

EFFECTS OF WOMEN'S COOPERATIVES ON CAPABILITIES AND GENDER RELATIONS: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM WOMEN'S DAIRY COOPERATIVES IN KILIMANJARO REGION, TANZANIA

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ABSTRACT: *Existence of gender imbalances is among the challenges of the agricultural production and marketing cooperatives Sub-Saharan Africa. Promotion of women-only cooperatives have been regarded as a better avenue to enabling women's inclusion in the labour force and to achieve women's empowerment. The ability of the cooperatives to achieving women's empowerment and improving gender relations is still a debate which requires more empirical investigations. The study focused on two women's dairy cooperatives societies in Kilimanjaro region, Tanzania to assess their effects on capabilities among women and gender relations in the households and community. Explorative research design was employed, which used in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with women cooperative members and their spouses. The findings revealed that through women's cooperatives, women's capabilities improved in terms of being able to run dairy production businesses, to generate more income and they gained full control over milk revenues. The findings further show that capabilities had little influence on the gender relations. The study found that in most households, the capabilities attained had widened the gap between couples. It was found that joint decision-making between the couples was impaired whereby men perceived women's increased income and a fully control over generated income as a threat. The developed women's agency could not change gender roles and social norms. As women's workloads increased, men continued to dominate political leadership positions in the local government and the secondary agricultural cooperatives. The study concludes that women's cooperatives do not lead to significant improvement in gender relations and gender equality. It recommends the involvement of men in women's cooperatives activities to challenge intra-household gender relations, cultural and social norms.*

KEYWORDS: women's cooperatives, capabilities, gender relations, agency, gender roles, gender transformation.

INTRODUCTION

Cooperatives have been recognized as promising pathway for reducing poverty, promoting human development, empowering women and reducing gender inequality (Sen, 2004; Bibby and Shaw, 2005; Majurin, 2012; Schincariol McMurtry and McMurtry, 2015; Duguid and Weber, 2016). They refer to “an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise” (ILO, 2002). Their values such as fairness, equality, self-help, equity and solidarity; and their principles of voluntary and open membership, democratic member control, member economic participation, autonomy and independency, and education, training and information (Alliance, 2015b; Duguid and Weber, 2016) give them the credibility to empower and give voice to the poor and marginalized group including women (ILO, 2015a).

Existence of gender imbalances is among the challenges of the traditional rural cooperatives¹ or agricultural production and agricultural marketing cooperatives in Sub-Saharan countries, which deter inclusion of women in these cooperatives. Despite women constitute a large part of the agricultural labour force in these countries, their share in the agriculturally based cooperatives tend to be small with a few women leaders as well (Majurin, 2012; Duguid and Weber, 2016). Various reasons have been pointed out in the literature including having rural cooperatives that deal with cash crops like coffee and cotton, which are men’s crops (Rawlings and Shaw, 2016); lack of access to land, and their limited access to inputs, seeds, credits, financial support, and extension services. It is also been argued the gendered power relations and hierarchies carried along in these cooperatives, tend to discriminate women from joining and discourage women members from becoming cooperative leaders (Majurin, 2012).

Since 2000, there has been a rise of women’s cooperatives or women-only cooperatives (Schincariol McMurtry and McMurtry, 2015; Duguid and Weber, 2016). This has been as a result of externally motivated factors, such as donors’ funding priorities toward women inclusion in cooperative development. Women-only cooperatives have been considered to provide a better avenue to enabling women’s inclusion in the labour force and formal economy (Schincariol McMurtry and McMurtry, 2015). These cooperatives create opportunities for women to learn about cooperative business and the building of capital. In addition, these cooperatives assist women in overcoming social cultural constraints, which limit them from participation in workforce, entrepreneurial and leadership positions and activities (ILO COOP, 2014; Schincariol McMurtry and McMurtry, 2015; Duguid and Weber, 2016).

It is further argued that women’s cooperatives facilitate women to advance their skills and experience necessary to participate in larger co-operatives (Alliance, 2015a). The cooperatives are also envisaged to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment purely through their operational cooperative principles (Majurin, 2010; Duguid and Weber, 2016). Some of these operational principles are open membership, democratic

¹ In the context of this study, traditional rural cooperatives mean cooperatives whose members are both women and men

member control, member economic participation, and education, training and information (Alliance, 2015b; Duguid and Weber, 2016). Therefore, women's cooperatives have been recognized as the pathway to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals on gender equality and women's empowerment. Russell-DuVarney (2013) claims that Women's cooperatives adopt gender-specific organizational framework which supports and provides a safe environment for women to challenge patriarchal social norms related to decision-making and leadership. Generally, cooperatives have been argued to have positive impact on women's lives and gender equality through access to employment, improved working condition and social benefits (Schincariol McMurtry and McMurtry, 2015). However, women's only cooperatives as topic of study still empirical studies to support the existing evidence derived from the gender-mixed cooperatives.

