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Export horticulture – empowering female small-scale farmers in Kenya?

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Abstract

Export horticulture is one of Kenya's most dynamic sectors, with the Mount Kenya Region playing a crucial role as a result of its professional large- and small-scale production and marketing structures. The sector is consequently referred to as a "success story of African regional development" (Dolan and Sutherland 2002: 1). A qualitative case study was carried out to understand the impacts on gender inequality of the integration of horticultural smallholdings into the fresh fruit and vegetable (FFV) supply chain to the European market. It will be outlined how export horticulture affects female small-scale farmers with reference to local distribution channels, the organisation of the farm as a group or an individual player, and the specific organisation of labour on the farm. The focus here is on the traditional division of labour, ownership and mobility patterns, as well as knowledge and income. The study shows that the influence of the integration in the FFV chain on gender inequality is conditioned by both the type of relations to the buyers and the internal and institutional organisation of the smallholding. Surprisingly, in some areas of the primarily male-dominated rural society, an integration in the form of outgrower schemes that resembles Gereffi et al.'s model of a captive value chain, with women farmers exclusively responsible for export production, can enhance gender equality, as women gradually gain more decision-making power and greater independence.

Zusammenfassung

Der Exportgartenbau ist einer der dynamischsten Sektoren Kenias und wird als "Erfolgsgeschichte der afrikanischen Regionalentwicklung" bezeichnet (Dolan und Sutherland 2002: 1). Aufgrund der Ausbildung professioneller klein- und großmaßstäbiger Produktions- und Marketingstrukturen spielt die Mount-Kenya-Region für den Sektor eine zentrale Rolle. Zum besseren Verständnis der Auswirkungen der Integration von Kleinbetrieben in die Frischobst- und Gemüse-(FOG-)Lieferkette für den europäischen Markt auf genderspezifische Disparitäten wurde eine qualitative Fallstudie durchgeführt. Im Folgenden wird – differenziert nach den jeweiligen Lieferbeziehungen, der Organisation des Kleinbetriebes in einer Gruppe oder als individuelles Unternehmen und der internen Betriebsorganisation – erläutert, inwiefern es zu einer Veränderung der Arbeits- und Lebensumstände für Kleinbäuerinnen kommt. Der Fokus liegt dabei auf traditioneller Arbeitsteilung, Eigentumsverhältnissen, Mobilität, Wissen und Einkommen. Die Studie macht deutlich, dass die Auswirkungen auf bestehende genderspezifische Disparitäten je nach Art der Lieferbeziehungen sowie der internen und institutionellen Organisation der Kleinbetriebe unterschiedlich ausfallen. Entgegen den Erwartungen kann eine Integration in die FOG-Lieferkette in Form von *outgrower schemes*, die dem Modell einer gebundenen Lieferbeziehung von Gereffi et al. nahekommen, bei exklusiver Zuständigkeit der Kleinbäuerinnen genderspezifische Disparitäten in der hauptsächlich von Männern dominierten ländlichen Gesellschaft abbauen und Entscheidungsbefugnisse und finanzielle Unabhängigkeit der Frauen fördern.

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1. Introduction

This paper is the outcome of a study on the international partner project “Changing Gender Roles in Sub-Saharan Horticultural Family Farming” funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. A qualitative case study on how the integration of horticultural smallholdings into the fresh fruit and vegetable (FFV) supply chain to the European market impacts on gender inequality was carried out in the Mount Kenya Region. With reference to local distribution channels, organisation of the farm as a group or an individual player, and the specific organisation of labour on the farm, it will be outlined how export horticulture affects female small-scale farmers. The focus here is on the traditional division of labour, ownership and mobility patterns, as well as on knowledge and income.

