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Full Length Research Paper

Fostering collective action amongst smallholder farmers in East Africa: Are women members adequately participating?

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Farmer groups in Sub-Saharan Africa are considered important vehicles for rural development, promotion of agricultural productivity and improved economic growth of communities especially women. However, weak institutional mechanisms put in place during formation and subsequent evolution processes has potential of exposing women members to the danger of alienation. This study addressed constraining factors and opportunities for women in groups, as well as their contribution to effectiveness and proper functioning of groups. The survey engaged a total of 40 groups and 305 members from two East African countries (Kenya and Uganda). The study revealed there were twice as many women, in Kenya and Uganda, as there were men in farmer groups. However, women were inadvertently excluded in decision making roles. Despite their small numbers men, were found to hold key leadership positions in farmer groups than women members in Uganda. In spite of limited representation in decision making, group members perceived women to be more trustworthy, more cohesive, better leaders in the group than men in Uganda ($p<0.05$) as compared to Kenya where both gender was perceived equally on attributes. The limited role played by women suggests that beyond numerical equity, there is still a long road to functional equity in farmer groups. The gender inequalities experienced in the management of farmer groups negates their fundamental function as an avenue for women empowerment.

Keywords: Kenya, Uganda, gender, farmer groups, gender roles, women empowerment, rural development, agriculture.

INTRODUCTION

Farmer groups in Sub-Saharan Africa are fundamental in promoting rural development and agricultural productivity. They can determine the growth of a community either socially, economically, politically, technologically and culturally through enhancing social capital (Lobo, 2008). Groups bring together individuals with common interests, activities, and challenges who cannot, as individuals, meet their goals effectively (Kariuki and Place, 2005). Through collective action, groups solve problems collaboratively and improve benefits to farmers such as through better market access, inputs and credit, improved access to storage facilities and provision of funds to farmers through informal micro-credit approaches such as merry-go-round and table banking (Davis and Negash, 2007; Kariuki and Place, 2005; Hellin et al., 2009; Lobo, 2008). Farmer groups include cooperative societies, producer organizations, farmer self-help groups, marketing groups and community based organizations (Debrah and Nederlof, 2002).

Agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa still faces myriad of

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challenges such as declining land/ labour ratios, inequitable land distribution within smallholder sectors, rapid urbanization and changing urban consumption patterns, and unequal contribution of men and women in agricultural productivity (Jayne et al., 2010). Women in these countries also contribute up to 60% of agricultural production as well as about 43% of the agricultural labor force (FAO, 2011). Women farmers' potential to significantly contribute to improved agricultural production is however hindered by factors such as limited decision making power within household, lack of knowledge and poor financial resources (Djoudi and Brockaus, 2011). And, it has somewhat led to lower productivity by female farmers compared to that of men farmers in terms of yields and earnings (Alesina et al., 2011; FAO, 2011). Women, who also serve as primary care givers in the home, contribute to most domestic roles and responsibilities but are often absent during decision making especially those related to good agricultural productivity (UN Women, 2012).

Through formation of new groups or joining existing groups, women farmers can overcome decision making constraints by working collectively. Working in groups allows women farmers to increase their control over assets and improve their productivity and well-being (Quisumbing and Pandolfelli, 2010). Group membership enables women to gain greater access and control over income obtained from enterprises and better manage resources than women who are not members of groups (Kimaro et al., 2013). Women farmer group members were also more likely to get involved in several aspects of the groups such as production, management and decision-making over revenues and expenditures obtained from sales of dairy products (Kimaro et al., 2013). Groups also present women with opportunities to benefit through provision of knowledge and skills such as training, power of negotiation and information on production and markets (Bernard et al., 2008; Foundjem Tita et al., 2011). Improving women's participation and decision making provides opportunities to enhance women's wellbeing and livelihoods (Evans et al., 2016), which in turn contributes to goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on gender equality and empowerment of women and girls.

In East Africa, groups are commonly of mixed gender and women members form the highest percentage in membership (Davis and Negash, 2007; Sanginga et al., 2006; Gotschi et al., 2009). This is despite numerous constraints faced by women members (Davis and Negash, 2007; Sanginga et al., 2006; Gotschi et al., 2009; Manchón and Macleod, 2010). Whereas men and women can both be members of the same groups, their interests in collective action often differ (Pandolfelli et al., 2008; Westermann et al., 2005).

Farmer groups are deeply rooted in local customs, community norms and beliefs that are often gendered with men and women having differences in knowledge, interests, motivations, opinions and decision-making capacity. These are likely to influence collective action, effectiveness of intended outcomes and could hinder women participation in farmer groups (Tanwir and Safdar, 2013; Gotschi et al., 2009; Coleman and Mwangi, 2013; Pandolfelli et al., 2007). In some cases, institutional mechanisms, collective action activities, processes and the organization structures set in place could inherently exclude and marginalize women farmers during decision making, group processes and distribution of benefits (Pandolfelli et al., 2008). Viability of a farmer group greatly depends on its ability to be considerate to the needs of its members (Tanwir and Safdar, 2013). The degree to which member needs are accommodated depend on group members' level of participation.