On other hand, the ability of the cooperatives to achieve women's empowerment and improve gender equality is debatable and requires more empirical investigations. For example, Dohmworth (2014) points out that there is no definitive connection between participation and empowerment for women involved in co-operatives, in developing countries. The argument presented is that cooperatives often reflect the same power relations of the society they exist within. Hence, realizing gender equality is still a challenge in cooperatives (Wanyama, 2014). According to Duguid and Weber (2016), many publications indicate that cooperative have positive impacts on women without a lot of substantive evidence backing them up. Furthermore, it is claimed that women's cooperatives are likely to suffer from negative stereotypes and discrimination manoeuvres which fail them achieve their goals (Sobering et al., 2014).

The available literature on women and cooperatives has inadequate empirical evidence on how women's co-operatives in particular bring gender transformative change to alter patriarchy influenced gender relations in the households. Most studies on women and cooperatives have mainly targeted women to understand their experiences on the impact of cooperatives on their well-being, empowerment and gender equality. There is still a research gap in terms of understanding men's perspectives and experiences as the result of women's capabilities and empowerment acquired through women-only cooperatives. The study attempts to answer this broad question; How do women's cooperatives affect/influence gender relations in the households and communities in rural Tanzania? Specifically, the study seeks to answer two specific questions: a) what is the contribution of women dairy cooperatives to women's capabilities? b) how do the capabilities gained influence gender relations in the households and community? The study hypothesizes that improved gender relations require a transformative change. Thus, in order to understand the effects of women's capabilities on gender relations in the household and community at large, it requires to recognize that cause/effect relationship as a transformative change.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Cooperatives are linked to poverty reduction among the poor including women especially in the rural areas where majority of dwellers depend on agriculture for their

livelihood. They create employment opportunities directly or indirectly for example, by facilitating women's access to business capital and marketplaces (Duguid and Weber, 2016). They also improve economic wellbeing and adoption of agronomic practices (Lecoutere, 2017). Empirical evidence from developing countries show that cooperatives contribute to skills development and education among the members (Lecoutere, 2017; Alliance, 2015b; Birchall and Simmons, 2009). In addition, increasing women's income, which enables them to afford sending their children to school and access to higher education and reduce household food insecurity (White, 2013; Lecoutere, 2017). Findings indicate that women's cooperatives offer the flexible work environment and structure that support women (Peterson, 2014).

There is a strong perception that cooperatives can realize gender equality and women's empowerment because of their principles and values. It is argued that cooperatives' values such as self-help, equality, and equity. Also, due to their operational principles of voluntary, open membership, and democratic member control, co-operative enterprises are placed in a unique position to ensure and promote gender equality and women's empowerment. In addition, to contribute to the achievement of the goals and targets laid out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Duguid and Weber, 2016). It is further argued that through women's cooperatives, women may overcome social and cultural constraints that are likely to limit women's participation in the workforce and in attaining other opportunities (ILO COOP, 2014). In addition, women's cooperatives are gender-specific and hence can provide a safe environment for women to challenge patriarchal social norms related to decision-making and leadership (Russell-DuVarney, 2013). They are a strategy in response to patriarchal labour market institutions where women may not be or feel welcome and heard (Duguid and Weber, 2016).

However, the evidence on how cooperative membership can contribute to women's empowerment is inconclusive. Some studies indicate that cooperatives contribute to women's empowerment. They argue that cooperatives have ability to create and increase individual agency through service provision and skills development (Dol and Odame, 2013; Ferguson and Kepe, 2011; Meinzen-Dick et al., 2011) and through economic enterprises, which lift the intra-household bargaining power of women over the allocation of resources and time (Jones, Smith, & Wills, 2012; Lecoutere, 2017). In this aspect, it is claimed that such economic enterprises can increase women's access to resources, common resources and exchange entitlements (Agarwal, 2007; Meinzen-Dick et al., 2011). For example, evidence from Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, indicate that memberships in gender mixed- cooperatives increase joint decision-making about household economics (Majurin, 2012). In Asian countries particularly Bangladesh it was found that through group marketing, women in a homestead food production program were able to overcome constraints in accessing markets due to being restricted from men or stranger's sights (Hillenbrand, 2010).