2. Gender and horticultural value chains

The trading of FFV between Kenya and the EU is dominated by a few large European supermarkets that coordinate the complex value chains, supported by Kenyan exporters who take over key functions in the organisation of the production process and of quality control (*Dannenberg and Nduru 2013*). Horticulture is one of Kenya’s most dynamic sectors, with the Mount Kenya Region playing a crucial role as a result of its professional large- and small-scale production and marketing structures (*Dolan and Humphrey 2004; Mithöfer et al. 2008*). The sector is consequently referred to as a “success story of African regional development” (*Dolan and Sutherland 2002: 1*). Although small-scale farmers in Kenya generally belong to the poorest groups in society and production difficulties are numerous, export horticultural farmers have achieved higher turnovers and a rise in living standards in recent decades (*McCulloch and Ota 2002*).

As a rule women make up 75 per cent of the horticulture workforce (*Barrientos et al. 2003: 1514*; see also *Rao and Qaim 2013*). Studies show nevertheless that the social disparities between men and women in export-oriented small-scale farming have increased (*Berg-Schlosser 1984; Dolan 2001*). Overall, it was found that women had lost control of the

traditionally female domain of subsistence horticulture in terms of profit and decision-making power. Female farmers tend to be excluded from contracting with exporters due to lack of access to capacities such as land and capital. It was furthermore stated that women became involved in export production on top of their exclusively borne unpaid household and subsistence responsibilities (reproductive work). Despite the shift towards export production, the traditional gender division of labour in the field has been preserved. This leads to a greater burden on women in terms of working hours and physical effort, who at the same time have lost control of whatever income is generated (*Dolan 2001*).

Recent decades have seen both socio-political changes (e.g., a hereditary land right in 2010 referring to gender equality and a female quota for democratically elected public associations were enshrined in Kenyan law) and profound sectorial changes, such as the introduction of the GlobalGAP standard in FFV production. The study seeks to deepen the understanding of this more recent value chain with reference to gender role dynamics in small-scale farming.

The research concept of the study is based on the “Global Value Chains” model of *Gereffi et al. (2005)*, which was developed to analyse coordination patterns in supply chains as well as economic disparities in global production and distribution systems connected with varied access to markets and resources. Several different governance types were defined in accordance with the characteristics of the determinants complexity of transactions, codifiability of information and capability of suppliers. The ideal categories hierarchy, captive, relational, modular and market-based cover a spectrum from the highest to the lowest degree of explicit coordination and power asymmetry between the lead firm and the suppliers.

The study concentrates on the Kenyan section of the FFV chain between exporters and local small-scale suppliers. According to *Dannenberg (2012)* these supplier relations cannot be clearly assigned to any one governance type but rather to coordination patterns with captive, relational and market-based characteristics. The GVC approach was used in the research process to categorise the local distribution channels of the smallholdings involved in these chains.