Women membership numbers have generally been accepted as a definite measure of women participation (Gotschi et al., 2009; Coleman and Mwangi, 2013; Tanwir and Safdar, 2013). Women participation in groups is beneficial in the long run: improved quality of participation ensures women are involved in all aspects of the group, stand to benefit and their needs taken into consideration (Selhausenab, 2016). Having adequate women numbers is fundamental, nevertheless, working towards improved quality of participation is more valuable (Das, 2014). The nature of participation in groups can be nominal, passive, consultative, activity specific, active or interactive (Tanwir and Safdar, 2013). These different forms of participation differ in intensity: nominal participation entails women membership in numbers only while passive participation is where women attend meetings and are involved in groups but rarely do they give their opinions. In consultative participation women give opinions on matters but without a guarantee that the opinion would influence decisions. Activity specific participation is where the women are asked to volunteer or undertake specific tasks. This differs from active participation where women express their opinions freely without inhibitions and take initiatives in the group. Interactive participation should be advocated for as women members have a say and a voice and thus adequately participate and influence group decisions (Tanwir and Safdar, 2013).

Despite the numerous constraints, women membership in farmer groups was found to be beneficial and could significantly increase overall performance of the group. In India and Nepal, collective action organizations with high proportion of women in their executive committee showed significant improvements in forest condition, attributed to improved forest rule compliance and cooperation among women (Agarwal, 2009). In Madagascar, farmer groups that integrated women more effectively in decision making processes led to high performance scores (CRS, 2012). Westermann et al. (2005), in a study covering Latin America, Africa and Asia, identified an increase in collaboration, solidarity, and conflict resolution in groups where women were present.

Women in leadership positions in farmer groups were

found to willingly help others and built higher levels of structural capital (Gotschi et al., 2009).

The cost of women exclusion is far more detrimental than just the farmer group as it also affects the household and the society. Women exclusion can lead to increased levels of poverty, increased levels of infertility, child mortality and malnutrition (Tanwir and Safdar, 2013).

Women participation in collective action has been extensively studied especially on gender compositions of groups and/or factors and determinants of women participation as a binary choice. However, there have been fewer studies that explored the level of women participation and their specific roles in the farmer groups particularly in Eastern Africa. This paper aims to address this gap through analysis of the roles and responsibilities held by women and men in farmer groups and their perceived contribution to the success of the group.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study sites

The study was carried out in the slopes of Mt Elgon in Kenya and Uganda, Bungoma County and Kapchorwa District, respectively. These represented implementing sites for strengthening rural institutions (SRI) project. The project's main objectives were: to enhance capacity of variants of grassroots institutions and provide support to harness broader collective action for rural service delivery; to improve enterprise development within the context of conservation, and community level asset accumulation; and to build a regional institutional platform for knowledge sharing, scaling up, and participation in sustainable land management policy making and development processes in East Africa.

The two sites were preselected based on existing knowledge of the communities and demonstrated importance of collective action. Similarities and differences between the two districts are presented in (Table 1) and were obtained from (KNBS, 2012) and (UBOS, 2014) for Bungoma and Kapchorwa respectively. Bungoma and Kapchorwa, have high percentage of mixed groups (Table 1). Through previous studies, the two sites showed women still face constraints as they were less likely involved in major decisions in the household and in the community (Bourne et al., 2015).

Research design and sampling

A sample of 40 groups from both study sites was drawn from the baseline survey undertaken under the SRI project (Tanui et al., 2011). A total of 314 group members were selected for interviews: 225 from Kapchorwa and 90 members from Bungoma. A smaller number of members were selected from Bungoma due to a few challenges during the survey. Bungoma's topography is wide in nature and long distances between sub counties lead to inability of interviewers to reach the targeted farmers.

Stratified random sampling was utilized to select groups to be interviewed. The first criteria adopted was based on the gender composition of group. Since the study looked at women participation in farmer groups in comparison to men, only mixed groups were selected, therefore groups comprising of men or women only were left out in the survey. Further selection of groups was done based on group location and group function whether agricultural based, commodity enterprises or user. Stratification was preferred as it ensured a high degree of precision as variability within the stratum is minimized (Barahona and Levy, 2002).

Before beginning the survey, enumerators were asked to visit selected groups and obtain a list of all active members. Proportionate random sampling was then applied, where the obtained lists were subjected to a random number generated in excel and respondents randomly selected. An average of six members from each farmer group were interviewed in Bungoma, while another average of nine members from each farmer group were interviewed in Kapchorwa.

Data and survey instrument

Data was mainly collected by use of survey questionnaire administered to selected members of groups and additional information was also collected from the group as a unit. The survey aimed at collecting information comparing women and men participation in different roles in the groups. The roles were predefined, pre-selected and aggregated to represent commonly practiced roles in rural farmer groups based on previous field visits and project reports. Each of the survey respondents was asked to indicate which of the roles he/she has participated in the farmer group in the past year. The roles and responsibilities analyzed in this study are shown in Table 2.

Data analysis was completed by use of SPSS version 20. Chi-Square tests were conducted to test significant difference in women and men participation in different roles.

In the survey, the respondents were also asked to indicate their perceptions on the contribution of women and men to several performance indicators of the farmer group. This was through a five-point Likert scale: 1- low score & 5- high score. The performance indicators tested consisted group internal factors that ensure group success. The following criteria were used: transparency in the group (both members and group leaders), group cohesion/unity in the group; group trust (leaders and members) and conflicts within the group. The performance criteria were summarized from (Uphoff and Wijayaratna, 2000; Barhama and Chitemi, 2009; Wambugu

Table 1. Basic characteristics of study sites.

Characteristics	Bungoma County	Kapchorwa District
Country	Kenya	Uganda
Location	Western Province	Eastern Province
Population density	482 persons per km^2	310 persons per km^2
Agricultural activities	Maize, sunflower, sugarcane, coffee, tobacco, potatoes, beans	Millet, potatoes, beans, sesame, sunflower, cotton, coffee, wheat, tomatoes, cabbage, passion fruit and onions
Farmer group composition (Tanui et al., 2011).	Mixed: 94% Women only: 6% Men only: 0%	Mixed: 83.95% Women only: 13% Men only: 0%

Table 2. Selected roles of members in farmer groups.

Assigned no	Roles played by members in groups
1	Participation in planning of activities of the farmer group
2	Participation in implementation of group activities
3	Participation in monitoring and evaluation of activities
4	Member of a committee
5	Participation in budgeting and costing of activities
6	Processing of group products before marketing
7	Call for meetings in the group
8	Chair meetings in the group
9	Participation in purchases of group inputs
10	Participation in marketing of group products
11	Participation in looking for markets of group products
12	Participation in decisions during distribution of benefits to the members
13	Keeping of group records
14	Writing minutes in the group
15	Keeping records of money in the group
16	Accessing funds from the bank for the group
17	Participation in soliciting for trainings in the group
18	Attending trainings offered to the group
19	Participation in mediation of conflicts/disagreements in the group
20	Participation in making of group constitution
21	Participation in making the rules in the group
22	Participation in writing of group proposal for funds
23	Participation in soliciting of credit/loans for the group
24	Soliciting partners for the group
25	Communicate group activities to others in the group

et al., 2009; Westermann et al., 2005; Joy et al., 2008; Place et al., 2004; Kariuki and Place, 2005).

A mixed method approach was adopted for this study, where both quantitative and qualitative data was used to triangulate results. Mixed methods approach was most preferred since it goes beyond confirmation but also tries to gain better understanding of results (Dunning et al., 2007). In this study focus group discussions (FGD) with farmer groups was chosen as the alternative method to triangulate findings from the survey. A total of eight focus groups were held in both countries with average of 10-15 members per FGD. A few groups were combined to form one FGD session due to small numbers of members that attended. During the FGD members were asked to provide

ratings (in percentage) on the level of women and men participation in group activities, also women and men contribution to the performance criteria. For each rating, a proper explanation and reasons was provided. In occasions where there were conflicting views several ratings were taken and an overall average obtained, the reasons for each rating provided was then recorded. Pearson chi-square, a non parametric test, was used to analyze significant differences between women and men participation in groups (McHugh, 2013).

RESULTS

Overall description of study sample

In the study, 44% of the respondents were men while 56% were women in Bungoma County while 37% and 63% were men and women in Kapchorwa respectively. More than 85% of the respondents had at least primary and/or secondary education while only 13% had tertiary and university education.

In both sites, the numbers of women members outnumbered men: the number of women was twice, on average, as many as men members. However, the study revealed that the number of women had significantly decreased, from the initiation stage to the time when the study was conducted in Bungoma. In Kapchorwa, there was a slight increase in number of women members from the start to the time of the study (Table 3).

Roles and responsibilities of women and men in farmer groups

A higher percentage of men compared to women members indicated to have been involved or participated in 18 of the 24 roles analyzed in Bungoma County (Table 4). This accounted for two thirds of all specified roles. Three of the 18 roles, performed more by men, showed significant difference between men and women participation, $p<0.10$. The three included: membership in committees, looking for trainings extension services from NGOs or ministry, and lobbying for credit/loans through inviting partners to invest in the farmer group.