Moreover, it is argued that cooperatives promote aspects of women's empowerment and serve as a platform where social norms like gender roles are questioned and negotiations in both the household and the group about responsibilities and rights take place, which in turn advance transformative agency (Agarwal, 2007; Kabeer, 1999;

Ferguson & Kepe, 2011). Evidence from Uganda shows that women members of a cooperative in Uganda increased women's control over production and marketing decisions at the household level and at the community level, they gained respect due to their business skills, a stronger voice in the community and greater confidence in public speaking (Ferguson and Kepe, 2011; Lecoutere, 2017).

Some scholars claim that cooperatives are not a panacea for solving women's empowerment or gender equality issues. A number of arguments have been raised and backed-up by some evidences from the case studies. Some of the arguments are women's cooperatives face discriminations and they are stereotyped by other community members (Sobering et al, 2014). The potential of co-operatives for empowering women firstly depends on women's ability to effectively participate, their control over cooperatives returns and other productive resources, and their access to leadership skills and roles (Coles & Mitchell, 2010; Majurin, 2012; Meier zu Selhausen, 2016). For example, a study conducted in the Northern Tanzania involving coffee cooperatives found that despite both men and women participated from the beginning, when harvesting stage reached the business belonged to men; and there a very few women in leadership positions (Rawlings and Shaw, 2016).

Women's cooperatives have further been criticized with their inability to challenge social and gender norms. One of the challenges that has been reported in the literature include heavy workload experienced by women cooperative members as they are required to carry out cooperative activities, household chores and other productive roles as dictated by their cultural norms. Evidence from Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya indicates that gender-mixed cooperatives and women's cooperatives in Bangladesh had no noticeable impact on intra-household division of labour they remained the sole responsibility of women (Lecoutere, 2017; Majurin, 2012; Hillenbrand, 2010). This is because intra-household labour division is determined by one's sense of identity, social perceptions and gender roles, which are sustained by social norms (Agarwal, 2007; Kabeer, 1999). It is until cooperatives address the social norms, change in division of labour can experienced both at household and community level. Therefore, cooperatives' potential of empowering women and leading to gender equality is likely to be hindered by gender roles, stereotypes and preserved norms (D'Exelle & Holvoet, 2011).

The above literature presents the positive impacts of cooperatives for women's wellbeing, empowerment. The evidence of a causal effect of cooperative membership on women's empowerment and improving gender relations is limited, raising further critiques over the ability of the women-only cooperatives in empowering women members and improving gender relations towards gender equality.

Theoretical underpinnings

The capabilities are conceptualized as to what people are able to do or able to be. They insinuate opportunities poor people have to achieve various lifestyles and the ability to live a good life (Sen, 1985; Sen, 1999; Robeyns, 2003). The study has adopted Amartya

Sen's Capability approach (CA) to guide the assessment of women's capabilities. A major assumption behind this approach is that human development is achieved when people get the capabilities to make choice. Thus, the women's cooperatives are meaningful only if they liberate a woman from the obstacles of life, she faces in the course of liberating herself.

There are two types of capabilities, the basic capabilities and internal capabilities. The basic capabilities are innate powers that exist within a person. They make necessary basis for developing more advanced capabilities. The internal capabilities are built on the already existing basic capabilities. They are a result of the process such as education, training and socialization (Nussbaum, 2011). The study focused on assessing the internal capabilities among women acquired through their involvement in their dairy cooperatives. Both individual and collective capabilities such as knowledge and skills, assets, their attitude and actions taken and their access to services as the outcomes of being the cooperative members (Martinez and Wu, 2009; Morgan, 2014) were examined.

Gender relations is conceptualized as the ways in which a certain society defines rights, responsibilities and the identities of men and women in relation to one another. They are normally constructed around power relations, negotiations, and gender roles. Changing gender relations requires initiatives that embrace gender transformative approaches. Gender transformative approach goes beyond individual self-improvement among women and towards transforming the power dynamics and structure that reinforce gendered inequalities (Rottach, et al.,2009, Hillenbrand et al.,2015) The approach critically questions gender norms and power relations and encourages critical awareness among men and women; challenge the distribution of resources and allocation of duties between men and women and/or address power relations between women and men (Rottach et al. 2009). Thus, it is important to analyse how such gender transformation relates to power.

Martinez and Wu, 2009; Morgan, 2014 suggest to use three broad domains of empowerment when assessing if there has been a gender transformative change. Such domains include agency, relations and structure. Agency refers to individual and collective capacities (knowledge and skills), attitude, critical reflection, assets, actions and access to services. Relations means expectations and dynamics or negotiation dynamics between women and men in the households and elsewhere and structure refers to informal and formal institutional rules and practices.

In understanding the changes in intrahousehold/interhousehold gender relations, the study examined changes in negotiations and power dynamics experienced by women and men in respect to access to, ownership of and control over resources including land and income; decision making over family investments and mobility among women; allocation of leisure time; women's and men's roles; and women's participation in leadership.

