

Women's Contribution to Agricultural Production in Rural Kenya
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Article Info

Received: 29-12-2025 Revised: 11-01-2026 Accepted: 13-02-2026 Published: 15-03-2026

Abstract

In Kenya, women are heavily involved in agricultural production. They get little attention, however. Women's contribution to agricultural productivity has been undervalued due to a lack of sufficient data, which has resulted in their marginalization in sector growth. In order to provide women with a platform to express their concerns about agricultural-related problems, this research aimed to investigate the role of women in Kenyan agricultural output. The author proposes that in order to increase women's visibility in agricultural production, women's contributions to food security in the home and community should be considered instead of their contributions to commercialized agriculture, which is dominated by men. By doing this, the author intends to influence decision-makers to reconsider how they see rural women who work in agriculture in order to take swift action.

Keywords

Food security, agricultural production, rural development, and women farmers.

Introduction

With a 25% GDP contribution and 75% of the country's labor force employed, agriculture continues to be the foundation of Kenya's economy and is regarded as its most significant industry (Republic of Kenya, 2005). In a similar vein, the 2010 Kenyan Constitution decentralized the powers of this important sector. In addition to their traditional household function, women play a crucial part in agricultural production, accounting for between 42% and 65% of Kenya's agricultural labor force (World Bank, 2014). Additionally, women produce half of the world's food and between 60 and 80 percent of it in the majority of poor nations (Chinery, 2011). In many areas of the globe, where economic and social factors are revolutionizing the agriculture sector, women's participation in agricultural production vary greatly across and within regions and are changing quickly. However, despite being a vital force in sub-Saharan agriculture and rural development, women's crucial involvement in agricultural output has received little attention, especially when it comes to policy (FAO, 2011). The agricultural sector directly affects at least two crucial issues that Kenya, a growing nation, must deal with: food security and job development. This has a direct effect on Kenyans' overall quality of life, health, and rates of poverty (Republic of Kenya, 2005). Therefore, effective agricultural sector governance is essential to its success in resolving the aforementioned issues. Therefore, it is crucial that the Kenyan government acknowledge and include important stakeholders in the sector, like women, in the policy-making process by promoting their active involvement in agricultural-related matters in order to appropriately address their needs regarding the obstacles they encounter and the most effective ways to overcome them. Therefore, in an

effort to emphasize the significance of women in rural agricultural production, this study will critically investigate three key concerns. locations to address the issue of why their contribution to agricultural production should be acknowledged by thoroughly examining their role in rural agricultural production, the obstacles they encounter, and the potential for increased participation in agricultural production in Kenya.

Women Participation in Agricultural Production in Kenya

According to World Bank estimates, women comprise between 42% and 65% of the global agricultural labor force (World Bank, 2014). In a similar vein, there is now a growing movement toward what has been dubbed the "feminization of agriculture" in many regions of the globe, including Kenya. Men moving from rural to urban areas in quest of paid work in towns and cities, either domestically or overseas, is one of the primary causes of this phenomena. Women play an increasingly important role in agricultural productivity when males leave their rural homes (Adenugba, 2013). Women now make up about 50% of the agricultural labor force in Sub-Saharan Africa, up from around 45% in 1980. But in Africa, the statistics vary from somewhat over 40% in Southern Africa to slightly over 50% in Eastern Africa. With the exception of Northern Africa, where the female share seems to have increased from 30% to nearly 45%, these sub-regional averages have largely been maintained, especially when compared to the 1980s. According to Sofa and Cheryl (2011), the sub-regional data for Africa reveals significant variations across nations in terms of the trend and the percentage of women working in agriculture. In Africa's rural communities, women are responsible for caring for the elderly and children. Additionally, they make up the bulk of rural small-scale and subsistence farmers' labor force (FAO, 2011).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, women's contributions to agriculture and rural communities are essential to their growth. According to the Technical Center for Agriculture and Rural Cooperation (CTA, 1993), women make up over one-third of the workforce in Africa. In pastoralist and mixed farming systems, livestock play a significant role in helping women and improving their financial circumstances, and women are heavily involved in the industry. Women make for around two-thirds of the 400 million poor livestock goalkeepers (Thornton et al., 2002).