Other roles that men members participated more include: calling and chairing of meetings, purchasing of group inputs, looking for markets for group products, participated in decisions on distribution of group benefits, writing of minutes, accessing of group funds, attended trainings, making of group constitution, writing of proposals, accessing credit/loans for group from other sources, looking for trainers or people to offer trainings, looking for partners to invest in the group and communicated about group activities more than the women.

The remaining 6 of the 24 roles that women participated in, though not significantly, include: planning of activities, monitoring and evaluation, processing of products before marketing, marketing of group products, keeping of records of group and keeping records of money for the group. It is interesting to note that more men than women were involved in collecting money from the bank yet, more women were involved in keeping record of money. Other unexpected results are that women farmers were mostly involved in the processing of farm products while men were tasked with marketing. (Table 4).

It was also evident at Kapchorwa District, which men participated more in almost all tested roles at a higher rate than women [23 out of the total 24 roles], $p<0.10$. Eight of these roles significantly involved more men than women members and accounted for a third of roles tested. At Kapchorwa, the proportion of men that chaired meetings and /or called for meeting doubled that of women. Other roles that significantly involved men members more than women members include: accessing funds from the bank; looking for trainings and extension services; making of group constitution; writing of proposal for funds; and identifying partners to invest in the group. With regards to involvement in group committees, women members were more active than men members; this was however found not significant ($p>0.05$). In Bungoma women members kept records of group accounts but men accessed money from the bank. Men members participation in accessing group accounts was significant in Kapchorwa, $p<0.05$. Men members also participated more in keeping records of group accounts and documentation, and accessed funds from the bank at Kapchorwa.

There were also many roles that both men and women fairly participated in where more than 50% of both men and women participated in both sites. The roles included planning of group activities, monitoring and evaluation of activities, implementation of activities, processing and marketing of group products, making of constitution and rules, decisions in distribution of benefits, attending trainings organized by the group, mediation in conflicts, and communicating group activities (Table 4). Such roles indicate the roles are not biased towards one specific gender.

Member's perception of men and women to group performance

This study also sought to understand perceptions on the contribution of women and men to the performance indicators of farmer groups. Interviewed group members were asked to rank overall contribution of men and women in the group internal factors that ensure collective success. The following criteria was adopted: transparency in the group (both members and group leaders), group cohesion/ unity in the group; group trust (leaders and members) and conflicts within the group.

From analysis, there was no significant difference in ranking of men and women group members based on the

Table 3. Member characteristics in Farmer groups in Bungoma and Kapchorwa.

	Kapchorwa (*n=24*)				**Bungoma (*n=16*)**				**Total (n=40)**	
Number of members	**Men**		**Women**		**Men**		**Women**		**Men**	**women**
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	**mean**	**mean**
Membership at start	5.59	4.48	10.96	11.48	7.13	5.15	15.38	11.11	**6.24**	**12.73**
Membershiptime of study	6.77	4.31	11.58	8.23	7.88	3.83	12.88	6.06	**7.24**	**12.10**

perception of their contributions to the group performance in Bungoma County. The perceived contributions of men and women members to cohesion were similar (Figure 2). In terms of trust, the 'high' bars show that women members were perceived to be more trustworthy than men. Women were also perceived to be more transparent "high and very high bars" and were thought to participate more in group activities than men. This difference was however found not significant; all ranks provided by members were in the mid to very high categories, Figure 2.

In Kapchorwa District, there was significant difference in ranking of men and women group members based on the perception of their contributions to the group performance. Women members were thought to be more trustworthy ('medium' bars); women leaders were considered more transparent as members and as leaders (Figure 3). Men members were found to be more cohesive. These findings suggest that women were therefore perceived to contribute more to the group performance attributes.

Even though women in Kapchorwa were considered more transparent as members as well as leaders, men were more involved in accessing of group funds from the bank and often kept records of money. These findings also contradict with findings from FGD discussions where participants indicated that women were more transparent and trustworthy and therefore can be trusted. FGD held in Kapchorwa further supported the findings from the surveys as the percentage ratings given by the FGD members conformed to the ranks given during the survey, (Table 5).

Data collected from Kapchorwa showed that both men and women members present during the FGD considered women's level of participation in farmer groups to be higher than that of men members. Higher women ratings were obtained during the FGDs because women were considered to perform other chores within households as opposed the group responsibilities but still managed to attend group meetings and group activities. In one of the sessions a woman member said "…. *I cook food for my family before going to the field (group field) to do the work and he (the man) will always come late at the end*" FGD Kapchorwa, March 2014.

Similar sentiments were also shared in another focus group "…. *We [women] have a lot of household activities that we [women] have to perform before the husband wakes up; we are very hardworking and perform double work, both group and household activities*" FGD Kapchorwa, March 2014. Other reasons given include: women were thought to be more committed to the group and worked harder in the group, considered assertive and would always push their husbands to attend group activities. The participants also said that women always implement activities discussed and agreed upon during meetings. Women rarely diverted money meant for the group as they lack collateral when the money or property is lost.

