



Women's empowerment in collective dairy value chains

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Context

Livestock are popular and important assets due to their multiple functions, providing income, food and nutrition security. They also help to stop poor households from falling into poverty, as animals can be sold to meet emergency needs and, as a source of animal traction and manure, they are an integral part of smallholder farming systems.

In developing countries, it is often easier for women to acquire livestock assets - whether through inheritance, markets or through membership of a group - than it is for them to purchase or control other physical or financial assets, including land. Typically, women are more likely to own small livestock such as poultry, rather than large livestock such as cattle, goats and sheep.

Ownership of assets provides a means for women's empowerment by increasing their bargaining power and authority within the household and the community. Yet, despite owning assets, many women still have to consult other members of their household, especially their husband, before making major decisions, such as to sell, give out, or slaughter their animals.

Ownership of assets, while necessary, is not therefore a sufficient condition for women's empowerment. Rather, it is women's ability to make decisions on these assets and other productive resources, and to manage and make decisions on income earned through these assets that is crucial to their empowerment.

When women manage income and control assets, their bargaining power may be increased, domestic violence reduced and their children's nutritional status improved. However, women's greater earning power may also have negative consequences, especially if men's spending on the household reduces as women contribute and manage more.

Methodology

An adapted Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) was used to compare the empowerment of women from the dairy value chain participating in collective action and those who were not.

Measuring women's empowerment

To capture the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of empowerment, indicators for measuring women's empowerment have evolved from use of single proxy indicators, such as income and women's education, to composite and multi-dimensional indicators. Common composite indicators include the Women's Empowerment Index (WEI), the Gender Development Index (GDI), the Cumulative Empowerment Index (CEI) and the WEAI.

WEAI is a composite empowerment index that uses two sub-indices - the five domains of empowerment (5DE) and the Gender Parity Index (GPI). The 5DE include: (1) decisions about agricultural production, (2) access to and decision-making power over productive resources,

(3) control over use of income, (4) leadership in the community, and (5) time use, and are made up of ten indicators. The GPI measures the proportion of women who are as empowered as men within their households. WEAI is calculated as a weighted average (relative importance) of 5DE and GPI. Using an adapted WEAI, this study analyzed the difference collective action made in empowerment of women actors from the dairy value chain. The WEAI was adapted to include a sixth domain, 'health', with two indicators on women's vulnerability - women's perceptions of gender-based violence (GBV) and women's decision-making on reproductive activities. A third indicator on custody of identity card was added to the leadership domain. The adapted WEAI therefore has 13 indicators. A woman is considered empowered if she has adequate achievements in four of the six domains, or is empowered in some combination of the weighted indicators that reflects 67% total adequacy as a proxy of empowerment.

Data was collected from 121 households in two East Africa Dairy Development (EADD) project sites, Tanykina in Nandi County and Sot in Bomet County, both of which are in Rift Valley Province, Kenya.

Analyzing the role of collective action on women's empowerment

Among women, social capital is associated with increased voice, influence, power, access to support from others, access to information, and means to save and access credit, accumulate assets and access markets.

Women's groups serve as support systems and provide important safety nets in times of crisis. Group formation helps to build social capital and enhance income generation among the poor. Through groups, women can come together to pool labor, resources, assets and marketable resources to break barriers that are gender-specific that may limit their participation in economic activities.

East Africa Dairy Development

The aim of the EADD project is to double the household dairy income of around 1 million people in Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda through integrated interventions in dairy

production, market access and knowledge application. The project uses a business hub approach, i.e. collective, farmer-owned milk bulking and/or chilling plants from which farmers may also access other services, including banking and finance. The project works with groups of farmers at various levels, including production groups, cooperatives and associations. Given the role of women in dairy production, the project has a gender strategy to address gender issues in dairy-related activities.

Data collection

The key research question addressed was whether women participating in collective action were more empowered than women who were not. A survey of 121 households was carried out in two project sites: Tanykina in Nandi County has a well-established dairy co-operative; Sot in Bomet County is a newly established dairy co-operative. In both areas, the main economic activities are tea and dairy farming; subsistence farming is common.

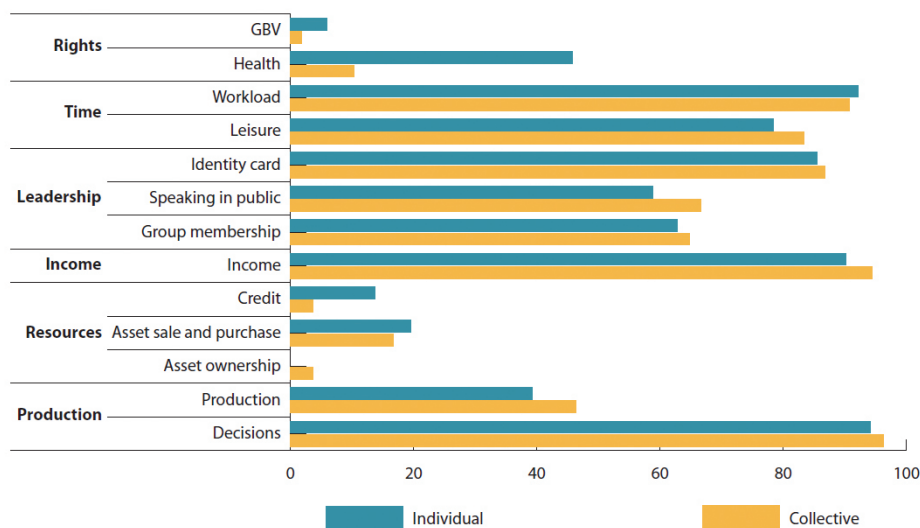
Most households surveyed (85%) had male heads of households, with over 40% of them having a primary education (while only 25% of women had a primary education). Each household consisted, on average, of six individuals. Average land size was 8.9 hectares and each household owned around 5.2 cattle.