Women make up a significant portion of the agricultural labor force, either as individual food producers or as agricultural workers, according to the Food and Agricultural Organization (2011). This is thought to account for around two-thirds of all agricultural workers in developing nations (FAO, 2011). The FAO's estimations of the percentages of women employed in agricultural production worldwide, in developing nations, in low-income food deficit countries (LIFDCs), and in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) are contrasted in the chart below.

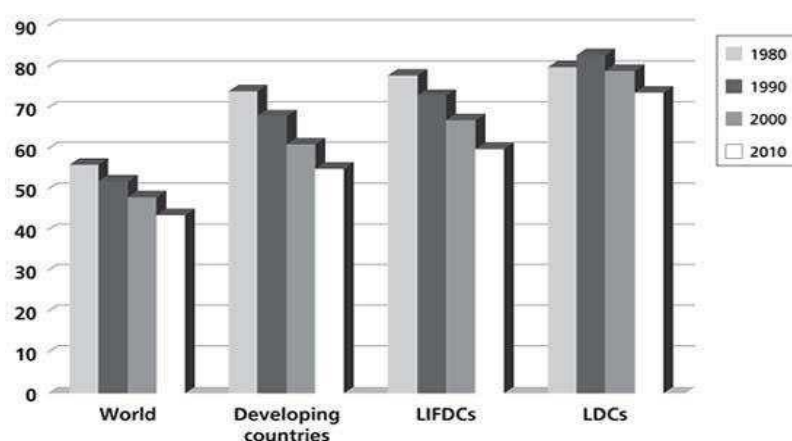


Figure 1: Percentage of economically active women working in agriculture, 1980-2010 (projected)

Source: FAO 2003 - Rural Women: Key to Food Security, Gender and Population

Women make up slightly more than half of the agricultural labor force in developing nations, 60% in low-income food deficit countries (LIFDCs), and more than 70% in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), as the above figure illustrates. This illustrates how women are increasingly involved in other agricultural operations including processing, cash farming, animal husbandry, and marketing, even though food production has historically been seen as a largely female activity. In addition to being paid or unpaid laborers on other farms and agricultural businesses, women voluntarily engage in agriculture as farmers and unpaid laborers on family farms. Additionally, they are essential to the development of both commercial and subsistence crops and cattle. In addition to managing mixed agricultural enterprises that often include crop, animal, and fish farming, women also cultivate food and income crops. According to FAO (2010), women are still regarded as members of the agricultural labor force.

In addition to their customary household duties, women in Kenya comprise between 42% and 65% of the agricultural labor force (World Bank, 2014). In Kenya, most people rely on agriculture as their primary source of income and security, and fertile land is highly prized. Kenyan rural women are socially, economically, and politically subservient to men because of the socially created conventional gender roles that dictate the division of labor (Feldman, 1983). According to a 2010 research by Kenya's National Agriculture and Livestock Extension Policy (NALEP), gender has an impact on the division of labor in crop production, for instance.

Table 1: Division of labour in crop farming

Task	Male (Percentage %)	Female (Percentage %)
Ploughing	55	45
Weeding	49	51
Harvesting	51	49
Marketing	53	49

All processes	47	53
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Source: NALEP, 2010

According to the survey, males do harder labor like plowing (55%), harvesting, and marketing (53), while women perform lighter jobs like weeding (51%). All other procedures, however, are dominated by female farmers. Therefore, both cash crops for the market and crops for sustenance are included in the productive role of women in agriculture. As a result, women in Kenya work on farms throughout the whole agricultural cycle, including hoeing, planting, weeding, frightening animal and bird pests, and harvesting. Additionally, girls tend to livestock and poultry, tasks that were formerly performed by males (Republic of Kenya, 2005).