Although ratings in Bungoma weren't different, there were divergent and sometimes conflicting views on the reasons behind the given ratings. Men members of farmer groups rated women members lower in their level of participation in the group, while women members rated men members lower in level of participation, Table 5. Some of the reasons given for this diversity was that "*The man gives all the power to women to do the work and therefore they (men) should be given the same rates as women*" FGD Bungoma, March 2014.

On the other hand, women were thought to have lower ratings as compared to men because women always come late for group work due to other responsibilities in the home. Men were also said to delegate household duties to the women who had to undertake them before engaging in group activities to avoid conflicts at home. From the discussions, responsibilities given to women in the household played a key role in determining the level of their participation in farmer groups and should not be overlooked.

Perceived leadership performance ratings by focus group

Further, focus group participants, were also asked to rate (in percentage) men and women in terms of leadership performance: Table 6, collates all rates given from FGDs

Table 4. Roles played by men and women members of groups in the two study sites.

Roles played by members in groups	Bungoma County (%)			Kapchorwa District (%)		
	Men	Women	Pearson Chi (X^2)	Men	Women	Pearson Chi (X^2)
Have you participated in planning of activities of your group?	74.4	84.6	0.503	84.6	69.4	0.709
Do you participate in implementation of group activities?	76.9	86.5	0.203	68.8	65.7	0.430
Are you involved in monitoring and evaluation of activities?	71.8	57.7	0.339	65	59.7	0.264
Are you a member of any committee in the group?	51.3	34.6	0.091•	38.8	39.6	0.946
Are you involved in budgeting and costing of activities?	-	-		56.3	49.3	0.235
Do you process group products before marketing?	59	67.3	0.413	43.8	34.3	0.128
Do you call for meetings in the group?	30.8	17.3	0.108	36.6	20.1	0.007**
Do you chair meetings in the group?	17.9	7.7	0.125	35	16.4	0.001***
Are you involved in purchases of group inputs?	43.6	42	0.630	42.5	41.8	0.894
Are you involved in marketing of group products?	56.4	62.5	0.676	62.5	52.2	0.116
Are you involved in looking for markets of group products	64.1	57.7	0.611	55	42.5	0.063•
Are you involved in decisions during distribution of benefits to the group?	84.6	67.3	0.107	61.3	59.7	0.572
Do you keep records of the group?	25.6	26.9	0.841	25	16.4	0.115
Do you write minutes in the group?	15.4	11.5	0.643	15	11.2	0.397
Do you keep records of money in the group?	17.9	19.2	0.807	15	11.9	0.498
Can you access funds from the bank for the group?	5.1	3.8	0.800	21.3	11.2	0.044*
Do you get involved in soliciting for trainings in the group?	48.7	21.2	0.007**	23.8	13.4	0.051•
Have you attended any trainings offered to the group	66.7	53.8	0.246	43.8	38.8	0.442
Are you involved in mediation of conflicts/disagreements in the group?	48.7	48.1	0.927	73.8	73.1	0.753
Were you involved in making of group constitution?	94.9	92.3	0.877	81.3	67.9	0.753
Were you involved in making the rules in the group?	94.9	94.2	0.783	75.0	70.9	0.022*
Are you involved in writing of group proposal for funds	56.4	38.5	0.146	28.8	11.2	0.001***
Are you involved in soliciting of credit/loans for the group?	39.5	22.7	0.100•	17.5	17.2	0.937
Do you solicit partners for the group?	43.6	32.7	0.356	25.0	9.0	0.002**
Do you communicate group activities to others in the group?	64.1	59.6	0.839	-	-	

Pearson chi square test for significance: ***at 0.1%, **at 1%, *at 5%, • at 10%.

in both sites. In Kapchorwa, women leaders were rated higher by both men and women members present than men in the FGD. Women leaders were thought to be more hard working, more trustworthy and committed to group activities. On the other hand, men were considered trustworthy to the level that they would not be trusted with group funds. In Bungoma, women leaders were rated lower than men leaders by both men and women, on average, present in the FGD, Table vi.

Men rated male leaders higher than that of female leaders while women rated

Table 5. Farmer group discussion ratings of the different levels of participations by men and women members.

Focus Group Discussions Ratings		Level of participation of men in farmer groups		Level of participation of women in farmer groups	
		Ratings by men members	*Ratings by women members*	*Ratings by men members*	*Ratings by women members*
Kapchorwa	Rating 1	65	75	80	84
	Rating 2	80	70	-	75
	Rating 3	80	-	90	95
	Rating 4	75	-	80	90
	Rating 5	70	90	-	-
	Rating 6	90	80	-	-
	Average ratings	**76.7**	**78.8**	**83.3**	**86**
Bungoma	Rating 1	80	90	65	90
	Rating 2	70	50	70	50
	Rating 3	90	60	60	95
	Rating 4	60	70	70	90
	Rating 5	70	70	65	85
	Rating 6	-	-	95	85
	Rating 7	-	-	40	60
	Average ratings	**74.0**	**68.0**	**66.4**	**79.3**

Table 6. Perceived contribution to performance indicators by FGD participants.