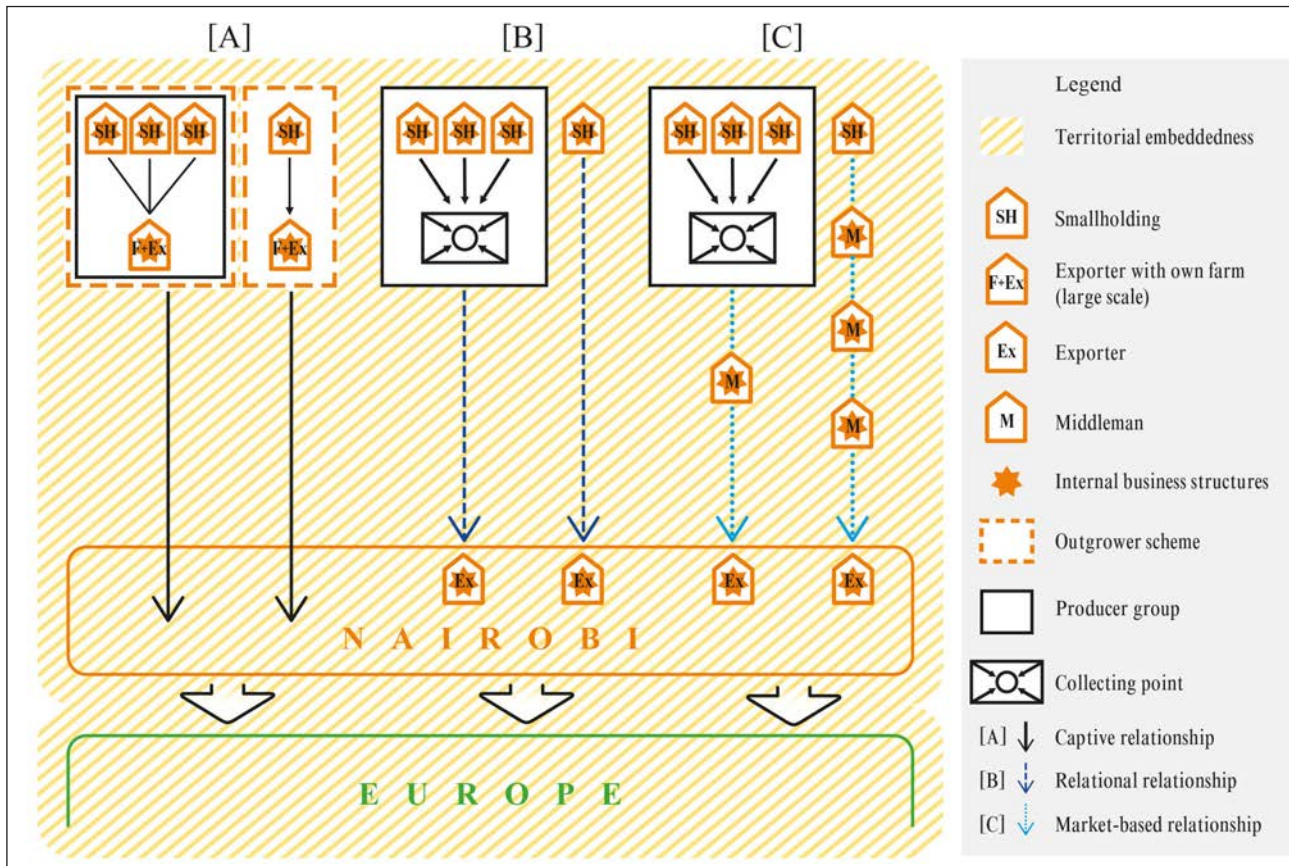


Fig. 1 Supply chain organisation of Kenyan smallholdings; own design, after Dannenberg 2012, modified

Furthermore, the research incorporates gains from a number of gender-specific value chain approaches. The latter propagate gender-specific analysis at different levels, since underlying gender relations can impact heavily on the functioning of value chains, while these in turn can affect the gender division of labour at local level (Barrientos 2001). Accordingly, access to and management of property and income should be scrutinised. The same applies to the division of productive and reproductive labour at household level, local labour markets at institutional level, and the further nodes upwards the value chain (e.g. distribution, management, retailing) at global level (Barrientos 2001; Coles and Mitchell 2011).

So far, gender-specific value chain analysis in African agriculture has primarily focused on employment in large-scale farming (Barrientos et al. 2003; Rao and Qaim 2013) or compared the benefits of and forms of participation in these “labour markets” with contract farming (also termed “product markets”; see Maertens and Swinnen 2008). In the case of small-scale farming, on the other hand, neither a systematic analysis nor a comparison of the different forms

of integration into the value chain has been carried out. Since governance structures between small-scale farmers and buyers can affect gender roles in several ways, this aspect is of great interest. To close the research gap, the study focused explicitly on the different forms of integrating Kenyan smallholdings into the FFV chain (captive/relational/market-based), their institutional organisation (in a producer group or individually), their internal organisation at household level (exclusive or joint management of the smallholding), and the subsequent influence of these factors on gender inequality.

