

## Women Collective actions and Empowerment in Agricultural Value Chains in Simanjiro District Tanzania

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### Abstract

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Women face many barriers in accessing markets for their agricultural products. Collective action (CA) has been identified as a potential option to overcome such barriers and empower them. As such, they have been organising themselves in different forms of collective action through formal and informal organisations in order to raise the capital base required in production and to influence traditions, laws and regulations that hinder their active participation and benefits. This paper explored the relationship between women's participation in collective action initiatives and their empowerment. A cross-sectional research design was adopted, involving 402 respondents in the survey. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to explore the types and benefits of collective actions. In the same vein, an index scale was used to gauge the extent of women empowerment and ordinal logistical regression was used to determine the relationship between participation in collective action and empowerment. Women in the study area were categorized into medium level of women empowerment (CEI=0.6033) while 45.8% were categorized into higher level of women empowerment and 13.6% and 16.4% were categorized into no and low empowerment levels respectively. Ordinal logistic regression model revealed that marital status, education level, access to credit and participation in any form of collective action were the most important factors for women empowerment ( $P < 0.05$ ). In view of this, it is concluded that women still face many barriers towards their empowerment and CA has potential to contribute to their empowerment and the government and non-governmental organizations need to strengthen efforts in the identified CA initiatives. It is recommended that development actors work beyond increasing the resources at women's immediate disposal and focus more on addressing unequal social relations and the 'structures of opportunity' faced by women, including their sense of collective as well as individual agency.

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**Key words:** women empowerment, collective action, value chain

### Introduction

Women in Tanzania, as it is in most other developing countries, contribute a lot of labour in agricultural production (URT (2000)). The division of labour in agricultural production has a gender dimension. It is usually based on crops and, in many instances, cash crops and export crops are "male crops," while subsistence crops are "female crops," based on the notion that women are responsible for feeding the family while men are responsible for providing cash income to the family (Doss, 1999). Although women are involved in all production activities and processes, men usually dominate in the marketing of the agricultural products and have a final decision over use of the income accrued from different types of agricultural production (Baden, 2013).

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Gutierrez (2003) argues that, in agricultural value chains, earning a living, having access to markets and even paying taxes are influenced by whether one is male or female, implying that gender inequality is rampant. It has also been argued that throughout the world women do not enjoy the same opportunities as men because of their sex (UNDP, 1995). Women face many obstacles to development and enjoy disproportionate return on their labour. Their participation in decision making over production and marketing of agricultural produce is sometimes hampered by lack of ownership of assets and means of production such as land. In order to overcome barriers which face women in agricultural markets, they have been organising themselves in different forms of collective action through formal and informal organisations in order to raise the capital base required in production and influence traditions, laws and regulations that hinder their active participation and getting benefits from their engagement in different initiatives of collective actions (Barham and Chitemi, 2009). Collective action (CA) can be defined as voluntary action taken by a group to achieve common interests (Oxfam GB, 2013). It refers to both the process by which voluntary institutions are created and maintained and the groups that decide to act together. Most definitions of CA have, in common, several basic features: the involvement of a group of people, shared interest and some common action. CA can be a one-time event, for example a community coming together to build a water tank, or it can refer to activities of a specific group of people. These initiatives usually take different forms of collective actions such as self-help groups, savings and credits, producer and marketing groups. Collective action can bring a range of benefits such as improved market linkage and easy access to production inputs (Barham and Chitemi, 2009).

It is argued that women benefit differently from market access than men. This is due to the fact that market access is more associated with status, leadership, access to new information and innovation than the effects of improved market access which may be even more significant for women than men (KIT, 2010; Tovo, 2010; Mutua *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, in order to bring about sustainable development, especially in the value chain context, it is imperative that women are empowered to actively participate and benefit from their engagement in agricultural value chains. In order to help women overcome barriers to effective participation and benefit from agricultural markets, collective action initiatives have been suggested as a way of bringing about empowerment. There is a need to understand whether women's involvement in collective action in agricultural value chains impacts on their empowerment in order to assist policy makers and practitioners to integrate such variables in development planning and in overcoming factors hampering women from benefitting in CA. Therefore, this paper presents an empirical investigation on women's collective actions and outcomes in the onion value chain in Simanjiro District of Tanzania.