In assessing power dynamics, the study has adopted VeneKlasen and Miller (2002) dimensions of power framework. The framework suggests four forms of power

including ‘*power over*’, ‘*power to*’, ‘*power with*’ and ‘*power within*’. The ‘*power over*’ privileges certain individuals over others and hence denies some people access to, ownership and control over certain resources and mobility (Miller et al., 2006). The ‘*power to*’ involves the potential of person to form, influence and realize aspirations for their life. It ties to the agency domain of change, and it stems from education, skills, abilities and the confidence to exercise them (Miller et al., 2006). The ‘*power with*’ involves collaborative and cooperation with others at household level, cooperatives and movement for change (Miller et al, 2006). It entails collective agency and action, for example women’s ability to participate in decision making in intra-household resources allocation. On other hand ‘*power within*’ means a person’s sense of self-worth, self-awareness, self-knowledge and aspirations, and it is also related to agency concept (Miller at al., 2006). Therefore, VeneKlasen and Miller’s power framework fits well in studying micro power practices among different individuals.

METHODOLOGY

Study design, Study area and study population

Explorative research design was employed whereby a cross-sectional study was carried out among women cooperative members and their spouses. The study acknowledges gender relations involve both men and women, hence to get richer understanding of changes experienced in this aspect it is important to spouses. A qualitative research approach was used to gain a deeper understanding of the women’s capabilities gained through their involvement in dairy cooperatives. Also, to understand the contribution of the gained capabilities to the improvement of gender relations in the households and community. The study was conducted in Hai district, Kilimanjaro region. It targeted the women members of the two Women Dairy Cooperatives found in Hai district including *Kalali* Women Dairy Cooperative society and *Nronga* Women Dairy Cooperative society. The district was selected purposively basing on the availability the women’s dairy cooperative societies. The two cooperatives were also purposively selected basing on the criteria of being operated by women and they are among the cooperatives that have been operating for more than two decades.

Study participants were selected purposively basing on the criteria of been cooperative member for at least two years. The leaders of cooperatives and government officials assisted to identify members of women’s cooperatives. However, age distribution was taken into consideration to ensure youth and adults were included in this study. The age of the participants ranged from 26 years to 63 years old, although majority were in the their 30s and 40s.

Data collection

To explore the effects of Women Dairy Cooperatives to women’s capabilities and gender relations different qualitative data collection methods and tools were employed. The key questions were: *who does what* (gender roles), *who uses what* (Access), *who controls what in the household* (decision making), *who knows what* (communication), *who benefits from what* (benefit sharing/exploitation) and *who is included in what*

(participation). The major aim was to explore how women's capabilities could transform gender relations. The in-depth individual interviews were conducted with twelve women from each cooperative, including young women. In-depth interviews were necessary for this study in order to give a room for probing and learn individual experiences (Yin, 1984).

Four (4) focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted, each with 10 participants. Two FGDs with female members of the cooperatives and two with the spouses to capture more information particularly on changes in gender relations experienced by both men and women. Each FGD lasted for an average of two hours. In addition, key informant interviews were conducted with six leaders of cooperatives (three from each cooperative) and two government officials from the Department of Community Development. The key informants assisted with information on the different initiatives and activities established in the cooperatives. The collected data was analysed using content analysis. The data was coded, themes and categories basing on the research questions were drawn from the data set. The patterns from the data helped in identifying unique quotes, compiling the data and summarizing them according to the research questions. The results have been presented in narratives, explanatory and quotation forms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Women's Dairy Cooperatives as a structure that support women

The Kalali Women Dairy Cooperative Society (KWDCS) was established in 1988 with the goal of improving the livelihoods of women. It is a women owned dairy cooperative in the Kilimanjaro region with about 300 women members who bring milk to cooperative milk collection centre. The cooperative has a milk processing plant with a processing capacity of up to 1000 litres per day, however, the plant could process about 300ltrs per day. It was reported during the interviews and FGDs that the KWDCS has improved the livelihood of the community especially of women dairy farmers.

The Nronga Women's Dairy Cooperative Society (NWDCS) was established in 1988 as women cooperative to promoted dairy production through milk marketing. It started with 75 members collecting milk daily and now it has more than 400 members who collect daily between 800 litres and 900 litres of milk from Nronga village and the neighbouring villages. NWDCS has milk processing plant with capacity of litres per day 2000. It was reported that the plant processes about 800ltrs per day.

The two cooperatives performed different functions to support women members in the dairy value chain. The central function was marketing of milk produced by women members. Other services were to, offer saving and credit facilities to their members including Village Community Banks (VICOBA) and Savings and Credit Cooperative Societies (SACCOS), and provide artificial insemination of dairy cows in the two villages as well as in neighbouring villages.