	Kapchorwa				
Focus Group Discussions ratings		**How would you rate leadership performance by men in groups**		**How would you rate leadershipperformance by women in groups**	
		Ratings by men members	Ratings by women members	Ratings by men members	Ratings by women members
Kapchorwa	Rating 1	60	80	70	85
	Rating 2	80	75	70	80
	Rating 3	70		75	
	Rating 4	70	70	85	85
	Average	**70**	**75**	**75**	**83.3**
Bungoma	Rating 1	60	75	45	85
	Rating 2	80	70		90
	Rating 3	75	80		
	Rating 5	30			
	Rating 6	68	46		
	Rating 7	58	58	70	70
	Rating 8	40	60	40	60
	Rating 9	70	30	60	40
	Rating 10	60	45		
	Average	**60.1**	**58.0**	**53.8**	**69.0**

female leaders higher than leaders who were males in Bungoma. Therefore, the level of leader performance of women and men in Bungoma was considered inconclusive. Most groups preferred both men and women leaders. *"There are many groups with chairladies. These women help to stabilize the groups and always follow group rules. But we also need men as they often act as advisors and assist with those activities that are labour intensive"* FGD Bungoma, March 2014.

Both women and men leaders were advocated for as they both have different contributions to the group. Women playing the roles of members and leaders were

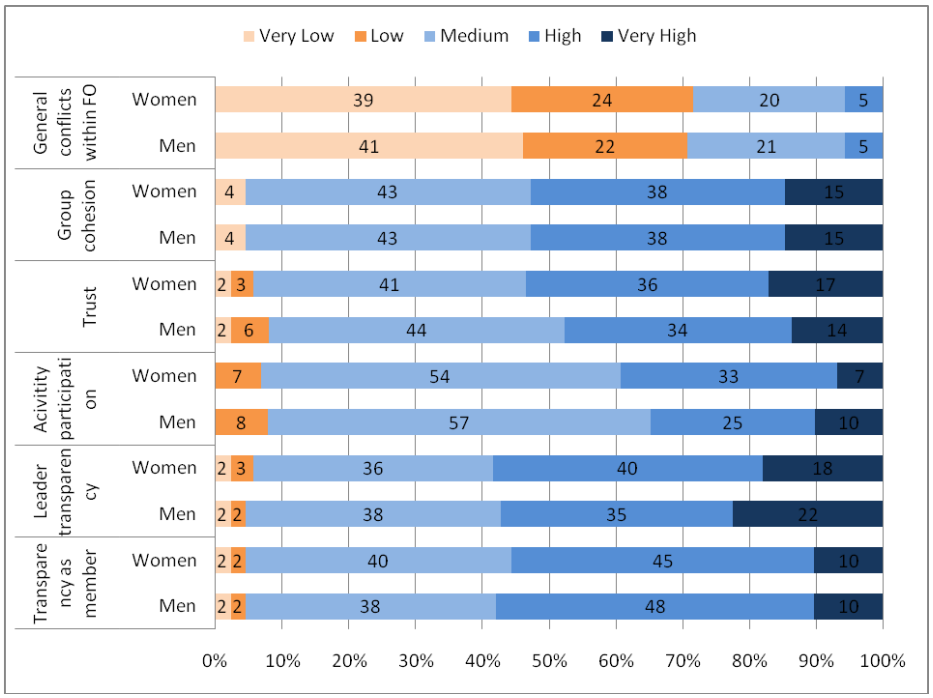

Figure 1. Members perception of women and men contribution to farmer group performance in Bungoma County.