There is paucity in literature and theory between the impact of collective action on social capital and empowerment. For example, Uphoff and Wijayarathna (2000) highlight how structural forms of social capital (roles, rules, procedures and social networks) variables basically reflect the empowerment outcome and how such variables facilitate mutually beneficial collective action and how cognitive forms of social capital (norms, values, attitudes and trust) are conducive for mutually beneficial collective action. This line of argument connotes the assumptions that improvement in collective actions will positively impact on social capital and empowerment. Nevertheless, Coles and Mitchell (2011) argue that the transformation of value chain initiatives and improvement in social capital into wellbeing and empowerment may be affected by location specific contexts and environment. Contrary to the argument by Coles and Mitchell (2011) on the expected relationships, Pretty and Ward (2001) and Krishna (2001) have shown that human and social capital formation have been pivotal in solving many communities' development problems. This paper contributes to this debate and seeks to explore the impact of women's participation in collective action initiatives for their empowerment.

### **Background on programme and study area**

The study examined a planned change initiative programme in Same and Simanjiro Districts, called Social and Economic Empowerment Programme for Simanjiro and Same Districts (SEEP for SiSa). This entailed a shift from traditional agricultural development interventions which overemphasize on production as a way of building the capacity of smallholder farmers and less efforts in linking farmers with other actors to ensure their access to sustainable market chains. The programme's overarching goal was to increase income and food security through improvements in market access which was anticipated to transform communities to be socially and economically empowered. The programme developed market commodity chains and supported formation of different groups of collective action that aimed to empower smallholder farmers to participate actively and profitably in market transactions. The collective action groups included production and marketing groups for accessing production inputs, credit, extension services and marketing linkages.

It was anticipated that women's participation in these groups of collective actions would gradually generate reasonable incomes for the involved actors and bring a range of benefits that would lead to their empowerment.

### Methodology

The study from which this paper is based was conducted in Simanjiro District of Manyara Region, Tanzania. The district has both Government and Non-Governmental Organisations, promoting onion production and marketing, using value chain approach. There are many farmer groups organized for collective action along onion production and marketing, and the district is among the pilot areas in Tanzania for village community banks (VICOBA).

The study adopted a cross-sectional research design. The sampling unit was an individual woman participating in different forms of collective actions along the onion value chain. Villages with farmer groups that were actively engaged in collective actions along onion value chain were purposively selected. Simple random sampling technique was used to select women groups involved in different forms of collective actions. This also included women who were not participating in the value chain development activities but were actively engaged in some forms of collective actions. A household survey was conducted in all eight villages, involving 402 respondents.

Four women empowerment indices were developed and used to construct a composite empowerment index (CEI) (UNDP, HDI, 2005; cited in Varghese, 2011; Alkire, 2002; IFPRI, 2012). Personal autonomy index (PAI) was used to understand whether a woman was able to visit parental home, hospital, market, help a relative with money, seek financial help or set money for personal use without seeking permission from her husband. In the same light, the household decision-making index (HDMI) was sought to determine who makes decisions over the following matters: children's education, family planning, day to day expenditure, purchase of permanent items, going outside home, medical treatment, spending personal income, use of family income, marriages of sons/daughters, selection of crops to plant in the field, food purchase, and purchase of clothes and entertaining guests. Domestic consultation index (DCI) was employed to assess whether women are consulted by their husbands when they want to spend family income on purchasing furniture and utensils, land, medicine, clothes, food, consumer durables, spending money on children education, spending money accrued from onion sale, opening up a bank account, and spending up a personal income/wage. The freedom of movement index (FM) included items regarding women's freedom to visit market, medical facility, relatives/friends, parental home, meetings, social functions e.g. marriage ceremonies, going to distant places for shopping and visiting financial institutions such as banks.

CEI was computed by averaging those four indices.  $Y = 1/4(\text{PAI} + \text{HDMI} + \text{DCI} + \text{FMI}) \dots (1)$ . The contribution and the net effects of women collective action on women empowerment was assessed using ordinal logistic regression model. The dependent variable (Y) was categorized into four levels (no empowerment, low empowerment, medium empowerment and high empowerment) based on individual scores on the CEI. The independent variables included income, age, education, land ownership and access to credit.

$$\text{Logit}(Y) = \ln\left(\frac{\pi}{1-\pi}\right) = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_n X_n + \varepsilon_i$$

Where:

$\alpha$  = error term

Logit (Y) = chances of being highly empowered (score on CEI)

$X_1$  = Age of respondent measured in years

$X_2$  = Marital status of respondent (married/cohabiting 1, 0 otherwise)

$X_3$  = Education level of respondent measured in years of schooling

$X_4$  = Age at first marriage (married at  $\geq 18$  = 1 and 0 if married < 18 years)

$X_5$  = Land owned/cultivated by respondent's family (measured in acres)

$X_6$  = Access to credit (Ever received credit 1, 0 otherwise)

$X_7$  = Participation in collective action initiatives (group membership) (Participant 1 and 0 for non-participant)

## Findings and Discussion

### Women engagement in collective actions

Women's access to agricultural inputs and credit was constrained by many reasons. Many formal institutions that offer credit required physical collateral that women did not have. As a result, they were heavily biased towards men and male headed households which had more assets and were better represented in formal groups such as cooperatives which enabled access to credit. Other sources of credit such as commercial and development banks typically provided loans to sectors where the majority of women were not involved. For example, the provision of credit for technological services was biased to export crops which are dominantly controlled by men. Therefore, in order to overcome this barrier, women engaged in different forms of collective actions that were envisaged to reverse the situation. The findings presented in Table 1 reveal the types of collective action in which women were involved. It was evident that women's access to financial services and access to production inputs were leading types of collective action in which most women were engaged. The least common type of collective action in which women were involved included those involved in political movements, water use management and civic groups. From the data presented in Table 1 and Table 2, it could be stated that women perceived a wide range of benefits from CA which, however, varied considerably across different socio-cultural backgrounds and contexts.

**Table 1: Types of women CA**

Type of organisation	Percent (n=402)
Finance, credit, or savings group e.g. VICOBA	36.7
Farmer/producer and input receiving groups	35.1
Religious or spiritual group	5.7
Livestock keeping/production group	4.5
Women group	4.5
Marketing group	3.2
Burial society or festival society	3.9
Political group or movement group	2.5
Water use and management committee	2.7
NGO or civic group	1.0

Those types of collective action reflect the government's and non-governmental organizations' initiatives to encourage farmers to organize themselves in groups or cooperatives for easy access to credit from financial institutions (PRSP, 2000). Similar findings were reported by Oxfam GB (2013) in which women were found to join collective action groups in order to increase their access to agricultural inputs, extension services as well as credit. Also, Oxfam GB (2013) found that collective action can occur around any social, economic, or political issue. It can be formal or informal, ranging from voluntary community-level self-help groups to formal groups advocating for change at the global level. Lack of access to resources and particularly capital has limited women's abilities to accumulate assets that would serve as collateral when in need of credit as compared to men. The weakness of women's land rights results in an inability to use land as collateral to obtain access to credit. Other reasons include social and cultural barriers, women's lower education levels relative to men and their lack of familiarity with loan procedures as well as limited mobility and interaction with predominantly male credit officers or moneylenders (Mohamed, 2003).

### Motivation and benefits for joining Collective Actions

The concept of women's participation in collective action is not new. Traditional women have been participating in many different types of collective actions for different reasons, hence differences in the benefits accrued from their participation. This study revealed that women participated in informal or traditional and in formal groups. In traditional groups, both men and women participated although there were no clearly set rules and regulations for such participation and benefit sharing. Most of the traditional collective actions were formed as a result of social networks and social capital in particular communities. Formal collective actions were established by development agencies which, most of the time, set conditions for the groups such as type of members, participation in different activities and sharing of benefits. Women anticipate to accrue different benefits when they join groups of collective actions, regardless of whether the groups are formal or informal.

This study found that among the benefits received by women involved in collective action initiatives were access to credit, knowledge and skills required to improve their production as well as access to markets and market information about their products (See Table 2). The positive impact of women's participation in collective actions and access to credit and production inputs has also been reported in literature (Oxfam 2013; Barham and Chitemi, 2009).

**Table 2: Benefits derived from being a CA group member**

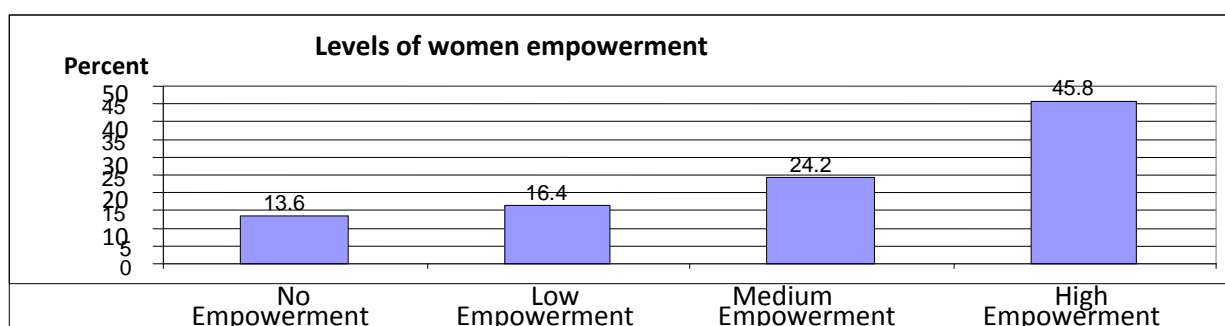
Benefits	Percent (n=402)
Easy access to credit	46.1
Knowledge and skills for improved production	15.5
Easy access to inputs and information about onion markets	13.1
Social support especially when one has problems	6.7
Increased access/linkage to market	5.2
To learn religious issues	4.1
Alternative source of income to meet family needs	2.9
Social protection, defense and advice	2.6
Increased access to resources e.g. water for irrigation	2.0
Increased access to extension services	1.7

