). Majority of women (30%), compared to men (2%), sold bananas in roadside markets (Figure 10).

The study noted that the resource poor women at roadside markets depend on Kibuchio⁵, as is commonly referred to in the area. Kibuchio as compared to organised market is unreliable and unpredictable hence the outcome of sales is uncertain. Spring (2000) analyzed commercialization strategies for local and export markets used by women and men small-scale farmers in Western and Central Kenya. She noted that smallholder commercial women farmers are constrained by lack of capital from making additional agricultural investments, As a result, the design of policies and programmes that both target and do not target women are limited in their design. Thus, she concluded that in future, it is likely that the

⁵ Selling by luck to any buyer

private rather than the public sector will offer extension and marketing services equally to women and men farmers. Figure 11 shows a roadside market day with majority of resource poor women selling by Kibuchio.

Access to Bank Accounts

Further analysis revealed that more women (32%) as compared to men (26%) save banana income through bank accounts (Figure 12).

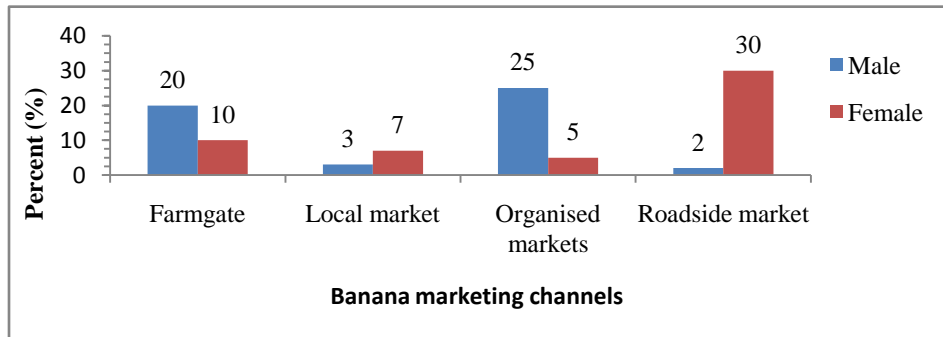


Figure 10: Access to Marketing Channels by Gender



Figure 11: Ntharene Roadside Market day where majority of resource poor women sell by “Kibuchio”

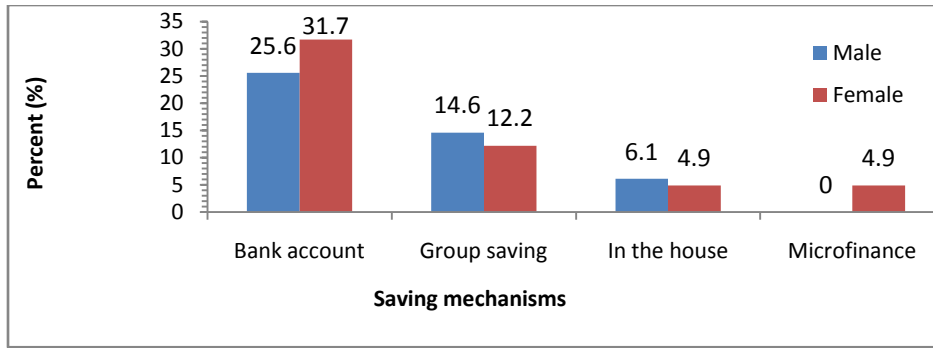


Figure 12: Access to saving mechanisms

Access to banana income

Likewise, more women (51%) as compared to men (42%) have control of banana income

(Figure 13). This scenario is attributed to the fact that women own bank accounts and hire separate farms to plant bananas.

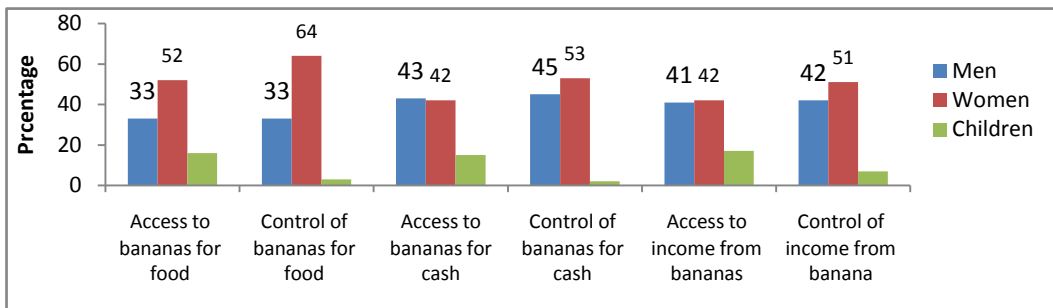


Figure 13: Access and Control of Benefits from Bananas

For example, Oral Informants (O.Is) Stella M., et al., indicated that they save banana income in bank accounts without their husbands’ knowledge due to the fact that the latter are drunkards. However, O.I Geoffrey M. had this to say concerning banana income:

Despite women claiming to have been empowered by banana income, they are more burdened instead. Out of frustrations from failure to control banana income, men are spending their time idling and taking local brew. Wives in these households are further burdened by performing reproductive and productive roles. In households where men are forcing their wives to surrender the income, it has led to separate banana farms for the wife and husband hence, causing conflicts in the household.

O.Is Stellah M., et al., had this to say:

We own separate bank accounts. Our children no longer ask for school fees from their fathers. Our husbands drink the money they get from bananas. They spend their time at local markets playing the “Maune”⁶.

Asked whether they share banana income in the household considering that they have separate bank accounts, O.Is Stellah M., et al., said:

By the time we get to the house in the evening, one is so tired, hence not ready for any conflict. After buying the daily household

⁶ A game whereby they use a long board with holes and small, smooth round stones, ‘Ncuthi’

items, he usually demands to know the balance. We usually cheat them and bank our income secretly.

This scenario shows that women in the study area have changed the gender roles by hiring their own land, having their own bank accounts and making decisions on how to use their income without the intervention of their husbands. In traditional cash crops, e.g., coffee, bank accounts were owned by men. This study concurs with that of Nguthi (2008), in Maragwa Kenya, which indicated that women seemed to have a large measure of control over banana income. In traditional cash crops, the study affirmed that despite women providing labour for management and harvesting, they neither knew how much cash was paid, nor had any access to, or control of the income. This was due to the fact that it was paid to the male household heads either through the bank or the coffee society. She indicates that variations were however observed in the control of income from bananas in different households as was indicated in different cases (Nguthi, 2008).

The study found that the empowerment of women in control of banana income, as well as possessing bank accounts, has contributed to intra-household gender conflicts in a majority of resource poor households. This is due to change of household duty allocations. Culturally, men are perceived as the heads of households and, hence, supposed to control productive resources like income as well as bank accounts. Likewise, men are perceived to be in charge of decision making in the household, e.g. hiring land. Women are perceived to be in charge of household chores. Since men controlled productive resources as well as made decisions in traditional cash crop economies, their expectation is that the situation should remain the same in any commercial undertaking. This has burdened women more hence; a negative impact on banana's potential to raise the standard of living in the area.

The concept of empowerment generally refers to people's ability to define and achieve their life goals more deliberately, using all of the resources (material, human, and social) available to them. For women specifically, the ability to increase the value of their contributions to agriculture is important. This is not only in terms of the value of the income they earn, but also the value that income has in changing gender roles and relations in the household, community, and elsewhere (World Bank, 2008).

Access to Means of Transporting Bananas to the Market

Results indicated that 88% of those who carry bananas on their back to the market are women. Likewise, very few women, especially the resource poor, are able to hire transport to market their bananas (Figure 14).

Results show that very few women are able to hire transport to market their bananas. Just like in the case of the mode of selling bananas where a majority of poor women sell by kibuchio, carrying bananas on their backs is tiring and time consuming hence compromising their banana sales. A report by World Bank indicates that time is a resource which is often very scarce for women farmers. In general, women's productive activities on the farm often compete for time with reproductive roles and community management. Women in most parts of the world have a longer working day than men. Consequently, they often lack time which becomes a major cause of declining food production (World Bank, 2004).

Access to Information

Provision of Extension Services

The results show that despite the study area having banana production as their major source of income, majority of farmers (64%) had not received any extension services for the last one year. Analysis by gender revealed that

more men (60%), as compared to women (40%), had received extension services. Likewise, more women (70%), as compared to men (30%), had not received extension services (Table 4). These results are in conformity with the study by NALEP, (2009) which found that while awareness of extension services is high among farmers, interaction with extension services is very low, especially among women. Extension is often provided by male agents to men farmers on the erroneous assumption that the message will trickle “down” to women. In fact, agricultural knowledge at the household is transferred inefficiently or not at all from husband to wife. Also, the message tends to ignore the unique workload, responsibilities, and constraints facing women farmers. As a result, gender

disparities continue to widen, with women farmers bearing the consequence (NALEP, 2009).