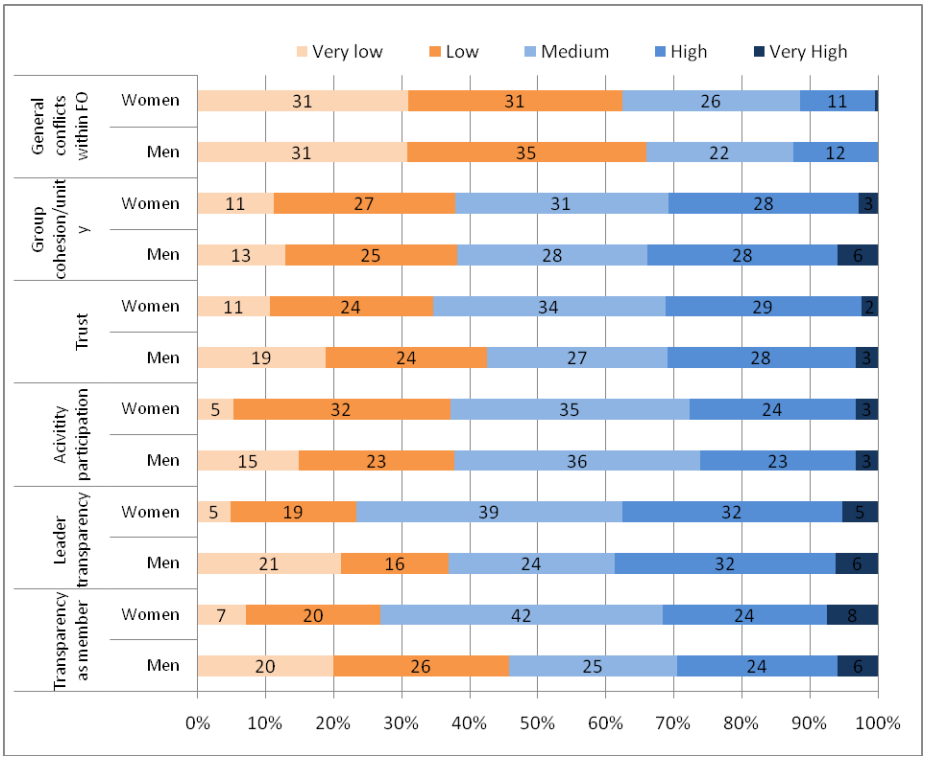

Figure 2. Members perception of women and men contribution to farmer group performance in Kapchorwa District.

considered committed and hardworking, resilient and compassionate. The men on the other hand could assist during consultation and during public meetings as well guide in conflict resolution.

DISCUSSION

The distribution of roles between men and women members in farmer groups varied between sites. Women members participated less in almost all the examined farmer group roles than men counterparts despite their relatively higher numbers within the group in Kapchorwa. The disparity in roles and responsibilities between men and women in Kapchorwa implies having men members, even in small numbers, in farmer groups could possibly lead to increased control of the group by men. These findings contrast with perceived contribution of men and women members to the indicators of success of the group as women were thought to contribute more to the performance criteria than did men in Kapchorwa. Men failed to relinquish control despite acknowledgement that women contribute better to the performance of the group. In Bungoma County, there were barely any roles that significantly involved women more than men; women and men members participated equally in all farmer group roles. There was also no difference in perceived contribution of men and women to indicators of success in Bungoma. These findings are quite unsettling especially in an area with a higher number of mixed-sex groups such as in the context of this study in Eastern Africa.

From the findings of this study, farmer groups can promote gender bias prevalent in community. This has been articulated in previous research for instance, Fischer and Qaim (2012)found that banana groups contributed to increasing male control over banana production in Kenya while Mudegea et al. (2015) found that potato groups had the ability to empower women but could also lead to duplication of societal gender roles leading to male bias in Malawi.

Even though farmer groups have been considered to further deepen the gender prejudice, having women in the farmer groups increases chances of a group to perform well (CRS, 2012;Agarwal, 2009; Westermann et al., 2005). Women participation should therefore be encouraged. To improve women participation in farmer groups several ways had been suggested: i) provide benchmarks for women participation through setting a rule for number of women in leadership position (Penunia, 2011;Agarwal, 2010)ii) introducing labour saving technologies to free up women time in the households so as to participate in farmer groups activities (Tanwir and Safdar, 2013), iii) improving access to assets and tackle norms that limit women inequitable rights to land (Quisumbing et al., 2015;Tanwir and Safdar, 2013), iv) encouraging participation of both wives and husbands in the farmer groups and having increased number of leadership positions and subcommittees within the group (Gotschi et al., 2008).

In this study women were adequately represented in the farmers groups in terms of numbers but were not sufficiently engaged in the different roles and responsibilities of the groups in both sites. Women participation in numbers should therefore not considered to be an end , but organizations should focus on how to involve women in positions of power and decision making within the group (Bernard et al., 2008; Sanginga et al., 2006). To do so, other ways such as improving women participation in decision making through having at least a third of office bearers to be women could provide quick solution (Agarwal, 2010; Penunia, 2011). Having more women as office bearers improves women proportional strength and encourages other women to speak up and raise their concerns, needs or opinions (Agarwal, 2010). As Kenya and Uganda have increasingly higher women numbers and thus women can be already adequately participating in farmer group activities, in this scenario therefore, focus should be on ways to improve the number of women participating in leadership positions.

