

Info Note

Gendered participation in informal milk markets in Kenya: Implications for low emissions dairy development

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Key messages

■ Gendered preferences for engagement in informal versus formal milk markets reflect differential ability to benefit from them. In Kenya, married women are likely to lose control over dairy income and decision-making when milk is marketed to formal channels, thus they often opt to sell milk through informal arrangements.

■ Women selling to or working in the informal sector as vendors (“milk hawkers”) are circumventing male-dominated formal structures and increasing their access to income.

■ Low emissions dairy development (LEDD) has been pursued only through the formal milk marketing sector, creating a reifying dilemma for existing power structures in terms of gendered access to dairy income.

■ Both formal and informal market participation provide important avenues towards agency and prosperity for women and their families.

Understanding the social trade-offs in market participation for both is necessary to inform to inform gender inclusive low emissions dairy development strategies.

Globally, low-emissions dairy development (LEDD) has been aligned with the intensification of on-farm production practices. Intensifying dairy production is seen as having positive environmental and social effects in terms of mitigating climate change (Gerber et al., 2013), improving ecosystem functioning (Njarui et al., 2012), and conserving resources (Weiler, Udo, Viets, Crane, & De Boer, 2014). On the social side, intensification has led to improved nutritional outcomes for children (Njuki et al., 2015), enhanced household food security (Sagwe, 2012), and higher household incomes from the sale of milk to commercial channels (Makoni, 2013).

However, recent studies (Farnworth, 2015; Mutinda, 2011; Tavenner & Crane, 2016) have drawn attention to the potentially disempowering impacts of dairy intensification on women. In Kenya, women tend to be responsible for most management tasks around dairy animal husbandry, including fodder and water provisioning, veterinary health, manure removal, and milking (Farnworth, 2015). Yet, despite their contributions to dairy labor, their direct benefits from dairying are often tempered by cultural norms that privilege men in resource control (e.g. cow ownership), decision-making associated with the animals (buying/selling), and commensurate income from the sale of milk (Farnworth, 2015; Muteshi, 1998; