

Is rainfall and access to irrigation gendered in arid and semi-arid Kenya?

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GENDER Impact
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1. The issue

Evidence on the mechanisms by which access to and use of rainwater for agricultural production might be gendered is absent in Kenya, while evidence on gendered access to irrigation for agriculture is limited. In this light, the World Food Programme, UN Women, UNICEF and CGIAR commissioned an exploratory qualitative field study in Isiolo and Tharaka Nithi counties of Kenya to determine whether there is gendered access to rainwater and irrigation for agricultural production.



2. The mechanisms

There are 4 possible ways access to and use of rainfall for agriculture might be gendered:



There are two additional mechanisms by which irrigation might be gendered.

5 Access to water for irrigation on land managed by women is less than that of land managed by men;

6 Community and household norms that deem what are appropriate roles and responsibilities for women and men based on their gender sustains gendered irrigation access for agriculture.

Eight villages were visited in Isiolo and Tharaka Nithi, ranging in size from 280 people to a multi-village cluster of 11175 people. Men's focus groups ranged in size from 10 to 16 people, while women's focus groups ranged in size from 9 to 15 people. Six villages were agro-pastoralist and two villages had commercial dairy farms.


3. The evidence


TABLE 1: Labour, decision-making and intimate partner violence


	Monogamous and polygamous marriages assign land to wives?	Women work on men's plots of land?	Women say men spend far less time on farm labour than claimed by men	Sharing of men's incomes?	Who makes major spending decisions?	Is intimate partner violence present?
Eight villages in total	8 of 8: Yes	7 of 7: Yes	5 of 6: Yes	7 of 8: No	8 of 8: Men	8 of 8: Yes


The key findings are:


- 1** Women work on plots of land assigned to them by men in their household, on plots of land retained by men, and in unpaid care and domestic work. Women must work on men's plots of land first, and when combined with unpaid care and domestic work this limits the amount of work that women can do on the land that they manage. Women's "time poverty" means that soil fertility management activities needed to sustain or restore soil biomass capacities are not undertaken, and in some cases women's plots of land have poorer soils.


- 2** Women's assets and incomes are less than men's, as only men "own" land, men do not share their incomes from waged labour or the sale of livestock, and men make major spending decisions. This hinders women's capacity to respond to increased rainfall variability and changes in the length of the growing season. It also means that women need to find an income to meet household needs, thereby reducing time spent on soil management.


- 3** Access to irrigation on land managed by women is usually not the same as land managed by men, and this constrains women's agricultural productivity relative to men's.


- 4** Gender norms produce household structures that place men in positions of decision-making authority while ensuring that women are subordinate. This is sustained by the threat of intimate partner violence, which is especially prevalent in the relatively better-off households.


- 5** Therefore, access to rainwater and irrigation for agriculture is gendered. It is a function of women's time and resource poverty and social norms that sustain material inequalities between women and men. This facilitates resource flows to men from women's labour, suggesting the men act as managers of women's labour.



4. The policy implications

These findings lead to 4 recommendations:

- 1** Reduce time poverty by drastically expanding programmes of water pan and community pond provisioning appropriate to the local context so that the capture of rainwater and surface runoff in arid and semi-arid lands can be significantly increased. The expansion of water harvesting programmes should allow for the adoption of context-specific water harvesting infrastructure relevant for a given area, together with ensuring increased and meaningful access to, use of, management of and benefit from water harvesting for both consumption and production, particularly for women.



- 2** Transform the gender relations within households by introducing programmes of gender transformative couple's interventions that seek to reduce intimate partner violence and reduce the root causes of gender inequality. Reducing the causes of gender inequality will facilitate increased and meaningful access to, use of, control of and benefit from productive assets and thereby improve household livelihoods, including women's autonomy in joint decision-making.



- 3** Build gender-responsive climate-responsive agricultural extension and training services that provides agronomic best practices that reflect the needs of women and men in communities.



- 4** Undertake further research into gender and access to water for agricultural production, given the glaring lack of evidence, in other Kenyan agro-ecological zones. Quantitative data on gendered access to rainwater and irrigation is required across Kenya, to inform policy making.



- 5** Considering the lack of understanding of the social determinants of access to rainwater for agricultural production, undertake research into the position of youth and persons with disabilities in relation to their specific needs and capacities to significantly enhance their contribution to agricultural production, including access to and control of land and access to water for agricultural production.