Gender Constraints in banana production and marketing

Gender Constraints in Banana Production

The study findings show that for production constraints, men ranked lack of capital, reliance to rainwater and land scarcity as numbers one, two and three respectively. On the other hand, women ranked land scarcity, land ownership/title deed and lack of enough capital as numbers one two and three respectively (Figures 15 and 16).

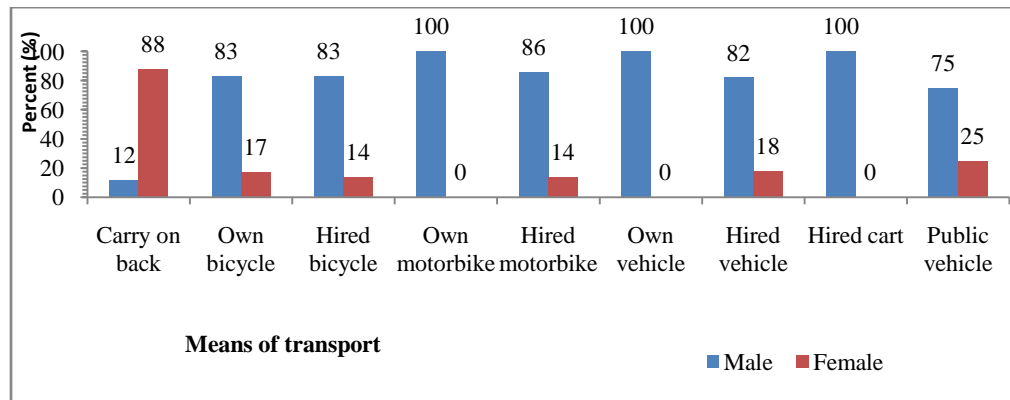


Figure 14: Access to Means of Transport by Gender

Table 4: Provision of Extension Services in Banana Production

	Visited (%)		Not visited (%)	
Extension visits for the last one year	36		64	
Extension Visits for the last one year by gender	Male	Female	Male	Female
	60	40	30	70

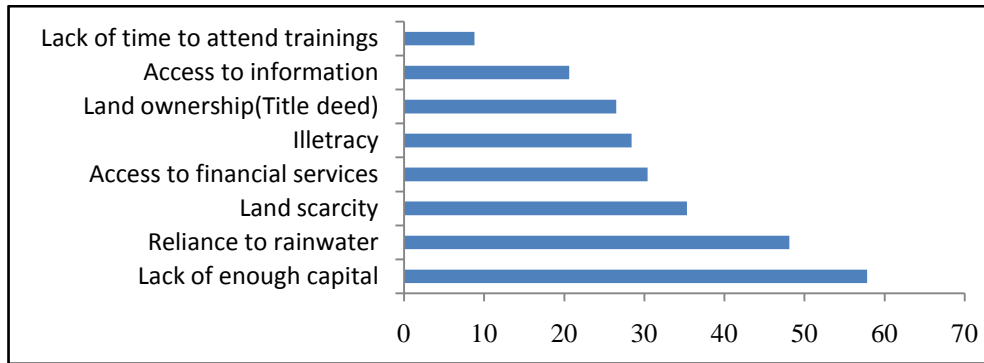


Figure 15: Female rankings on production constraints

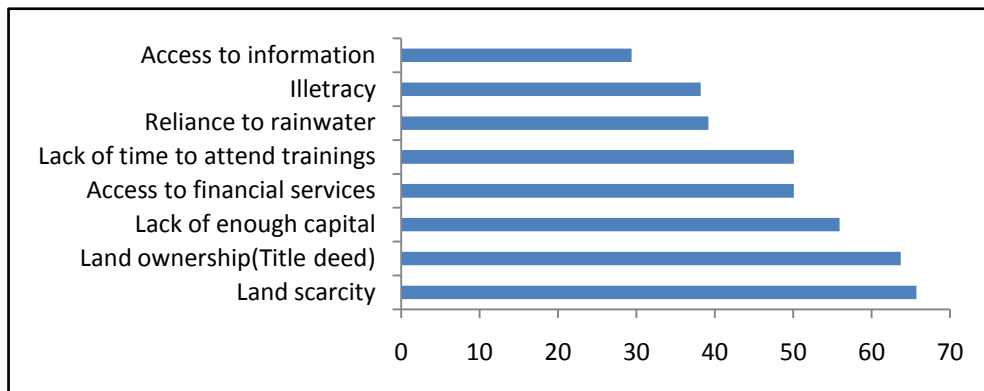


Figure 16: Male rankings on production constraints

Constraints in Banana Marketing

The results further revealed that poor infrastructure, in particular bad roads were the most challenging marketing constraints to both men and women (Figure 17 and 18).