3. Methodology

Qualitative data was collected in October 2012 and February 2013. With the help of local gatekeepers, interviews were conducted with 22 female small-scale farmers in the Mount Kenya Region. A sample of 14 of these interviews was chosen for an in-depth analysis and evaluation of the results. In addition, one expert and seven stakeholder interviews were conducted to interpret and triangulate the results.

A number of factors identified as influencing gender inequality will be presented:

- Division of labour
- Ownership patterns
- Mobility patterns
- Female small-scale farmer knowledge
- Income situation of female small-scale farmers

4. Results

Based on the empirical findings of *Dannenberg (2012)*, general forms of supply chain organisation were identified (see also *Fig. 1*):

On the whole, smallholdings can sell to a buyer (exporter or middleman) either individually or in a producer group.

Supplier relations with captive characteristics (A) occur in outgrower schemes, which usually consist of a large farm owned by the exporter and a vast number of exclusively contracted small-scale farms. Today, outgrower schemes are the most commonly used sales channel in the Mount Kenya Region. They are marked by a high degree of explicit

coordination (regular inspections and trainings) and proactively support the maintenance of production standards.

Supplier relations with relational characteristics (B) are marked by direct but not exclusive or constant purchase by exporters. Hence the power asymmetry between buyer and supplier is less distinct, business relations are less stable and smallholdings sell to a broader network of customers. Nevertheless a certain degree of production process monitoring is provided.

An integration into the FFV chain that resembles the ideal category of market-based business relations (C) occurs when mostly peripheral smallholdings deliver sporadically to exporters via one or more middlemen. These intermediaries do not provide explicit coordination in terms of support or control opportunities but have a strong influence on pricing due to their monopoly position.

The evaluated results show that depending on the variables outlined above (types of distribution channel, institutional integration and internal farm organisation) integration in export value chains can have a mitigating, manifesting or intensifying influence on gender inequalities (*Table 1*).

Table 1 Supply chain organisation of Kenyan smallholdings; own design

Supplier relation	with captive characteristics [A]				with relational characteristics [B]				with market-based characteristics [C]			
	in a producer group		individually		in a producer group		individually		in a producer group		individually	
Internal organisation of the smallholding Female farmer is in charge of export production	exclusively	jointly	exclusively	jointly	exclusively	jointly	exclusively	jointly	exclusively	jointly	exclusively	jointly
Experienced influence on gender inequality												
1 Mitigating	●				●							
2 Manifesting				●		●						●
3 Intensifying	●										●	

■ = Not covered by the empirical study.

4.1 Mitigation of gender inequalities

It was found that a more captive (A) or relational (B) integration of the smallholding into the FFV supply chain could have a mitigating influence on gender inequality.

Additionally, all interviewees were members of producer organisations and exclusively in charge of export production, since their husbands (where present) were employed outside the agricultural sector.

- Influence of integration in the FFV supply chain on traditional ownership and mobility patterns:

The results indicate that buyers do not systematically exclude women as contract partners because of their formal lack of land ownership. Exporters and producer organisations prefer to do business with whoever is continuously in contact with the crops. Due to their limited mobility and employment opportunities compared to men, these people are often women.

- Influence of integration in the FFV supply chain on traditional income patterns:

The long duration of financial transactions is typical for producer organisations in outgrower schemes (A). As men are traditionally and often economically forced to have a daily income, such transactions are less attractive for men than women. Men are therefore more likely to be official members of producer organisations, whereas women tend to be members who are both present and active.

In the case of a more relational integration (B), it is possible to sell directly to intermediaries who pay immediately, thereby increasing the attraction of this variation for male farmers in terms of securing a short-term income.