In a similar vein, women are often involved in the management of chickens (Guèye, 2000), dairy animals (Tangka et al., 2000), and other animals kept and fed on Kenyan homesteads. When responsibilities are shared, males are more inclined to work on building homes, herding grazing animals, and selling goods when women's movement is limited. However, the use of eggs, milk, and chicken meat for domestic use is where women's influence is most noticeable, and they often have control over the marketing of these goods and the revenue they generate. Small-scale dairy and poultry enterprises have been attractive investments for development initiatives that seek to enhance the lives of many rural women, perhaps because of this (Bravo-Baumann, 2000). There is a division of labor with distinct responsibilities for men and women in various businesses, according to a research conducted in western Kenya by Okitoi et al. in 2006.

Division of Labour in Rural Poultry Production

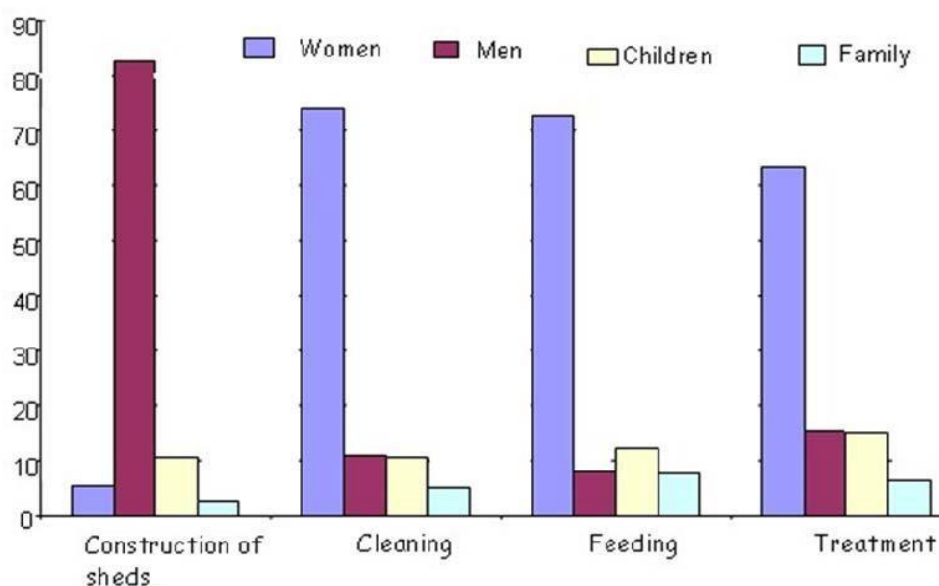


Figure 2: Division Of Labour Among Family Members In Rural Poultry Production In Western

Source: Okitoi et al, 2006

The above set of data indicates a division of labour among family members in rural poultry

production in Western Kenya. Participation in selling eggs and consumption of eggs is predominantly for women. Men and children mainly do the construction of poultry sheds. Women mainly do cleaning, feeding and treatment of rural poultry.

The importance of agriculture in rural Kenya is emphasised on plot cultivation and food production for home nourishment and trading or selling as the primary means for the income (Wane, 2003). Approximately 85 percent of females over seventeen years of age work regularly on the family holding compared to 54 percent of males. (Smock, 1981). It is estimated that one quarter of all Kenyan rural households are single-female headed. In these, the husband is either dead or absent for long periods, and women assume responsibility for satisfying both the domestic and income needs of the entire household which largely revolve around farm work (Republic of Kenya, 2008).

Women's role in Agricultural production in Kenya is also linked to household food security. As such, households overall access to food relies to a great extent on the work of rural women in farms (FAO, 2011). The world Food Summit of 1996 described food security as a situation that exists when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life (WHO, 2019). In Kenya, women spare up to 16 hours a day doing housework, caring for children, preparing food, and growing between 60 and 80 percent of the food for the family (Fagley, 1976 and World Bank, 2014). Furthermore, in the social context of rural areas in Kenya, women may head a household in case a principal male is missing, either temporarily due to internal or international migration or permanently due to divorce from or death of the male partner when legally married. Focusing exclusively on these female-headed households, which make up 5-30% of rural households in Kenya depending on location, results in overlooking the importance of understanding the relative position of women in male-headed households (Deere, Avarado and Twyman, 2012). For example, women do more than two-thirds of the work involved in coffee farming in Kenya. However, fewer than 5 percent of leadership roles in coffee cooperatives in the country are currently held by women).