The cooperatives' members produced milk at the household. They collected the evening and morning milk and cooled it in electric powered cooling tank before processing or selling unpasteurised to whole sellers or consumers in Kilimanjaro and Arusha regions urban areas. As mentioned earlier, each cooperative had a milk collection centre and milk processing plant where every member brought her milk for quality check before aggregation and selling amount obtained daily to customers and/or being kept for processed. The study revealed that with financial support from various development organizations and members' contributions *Nronga* and *Kalali* Women Dairy Cooperatives managed to establish small factories to process milk and to produce other products. Thus, collected milk was supplied in the various products including fresh whole milk, skimmed cultured milk, whole cultured milk in packets (500 ml for ordinary market and 200 ml for school distribution), pasteurised butter and yogurt, which were mostly sold to the community members and shops in Moshi and Arusha towns. It was revealed that the two cooperatives have secured milk markets to the farmers in Kalali, Nronga and neighbouring villages. On other hand, consumers and traders could have reliable milk supply.

The two cooperatives were managed by the women, and the leaders were women members of the cooperatives except the accountants. The accountants were recruited to ensure good financial records of the cooperatives. Their responsibilities included to record financial transactions, quantity of milk sold daily and any other processed milk products like cheese, and to produce financial reports of the three cooperatives. A few women were selected and trusted by the members to check the quality of the milk daily before it is being sold or processed. The cooperatives also hired a few male youths to carry milk from the centre to different customers. When women were asked why they had to hire youth from the village to vend the collected milk, it was pointed out that majority women members have a lot of roles to do apart from dairy business. Therefore, hiring a few youths gave them chance to carry out reproductive and other productive roles. The findings support argument by Peterson (2014) that women's cooperatives offer the flexible work environment and structure that support women.

It was reported by the cooperative leaders that through their cooperatives, they had managed to secure market for the milk that were produced by the members. For example, they had contractual arrangement with Tanga Fresh Limited Company. The cooperatives also offered opportunity for members to receive training, financial support and raise their voice especially on the challenges faced in milk marketing. As key informant from the local government pointed out, *"It is easy to reach out women through their cooperatives because they have already established cooperation, trust among each other and they have leaders they believe in"*

It was furthermore revealed in the study that through women cooperatives, government and non-governmental organizations reached and supported women through various development projects. As reported by a leader from Kalali cooperative:

We have been able to receive training that were conducted by Tanga Fresh Company Limited, Tanzania Dairy Board and SNV Tanzania at different times

that helped us to acquire different skills on milk handling and testing the quality of milk.

For example, it was found that the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) Tanzania was implementing 'Income and Employment for Women and Youth (IEWY)' project targeting generating income and creating employment among women and youth who were involved in the dairy sector. The project offered different opportunities including training on different issues such as gender related issues, entrepreneurship and leadership skills to youth and women who were members of the cooperatives. The findings denote that cooperative provides a room for non-government development organizations and government to collaborate and achieve their development goals. This supports the argument by Schincariol McMurtry and McMurtry's (2015) that cooperatives have ability to empower women through collaborating with civil society organizations and policy makers.

Effects of Women's Dairy Cooperatives to women's capabilities

Study findings revealed that Women Dairy Cooperatives had contributed various internal capabilities among women. Such capabilities were a result of different interventions by the cooperatives themselves and from different projects implemented by non-governmental organizations. It was found that milk production capacity among women increased as they could use the knowledge and skills imparted from the training on animal feeding and they could afford to buy supplements that were needed to increase milk production. Women participants reported through application of skills and recommended feeding practices, milk production increased. Majority women declared that milk production increased from three litres to 6-10 litres per cow per day. In Hai district cows are fed at home (Zero grazing) unlike the nomadic pastoralists like Maasai who take their cattle to the grazing fields. According to the cultural norms in district, taking care of cows and milking are the roles of women despite that the cows are owned by men. Thus, women collect and buy feeds, and bring them to the cowsheds. The interviews with cooperative leaders and FGDs with women revealed that women members were able to generate more income from the milk sold collectively. The lowest producer earns Tsh 100,000 per month from milk sales and the highest supplier earns about Tsh 450,000 per month. The generated income improved women's contribution to the household income. Some women reported to be the major contributors in their household's income as their men did not involve in any income generating activities due to decline of coffee market. In the past, majority men depended on selling coffee to generate income. This was also agreed by most spouses.