The type of benefits reported in Table 2 imply that women involvement in the initiatives of collective actions had potential to improve the wellbeing and hence their empowerment. These findings concur with those of Barham and Chitemi (2009) who found that collective action has the potential to improve women's access to markets. Evidence for both traditional and non-traditional types of collective action shows that a lot of emphasis has been on addressing production and productivity constraints, general social constraints and social constraints that specifically limit women's empowerment. In this regard, it is important to explore further how the improvement in collective actions may influence change in women's wellbeing and empowerment.

#### Status of Women Empowerment in the Value Chains

The mean score on the composite empowerment index was 0.6033 which is the medium level of empowerment (IFPRI, 2012; UNDP, HDI, 2005; cited by Varghese, 2011). Generally, This implies that women in Simanjiro District were within the medium level of empowerment. Less than half of the study sample (45.8%) had attained a higher level of empowerment, and about a quarter (24.2%) of the sample was categorized as having medium empowerment. The rest of the respondents were categorized as low and no empowerment (16.4% and 13.6%) respectively. Figure 1 presents the level of women empowerment in Simanjiro District. The factors leading to low or higher levels of women empowerment were found to be diverse in nature. In the study area (Simanjiro District), the district council, in collaboration with some development organizations (e.g. VECO and World Vision) had facilitated the establishment of many collective action groups which were engaged in production and marketing of their crop products and livestock. It was hypothesized that women's participation in these groups of collective action would result in many benefits that would empower women involved in such initiatives. In order to explore the relationship between women's involvement in the collective action initiatives and their empowerment, ordinal logistic regression was used.

**Figure: Levels of women empowerment**



### Collective actions and women empowerment

The ordinal logistic regression results on the impacts of women involvement in collective action initiatives on chances of their being highly empowered (Table 3) further revealed that marital status, education level, access to credit and participation in any form of collective action were the most important factors for women empowerment in Simanjiro District ( $p < 0.05$ ). Some of the factors emanated from their engagement in collective action initiatives in the value chain (i.e. access to credit, belonging to CA groups) and actual use of credit). These factors had significant impact on chances for women to be highly empowered. The findings imply that when women join collective action, they obtain benefits in different perspectives. Hence, while it is worth giving more emphasis on this initiative, it is also important to consider the broader contexts of its impact on women empowerment. As argued by Baden (2014), where collective actions focus narrowly on economic outcomes, a minority of women's group members is likely to experience economic empowerment, which may be both limited in scope and transitory. Therefore, there is a need to ensure that collective actions are designed to be inclusive of different categories of women, and interventions also tackle gender discriminatory norms and rules that govern women's economic opportunities (e.g. property rights such as land).

**Table 3: Results of the Estimated Ordinal Regression Model**

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Marital status	-0.339	0.143	5.630	1	0.018	-0.620	-0.059
Education level	1.090	0.236	21.392	1	0.000	0.0628	1.552
Land ownership	-0.033	0.283	0.013	1	0.908	-0.586	0.521
Access to credit	-0.569	0.298	3.655	1	0.056	-1.153	0.014
Member of CA	-0.638	0.272	5.501	1	0.019	-1.171	-0.105
Age at first marriage	0.027	0.030	0.825	1	0.364	-0.031	0.086
Uses credit services	-0.181	0.097	3.505	1	0.061	-0.371	0.009

### Conclusion and recommendations

The findings of this study have revealed that women's access to agricultural inputs and credits is still constrained by many factors. In order to overcome this hindrance, women are urged to engage in different forms of collective actions that are anticipated to improve their access to such resources as financial services, production assets as well as social groups, including religious, burial and political groups. Women obtain a range of benefits when they join groups of collective actions, which in turn, help them to overcome barriers to access some of the productive resources and services needed for improving their wellbeing.

It has also been revealed that in the study area, women were categorized into the medium level of empowerment. This could be attributed to initiatives such as collective action in the onion value chain that had been developed. The collective action groups identified in this study reflect the services that women need to improve their wellbeing. Therefore, in seeking to empower women, the government and non-governmental organisations seeking to should consider including such variables when designing interventions to support women's economic empowerment. For the empowerment effect acquired through collective action initiatives to have long term impacts, development actors must go beyond increasing the resources at women's immediate disposal and focus more on addressing unequal social relations and the 'structures of opportunity' faced by women, including their sense of collective as well as individual agency.

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