A study of western Kenya by the Swedish Agricultural International Network Initiative (SAINI) found out that female-headed households had agricultural yields that were 23% lower than those of male-headed households, and attributed the inequality experienced such to less secure access to land and lower educational levels. Similarly, a male farmer from Zambia told the organization that "there were men who have died and left their spouses and children. However, their farms are still being cultivated and are even doing better after their deaths. This is because the women were involved in planning and decision-making." (Nirit, 2014). Women are, therefore, prominent economic actors in land related activities, with a major stake in crop and small stock husbandry, crop preservation, processing and marketing and food preparation for both domestic consumption and sale (Republic of Kenya, 2008)

Constraints to Women Effective Involvement in Agricultural Production in Rural Areas of Kenya

Despite women's important role in the agricultural sector, however, empirical evidence shows that they face a number of constraints and lag behind men with regard to agricultural productivity in Sub Saharan Africa due to the gender inequalities that persist in respect of access to, control over and utilisation of productive resources such as land, livestock,

labour, education, extension and financial services, and technology (Slavchevska, 2015). For instance, Land is considered the most important household asset for households that depend on agriculture for their livelihoods (FAO, 2011). However, across all developing regions of the world, women are consistently less likely to own or operate land; they are less likely to have access to rented land, and the land they do have access to usually be of poorer quality and in smaller plots (FAO, 2010). Furthermore, a study by African Women's Studies Centre (2014) in Kenya found out that only 20.7 per cent women own land compared to 43.8 per cent of men. Additionally, legal regulations and customary laws in Kenya often restrict women's access to and control over assets that can be accepted as collateral such as land. Biased land inheritance rights often favour male relatives, leaving both widows and daughters at a disadvantage (Agarwal, 2003).

Notably, Kenya is an agriculturally based economy where land is the primary form of collateral through which there can be economic empowerment, this essential requirement is unavailable for women. Thus, they cannot benefit from credit facilities in contexts where land can be used as collateral to secure loans. This inhibits women's access to credit thus a serious obstacle to improving their agricultural productivity, as without credit women farmers are unable to buy inputs such as seeds, fertilizers and improved technologies or they are unable to hire labour (Daman, 2003). Furthermore, agricultural extension services are in favour of males in Kenya. It should be noted that Agricultural Extension Services play an important role in the dissemination of agricultural information on new technologies and research aimed at improving agricultural productivity as it is important in promoting household food security, improving incomes and reducing rural poverty. (IFPRI, 2009). However, women farmer in rural areas faces numerous challenges in their quest to access Agricultural Extension Services (GOK Report, 2002). This situation results from women's lower influence over resources due to a range of institutional- and norm-based constraints. Similarly, women inputs are always not taken into consideration in policy making because, the Policy-makers, managers, agents and participants in agricultural support services are mostly dominated by males who are not always sufficiently informed of the specific problems and needs of women farmers (Udry & Hoddinott, 1995). Their triple gender roles also constrained their time and mobility with a higher proportion of them being illiterate and engaging in subsistence agriculture without being up to date with current technologies.

Prospects for Women's Improved Involvement in Agricultural Production in Kenya

Closing gender disparities in agricultural production in Kenya is generally seen to depend on women's empowerment. Kenya has thus passed legislation to improve the subservient status of rural women in agricultural production (Muriithi and Matz, 2015). For example, some agricultural development-focused programs, including the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP) strategy on the enhancement of agricultural production, acknowledge the importance of women's rural lives. In order to accomplish female empowerment and mainstream the demands of women, men, and youth in all agricultural sub-sectors, the agriculture sector development strategy (asds) also suggests creating a gender policy for the agricultural sector (Gok, 2010). Similar to this, Kenya enacted a new constitution in 2010 that established the national and local governments. Following the 2013 general election, the national government relinquished most of its