In both sites, men mostly held chairperson positions in the groups interviewed and were the ones calling for meetings. Men were also given responsibilities that are contrary to their perceived character. For instance, even though women were thought to be more trustworthy and keep records of money, men members were more privileged to access group funds from the bank than women. Similar findings were previously found in a study of smallholder farmer groups in Mozambique, where women did not enjoy the same chances as men in governance of groups chairmanship and/or to represent the group, participate in meetings or seminars and take final decisions (Gotschi et al., 2009).

Either women were not given same chances as men to lead or provide leadership, or failed to get elected to leadership positions in the farmer groups, or face certain constraints external to the group and woman leadership abilities. In the FGD held in both sites, leadership and decisions are often solely concentrated in management committees, which comprises of a small number of members elected democratically. These conclusions were also made by(Bernard and Spielman, 2008). This suggests that members are not electing women to governing positions in groups and/or fail to nominate women for these positions. Women failed to be elected to leadership positions as leadership was considered a masculine trait (Coleman and Mwangi, 2013). Women election to such posts can also be hindered by institutional factors such as social norms, access to assets, time constraints, high opportunity costs associated with vying for leadership roles in farmer groups and thus prevent adequate participate by women(Weinberger and Jutting, 2001;Coleman and Mwangi, 2013).

In the FGDs, participants shared that aspects such as members socio economic characteristics for example ability to repay the group in case of losses, family background, and conflicts in the household limit women participation in leadership posts. Women who might also not have access and control over assets that could act as

collateral, or are facing challenges within the homestead would not be elected as leaders. These findings are supported in (Das, 2014).

The findings from this study therefore also suggest that there are clear links between households and farmer groups, the obstacles interact between these two spheres and need to be addressed to make significant impact. Improving meaning full participation of women in decision-making will therefore require addressing challenges at multiple levels; household, community and farmer group (Evans et al., 2016). To improve women abilities to participate agencies working in rural sector should be encouraging enterprise and assets accumulation groups in farmer groups. Equity in benefit should also be promoted as ensures that women have assets in their name which would act as collateral for loans from groups and in case of loss of group assets in their care and therefore could be elected to leadership positions.

Women participation in these leadership positions is highly desirable but their participation even if elected democratically, may only be passive, which according to Agarwal (2010) means attending meeting without speaking up. This offers an additional complication to the advancements made in having women numbers in leadership positions. To ensure women member voices are heard, participation should be interactive and substantive(Das, 2014). This type of participation not only involves high representation of women in decision making but also ensures enhanced quality of participation through resisting powers that restrict their participation.

Creating a critical mass of women in farmer organizations is vital since women need to have their own space and resources as well as being fairly represented in decision making positions (Manchón and Macleod, 2010). One of the ways to create critical mass for women is involving women in committees of the farmer groups. Although in both sites there was small number of women involved in these committees, increasing women members in the committees could be a step towards women gaining confidence to vie for higher level positions. With the high numbers of members, formation of subcommittees will allow a greater number of members to gain experience and skills such as negotiation skills and public speaking (Gotschi et al., 2009).

Women were also left out in roles that could benefit them such as seeking trainings and writing of proposals. Men, in the two sites, sought training opportunities and attended the trainings more than women. This suggests women capacity building needs might be easily overlooked. Seeking for trainings require members to travel out of their home districts, and negotiate with representatives of companies. This can be challenging for women members who might be constrained and unable to leave their home districts due to household duties. The women may also lack useful skills such as negotiation skills or public speaking to adequately convince the representatives. Capacity building on the importance of equity, member roles, leadership skills and negotiation skills is key in empowering women and ensure that they negotiate for their needs and voice their opinions in the group.

The high ranking for both men and women on tested performance indicators at Bungoma County implies that both genders are adequately empowered to effectively participate in the farmer groups. This was demonstrated by their involvement in the leadership and management of the farmer groups. This level of empowerment for women and men can partly be attributed to Kenya's new constitution, passed in 2010, that provided a framework for addressing gender inequality. The Kenya constitution aims at seeking remedies to the traditional exclusion of women through promotion of women led farmer groups. There has also been promotion of women leadership at the community level to national level. Other initiatives such as Uwezo and women enterprise funds in Kenya have contributed to women and youth empowerment through provision of loans and funds (Ombara, 2012).

For sites such as Kapchorwa, low level policies such as group governing rules should also be promoted to ensure democratic decision making and fair participation is promoted in groups. Group by-laws and constitution should also be amended to highlight rights of members to voice their concerns, challenges and needs in the group.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the significant function of division of roles in farmer groups. It can be therefore concluded that much efforts should be intensified towards better understanding of the dynamic of collective decision making in the farmer groups and policy changes at the institution level to allow more robust by-laws at the farmer group level that promote equality and the right of each member to contribute in meetings without bias. Increased capacity of farmer groups on soft skills for example leadership and negotiation skills is paramount in enhancing women participation. Women and men participation should form part of initial analysis to gauge participation and roles of both sexes. This ensures program activities are well articulated and focused.

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