Women FGD participants declared to feel empowered as they could control milk revenues. Most declared to send their children to school. *"I use the milk revenues to do different things but major is to make sure that all necessary things like drugs for cows are taken care of, then children education"* said female member of Nronga Women Dairy Cooperative. These findings suggest that women's cooperatives are better avenue to income generation among women and hence improved their agency. The

findings support what is reported in earlier studies (for example Lecoutere, 2017; Schincariol McMurtry and McMurtry, 2015; White, 2013;).

Some women FGD participants reported that the income generated improved their saving practices as they were able to join Village Community Banks (VICOBA) for saving and accessing micro-credits. As a female stated during the FGDs, “*Most of us women have been able to join VICOBA because we can get milk revenues, no matter we handle family expense in the end there is a small portion for saving*”. This study argues that income generated from the milk, has improved women’s decision-making power around milk revenues expenditure.

However, the interview with the key informants revealed that cooperatives had improved women’s collective voice in negotiating the price for their milk and other dairy products. It was point out that through cooperative women managed to get rid of middlemen’ exploitation. The middle could buy milk from different individuals at different prices. The same was revealed during key informant interviews. As a key informant from the local governmental explained:

The essence of cooperatives is to enable members to work together, and I can see that has been achieved in these cooperatives. In the past women had no voice, there were young middlemen who could come to the village and buy milk at the very cheap price, especially during the wet season when there is more milk, but now, the market is available as there are companies like Tanga Fresh which buy from them throughout the season and they can also process...cooperatives must make sure that the quality of milk is good

The same was reported by an adult widow during the FGD. As she declared:

“I live in Nronga village, as you can see this place is mountainous and far from Moshi town, getting customers for the milk was big problem...to produce was never a problem, but to sell. Joining this cooperative has reduced the tension of looking for customers outside this village. Once I bring my milk at the centre, my part is done, I wait for the money”

This study argues that through women’s dairy cooperatives, women improved their capabilities, particularly in terms of being able to take charge of their lives, running dairy production businesses, and making decisions regarding the use of the generated milk revenues. These findings confirm what found by other scholars (for example Lecoutere, 2017; Burchi and Vicari, 2014; Jones, Smith, & Wills, 2012; Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007; Alkire, 2009;) who argue that in the women’s cooperative may lead to increased women’s ability to make independent choices in multiple domains of their lives. Therefore, findings also suggest that women practiced both ‘power over’ and power to’ (Miller et al., 2006).

It was further found in this study that through women cooperatives, women members were able to gain access to entrepreneurship and leadership training. Women

participants declared to have attended entrepreneurship training which improved their skills on doing businesses rather than selling through the cooperative. However, it was discovered a few women could establish businesses. These findings suggest that women could still face challenges to establish businesses including multiple gender roles, lack of enough capital to establish new businesses and cultural norms that restrict women's mobility (Agarwal, 2007; Kabeer, 1999). The study findings affirms that cooperatives' potential of empowering women and leading to gender equality is hindered by gender roles, stereotypes and preserved social norms (Lecoutere, 2017; D'Exelle & Holvoet, 2011).

The effects of women's capabilities on gender relations in households and community

As indicated in the previous section, women dairy cooperatives have impacted some capabilities to women members of the cooperatives. The study's further inquiry on whether women's capabilities obtained through the cooperatives have transformed gender relations in the households and the community has brought interesting findings. Such findings have both practical and theoretical implications of the women's cooperatives which seek to bring gender equality.

At the household level

At the household level, the study discovered that in most households, increased income generation among women and improved their ability to make decisions on the expenditure of the milk revenues widened a gap between couples.

It was revealed through the study that women's ability to contribute to household income did not lead a balanced power relation between women and their spouses. There was no a room for joint decision-making regarding milk revenue expenditure. The study has unfolded a number of reasons. Firstly, women were not willing to disclose the amount of income generated from milk sales to their spouses. This was contributed to the fear that once their spouse knew the amount of income generated; they would have stopped to provide for their families. As one female claimed during the interview:

I do not have to tell my husband about everything shilling I make in this business. This is my business. You know telling men how much money we make, men will we have more money as once they know, they leave every expense to you, they relax because they know family needs will be taken care of.

The above findings suggest that women's ability to contribute to the household income has not resulted into joint decision making for household financial resource allocation. The study argues that women's unwillingness to disclose their income to their spouses was mainly influenced by what has been mentioned by other scholars that women's income is utilized to fulfil the family needs. In this regard, women knew that once their spouses are aware of their income, they would have left the burden to taking care of family to women. Thus, they would not manage to continue operating the dairy businesses.