powers, including agriculture, to the counties. Rodriguez-pose & Gill (2004) assert that the devolved style of government improves inclusive development by bringing services closer to the people. This is similar to Kenya's goal of devolution, which aims to give Kenyans more control and influence over the decision-making process. Additionally, devolution aims to enhance the delivery of close-by, conveniently accessible services and advance social and economic development (Kenyan Constitution, 2010). Women now have equal rights under the new constitution, including the ability to own land and inherit property. However, many people in Kenya's rural regions, including women farmers, are still ignorant of the new constitution since they continue to live under the outdated system that disadvantages women and girls, especially when it comes to property rights. Women who own property have the flexibility to escape violent relationships and access capital (Wasike, 2013). Affirmative action is used to rectify and equalize long-standing disparities that are the primary source of marginalization. Devolution also aims to preserve and advance the rights and interests of minorities and marginalized populations, including women. Devolution addresses gender mainstreaming on concerns of gender marginalization (Kenyan Constitution, 2010). Finally, gender discrimination in the horticultural labor market and gender disparity in the distribution of profits from horticultural output are acknowledged in Kenya's national horticulture policy (Gok, 2012).

Conclusion

In order to provide the groundwork for further research on gender disparity in agriculture, this study compiles the actual data on women's responsibilities in agricultural production. The primary conclusions are that while women make up at least half of Kenya's agricultural labor force, their ability to contribute effectively to agricultural productivity is hampered by customs that favor males. Second, women play an important role in agriculture and food production. However, since agriculture is often a family endeavor involving a variety of resources and inputs that are difficult to allocate by gender, it is challenging to scientifically assess the precise percentage generated by women. Consequently, this has played a significant role in the lack of attention that legislators pay to women while addressing their issues. Finally, despite their vital role in food production, women farmers are often overlooked by initiatives aimed at increasing agricultural output. Therefore, without rural women's collaboration, integrated rural development programs to enhance nutrition, boost food production, and provide basic healthcare cannot be achieved. Given that women are already overworked, it is more important to fully include them in the process of growth and its advantages rather than just giving them job chances. Lastly, a potential limitation of this research article that should be taken into account is that it was unable to obtain disaggregated data on the precise amount of agricultural output of women. As a result, it relied on the assumption that women play a significant role in agricultural productivity because they make up the majority of farm laborers and are in charge of household food security. In a similar vein, African cultural standards often require that if an adult man is present, the home will not be considered female-headed. As a result, families led by women nearly always have fewer adult members.

Recommendation

There is plenty of compelling evidence that the agricultural sector is a powerful driver of

economic growth in Kenya. Women make a significant contribution to Kenya economy through their agricultural activities. According to Sabo (2016) agricultural initiative which fails to recognize the role of women in agricultural production will only achieve 'false growth'. It is, therefore, necessary that agricultural policies, programmes, and projects to recognize the women's productive role in specific issues related to agriculture to raise their voices especially in the decision-making process at household, local, national and regional levels. From the government perspective, women contribution to agricultural production should be understood based on their contribution to food security in household and community rather than their contribution to commercialised agriculture which is dominated by men.

The Rural areas of Kenya have many geographically dispersed smallholder women farmers that are not integrated into key agriculture value chains. Dispersion increases production costs and reduces small farmer's competitiveness. Therefore, support to women's organisations in the rural areas should be made a priority and government through the ministry of Agriculture, livestock and fisheries should invest heavily in such organisations and movements to support the women from their subordination role in agricultural production. Despite the significant role of the Kenyan constitution, 2010 is playing in ensuring equal rights for both gender in regards to the acquisition of agricultural resources such as land, many people are still unaware. Therefore, the government should partner with the civil society organization to offer civic education to community members regarding the legal rights of women. Lastly, financial institutions are very important in increasing productivity in Agriculture by rural women. The ministry of agriculture, livestock and fisheries should create a special program that will encourage existing female farmers and target potential female farmers to invest in the agriculture sector by supporting them financially.

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