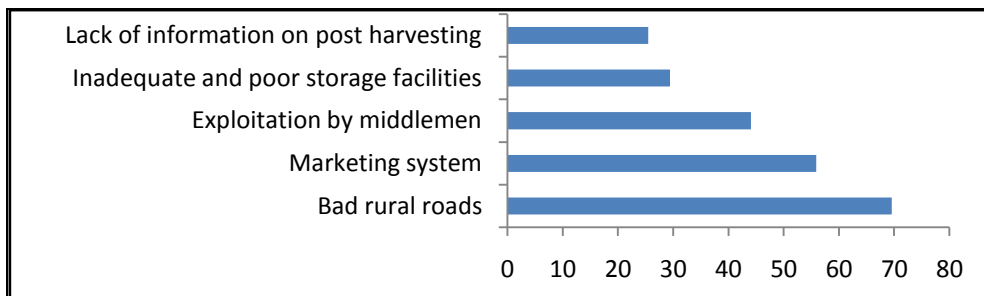


Figure 17: Male Rankings for Marketing Constraints

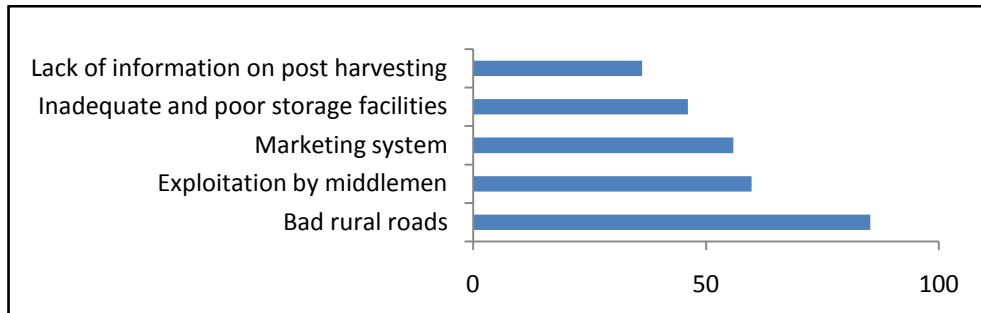


Figure 18: Female Rankings for Marketing Constraints

Spring and McDade (1998) also noted that most agricultural produce is highly perishable and so roads and marketing infrastructure are crucial. In general, rural roads are of poor conditions and often impassable during the rainy seasons. Small holders, especially women, lack reliable market information on targeting the best urban markets. Spring and McDade (1998) noted that this is a major constraint on women's participation and suggests that governments should focus on infrastructure and leave marketing to the private sector.

Studies conducted by UNDP (2008) on agriculture in East Africa, including Maragwa in Kenya, revealed that despite the contribution of women in terms of labour, time and their role in the entire production cycle, there are gender asymmetries and biases. More women than men experience the following constraints: Land ownership, poor rural infrastructure, limited capital and access to financial services, inadequate access to information and high illiteracy, inadequate supporting services and networking opportunities, lack of markets and marketing system, lack of technology, irrigation, processing and storage facilities and HIV/AIDS (UNDP, 2008).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study found that reproductive activities are exclusively performed by women while key decisions around farming are influenced

and controlled by men. Likewise, productive resources in banana production and marketing are controlled by men. The study noted that women have control of bank accounts and banana income and manage their households effectively through the savings. However, this has brought conflicts in a majority of resource poor households as well as disempowered men who have resulted to drinking local brew. As a result women are more burdened. Further, a majority of young men solely depend on bananas as a business. The study therefore recommends collaboration of existing development agencies especially Technoserve, Africa harvest, Ministry of Agriculture and Kenya Agricultural Research Institute to initiate trainings through gender responsive farmer groups that focus on pooling resources and equitable budgetary allocation in the household. A majority of these farmers have the lowest level of education hence, they require trainings on commercial farming including investment and account keeping. There is also need for interventions to ensure that young men and women benefit equally as their elder counterparts, as well as participate fully to improve the standards of living in the area.

Way forward

This study suggests gender mainstreaming in the agricultural sector as well as institutions that will assist in gender policy formulations. Such a move will assist in defining ways of introducing any technology that changes a

woman's subsistence enterprise into commercial. This could be achieved through collaboration of all the stakeholders in the agricultural sector to review existing policies as well as formulation of gender responsive ones. For example, every agricultural organization, e.g., KARI, should have a gender policy and ensure that women farmers' priorities receive equal consideration. In this way, gender mainstreaming then becomes part of a change process in the institutional culture and practice.

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