In addition, women claimed to not want to disclose the amount of money generated as they feared their spouse would ask for some cash for personal use like buying alcohol. *“We know our men, telling him everything you make brings trouble because once he knows what you are making and savings, on weekend he will ask you for little cash and you cannot refuse. To avoid unnecessary quarrel”* said a female FDG participant from Kalali Dairy Cooperative. Another female pointed out during FGD with women from Nronga Dairy Cooperative:

If I tell him all the money I make, where will I get money to take care of the cow, paying the household is on me, buying drugs is on me...if he knows I have more money and he will also ask some for some cash for his leisure, that is his cow.

It was reported that patriarchal or cultural norms still dictate the man to be the sole decision-maker in the household and land owner, hence, hence women felt once they had disclosed about income generated, they would not have full control over it considering the cow belongs to the man.

The findings further suggest that women feared to disclose their income to their husband as they feared that men's income would be spent in unnecessary expenditure like drinking alcohol as long as family needs are met through women's income. Basing on these findings it argued that women's ability to contribute income to the household does not necessary result into high bargaining power nor result into joint decision making. Instead, such outcomes depend on the gender relations between the couple. The study findings imply that increased income generation and full control over it among women is likely to widen the gap between them and their spouses if there is good relationship in the household. Thus, worsening gender relations in the households as women are perceived by their spouse to have power over them.

While generating milk revenues was perceived as an economic empowerment among women, to majority men, it was an intimidation. The situation was worse in some households where women generated more income than men. Some men declared to feel insecure and respected especially when children knew their mothers were the ones paid the school fees. As one man stated during FGD, *“We have seen in some households, men are disrespected, women are even the ones who decide which school children should go, men can do nothing because they do not have money and those women cannot tell their husbands how much they make from milk sold”*.

It was found that in some households, women became major contributors of the household income. These findings imply that men were not empowered to adapt the changes that were taking place. Again, women's unwillingness to disclose how much money they made from the milk made at the same time covering some household expenses, made them felt vulnerable and voiceless in the households. This might be attributed by the approach of women's cooperative of targeting women only as all activities that were implemented by development organizations targeting women cooperatives automatically benefited women members. Basing on these findings it is

argued that women's dairy cooperatives cannot necessarily lead to gender equality since they neglect men in the process, especially poor men, although they can have impact of economic empowerment among women.

Furthermore, the study findings indicate that women's capabilities acquired did not transform some of the gendered norms and roles. Women reported to have workload increased. They participated in the cooperative activities (dairy production activities) at home and at the milk collection centre, and they still had to take care household chores. For example, it was mentioned that women had to spend much time taking care of the animals such as finding animal feeds so as to increase milk production and meet the target.

During the FGDs, majority women declared to get tired because men do not help them in household chores and feeding animals. This in turn reduced leisure time/time resting among women. In the same case, men complained to not have much time with their women which had negative effect in the marital affairs. As one male FGD participant claimed, *"These women work too much and we wonder what do they do all the time, you find that she leaves the bed at 5am and go to bed at 12am midnight...in the village we sleep early, they do not have time for us, all they think is working"*

However, the study found that some women participants felt it was their responsibilities to do all the jobs. One female FGD participant said:

"Taking of cows is our key task and so managing the household, if I don't do that my marriage is in trouble that why we see in most of the young couple marriage things are not working because these young women want their men to do their jobs"

These findings suggest two things, firstly, men did not recognize their wives' multiple roles. Secondly, women still did not have much influence to alter gender roles within the household despite that they started to do dairy business and they could earn income to support the family expenditures. Consequently, there was no improvement in gender relations in the household as men felt neglected. Again, this might be mainly by the approach of women's cooperatives that focus on empowering women within the existing social and cultural norms and power structures. The earlier findings indicate that women's cooperatives faced discriminations and were negatively stereotyped by other community members (Sobering et al, 2014). Therefore, it is until cooperatives address the social norms, change in division of labour can experienced both at household and community level.

The interviews with women and FGDs conducted further revealed that majority women did not have control over land, and the majority claimed to be not informed about their spouses' businesses. This is because patriarchal or cultural norms were still dictating the man to be the sole decision-maker in the household and land owner.

Basing on study findings, it is argued that cultural norms remained unchanged because the women's cooperatives were not focusing on improving gender relations. Therefore, the studied cooperatives improved women's production efficiency, their well-being and agency, which in turn did not impart them with power to control resources which were owned and controlled by men before. Women could only control income they generated.