In both cases (A and B), export production provides female farmers with fresh opportunities to earn income and in the long run the potential to earn even more than their husbands. For this reason, most of the interviewees endorsed or even pushed the decision for a partial shift in the direction of export production. As female farmers are exclusively responsible for horticulture, they are in a position to accumulate personal savings. Higher cash flows enable them to participate more actively in micro-financing projects, which in turn provides

them with additional financial support, independence and social inclusion. Regular purchases – and in some cases additional income from the husband independent of seasonal fluctuations – made it possible for the interviewees to hire workers on a constant basis (still in accordance with the traditional pattern of a gendered division of labour) in order to reduce the physical workload. There is, however, no sharing of time-consuming reproductive duties, which remain the exclusive responsibility of female farmers in general.

- Influence of integration in the FFV supply chain on knowledge:

Furthermore, in the case of a more captive business relationship (A) the interview partners had acquired expertise in farming and worker protection by means of regular participation in training programmes. For the first time, these women not only gained capacities in terms of time (due to hired workers) and know-how but also the confidence to assume more responsible positions in producer organisations. In addition, the bargaining position of the participants improved at household level. One interviewee stated that her group had carried out several strikes in an effort to achieve more consideration within the family.

Results in the case of more relational integration (B) are similar when purchases are regular. Supplier relations here, however, are unreliable and crisis-prone.

4.2 Manifestation of gender inequalities

In the case of joint competence for export-oriented horticulture in each form of supply chain organisation (A, B, C), interviewees had for the most part not experienced any enhancement of their social position.

- Influence of integration in the FFV supply chain on the traditional division of labour:

It was reported that if a husband was not engaged in off-farm activities he usually took over the more representative tasks of export production. Depending on alternative income opportunities and the degree of existing disparities, the interviewees seemed more or less excluded from contracting, trainings, sales and decision-making competences but were primarily responsible for the time-consuming and

labour-intensive chores traditionally assigned to women. Shortages were likely to occur in the case of poor diversification of income and a somewhat volatile relational (B) or market-based (C) integration. In the latter case, in particular, the monopoly of the middlemen led to price loss on the part of the producers, which hampered the recruitment of workers and exacerbated the burden on female farmers.

4.3 Intensification of gender inequalities

In the case of a more market-based supplier relationship (C), gender inequality increased where female farmers were solely responsible for export-oriented horticulture.

- Influence of integration in the FFV supply chain on income:

Although the very low income level of the interviewees may have enjoyed a short-term boost, the probability of crop losses, low demand and, hence, financial shortages was high in the medium and long term due to an unreliable integration form as well as a lack of expertise and farming inputs. This again led to a heightened dependence on the husbands' income and investment, and therefore to conflict aggravation at the household level. Moreover, the workload of the interviewees was extremely high, since they were solely responsible for performing most of the export production tasks on top of their work in the reproductive sphere, and led to social isolation.

- Influence of integration in the FFV supply chain on strictly conservative smallholdings:

Some interviewees pointed out that if strong gender disparities are heavily ingrained prior to undertaking the shift towards export production, the latter could well increase gender inequality. Likewise in the context of a more captive integration, where women's exclusive competence gives them the potential to gain enhanced access to resources (see 4.1), the interviewees stated that their husbands continued to be the sole financial management actors and only partly reinvested capital in the smallholding. They attributed their own inability to take on more responsible tasks in producer organisations to the heavier workload and the pressure arising from lack of additional labourers and reduced capacities due to lack of time and the necessary self-confidence.

5. Closing remarks

The study shows that the influence of the integration in the FFV chain on gender inequality is conditioned by both the type of relations to the buyers and the internal and institutional organisation of the smallholding. On the whole, horticultural export production remains a risky strategy. In some areas of the primarily male-dominated rural society, however, a more captive integration into the FFV chain with women farmers exclusively responsible for export production can enhance gender equality, as women gradually gain more decision-making power and greater independence. Empowerment is not the result of freedom alone but requires target-specific mobilisation and organisation (see also *Rauch* 2007). The outlined captive relationships are not only marked by power asymmetry but also by a large degree of support and training systems that seem not to call for gender categories and can thus have a positive influence on gender disparities.

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