Households that were selling milk collectively had a slightly larger household size, and a higher percentage of male heads of households and women with at least a primary education. They owned a significantly larger number of cattle and area of land.

Table 1: Women's empowerment scores

	Selling collectively	Selling individually
6DE scores	0.63	0.59
GPI scores	0.82	0.83
WEAI	0.65	0.62
% who are empowered	26%	17%

Figure 1: Percentage of women achieving adequacy in different indicators





Women's empowerment scores

There was a higher percentage of empowered women in the group selling collectively, compared to those selling individually. The 6DE scores were also higher for women selling collectively than for those selling individually. The GPI scores were comparable across the two groups (Table 1).

For both those selling their milk collectively through dairy groups and those selling individually, women had lower 6DE scores than men in the same households.

How do women fare in terms of the different domains?

Looking at those that achieved adequacy in the different domains, women were least empowered in terms of asset ownership (2% achieving adequacy) and access to and decision-making on credit (7.8%). Slightly more women (17.4%) achieved the threshold for purchase or sale of assets.

A very low percentage of women (3.9%) achieved adequacy with respect to GBV, although more women were empowered (27.4%) with respect to decision-making on reproductive health. The highest adequacy was achieved with respect to input on decision-making (95.2%), control over income (92.2%) and workload distribution (91.2%).

Collective vs individual marketing and empowerment

Women who sold milk collectively achieved higher adequacy on several indicators, including autonomy of production, control over income, group membership, speaking in public, having an identity card and satisfaction with their leisure time. However, those who sold milk individually had higher empowerment scores with regard to health and resources. For asset ownership, more women selling collectively achieved adequacy than those selling individually. This suggests that the group support system allowed women to either purchase these assets and/or have more say in the ownership of agricultural assets in general. However, there may be other factors at play, such as proximity to collection centers, which may influence female asset ownership and marketing patterns simultaneously.

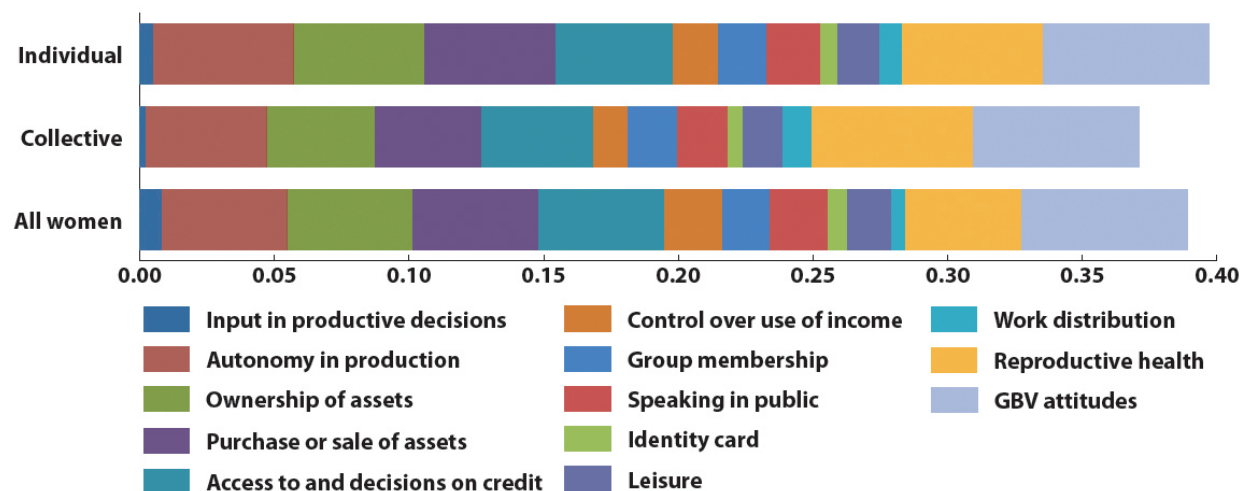
The opposite was true for attitudes towards GBV and decisions on credit, where a higher percentage of women selling individually achieved adequacy compared to those selling collectively.

Women's highest adequacy achievements were the same, whether they sold individually or collectively, these being decisions on crop production, and control and decisions on income and workload. Similarly, the lowest adequacy achievements were also the same, regardless of whether women sold collectively or individually, namely attitudes towards GBV, asset ownership, and access to and decision-making on credit.

Women's disempowerment

For women selling individually or collectively, the greatest contribution to disempowerment was recorded for the same indicators. There were, however, some nuanced differences. For women selling individually, the two largest contributors to disempowerment were autonomy in production and attitudes towards GBV. For women selling collectively, contributors to disempowerment were attitudes towards GBV and decisions on reproductive health.

Figure 2: Relative contributions of different indicators to women's disempowerment



Conclusions and recommendations

The largest contributors to women's disempowerment were attitudes towards GBV, autonomy in production, ownership of assets, access to and decisions on credit, and decisions on reproductive health.

While social capital and collective action are critical for giving women a voice, more policy and programmatic interventions are required to increase women's access to key productive resources that will enable them to improve their livelihoods and those of their families.

One key area where women score poorly, irrespective of whether they participate in collective action or not, is their perceptions of GBV and their exercising of their reproductive rights. The addition of this domain to the empowerment index sheds light on the need to integrate women's economic development with increased awareness of women's rights, as well as addressing entrenched perceptions on gender roles, norms and issues of GBV.

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