At the community level

Similar was reported regarding the leadership training. Interviews with SNV Tanzania, local government official and cooperative leaders revealed that a number of trainings had been conducted involving women cooperative members to create awareness on gender issues affecting women development and to equip them with leadership skills. However, no much of outcomes of these trainings on improving women's participation in leadership was experienced in the district. As a local government official narrated:

If we talk of training, I think there a lot of trainings which have been conducted with women on leadership and on sensitizing them to participate in leadership but, we still have the same faces of a few women who are willingly to be leaders in the cooperatives and in political position at the local level

It was further pointed out that women were not confident enough to take run for positions. As key informant from the district community development office explained, *"In this district women are many than men, and they know that but it is very rarely to see women from these cooperatives taking forms to run for leadership at village, ward or even at the Cooperative Union² level"*

Interview with women leaders and FGDs with women members revealed that women were still facing challenges in taking up leadership opportunities in community. At village level the chairman is selected through political parties and so at the ward level whereby ward councillors are selected via political parties' elections. It was declared by majority women during FGDs that they still do not have equal opportunities in these parties despite some women are members in the political parties. Normally, parties nominate mostly men.

As one woman during the FGD with Nronga Women's Dairy cooperative members narrated:

We still do not have women in leadership positions and this is because no woman is ready to take the leadership forms to contest for political parties' positions. But again, let's be honest, even if some of us decide to take the leadership forms will we win? Majority people including us women still have bad stereotype towards women's ability to lead, otherwise, if not, a few women who contest for leadership would be always winning the election because we, women are many as compared to men and we are the one who mostly vote.

² Cooperative union are made of a number of primary cooperatives.

These findings suggest that men still dominated political leadership positions in the local government and the secondary agricultural cooperatives and there was no women's collective agency, which further implies that women's voices were not well represented in decision making process. The findings further imply that despite a number of trainings on leadership that have been done targeting women have not been successful because such trainings did not involve men from the community to be able to address the gender and cultural norms that restrict women partake leadership positions, and hence create a conducive environment for women who want to be leaders. The trainings were focused on imparting leadership skills to women and they overlooked the influence of patriarchy community where women live. In addition, there is still stereotypes among women themselves regarding women's ability to be leaders. This might also be influenced by the existing patriarchy system.

It was also mentioned that it is difficult for women to get leadership position due to high competition from their counterpart males. As one female FGD participant claimed, *“Even those who take forms to contest for leadership, they do not go through during the screening process, women are still regarded unskilled and incapable to lead the community, may be the young generation but women of our age”*.

It can be further argued that the generated agency among women was not enough to challenge the existing cultural norms and gender relations both at the household and community levels. Basing on these findings, the paper argues that there is a need to involve men in the women's cooperative activities and these cooperatives should have programs for creating awareness on the importance of joint decision making in household and gender equality in all spaces.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Women's cooperatives have been debated as a means to reduce poverty and empower women in the community. This study was focused on exploring the effects of cooperatives of women's cooperatives on capabilities among women and how such capabilities improve gender relations in the rural context in Tanzania. The study revealed that the two Women Dairy Cooperatives in Hai districts played a big role in developing women's capabilities in terms improving their skills and knowledge in dairy production and entrepreneurial business and leadership, increased income generation and improved decision-making power around milk revenues. Women members of cooperatives felt economically empowered and they used their income to cover household expenses, send their children to school of their choice and contribute to saving groups.

The study findings have also revealed that despite contributions of women's dairy cooperatives to women's capabilities, such capabilities had no remarkable impact on improvement of gender relations in most of the households. For example, they did not influence joint decision making in the households as women were not willing to

disclose their milk revenues to their spouse fearing that once their spouses know, they would leave the burden of taking care all family expenses to women.

The study findings further revealed that the capabilities obtained had low influence on changing gender norms that affect improvement of gender relations in the course of attaining gender equality. The women's workload had increased due to participation in the cooperative activities (dairy production activities) at home and at the milk collection centre. Women had to spend much time taking care of the cow such as finding animal feeds to increase milk production. This in turn reduced leisure or resting time among women. It argues that, this situation was caused by failure of the women's cooperative to address gendered and cultural norms which dictates the power hierarchies and gender roles between women and men in the households and community at large. Moreover, the discovered that women's capabilities obtained did not contribute to their participation in leadership. It is argued in this study that failure to address gender norms and involvement of men through cooperative interventions has not created conducive environment for women to participate in leadership. For example, addressing gender stereotypes towards women's ability to lead, elimination cultural norms that dictate men's superiority in decision making in the households.

In conclusion, it is argued that the focus of women's cooperatives on achieving women's economic empowerment and imparting leaderships skills cannot necessarily lead to gender equality and/or improve gender relations alone especially in the patriarchy communities as it has been pointed out in some earlier scholars. Gender equality and improvement of gender relations requires a transformative change. Therefore, this study recommends for the involvement of men in women's dairy cooperative activities, address of gender norms and creation of awareness in the community the importance of creating good gender relations towards achieving gender equality. Future research is needed to investigate gender transformation can be achieved in the dairy cooperatives that involve women, men and youth.

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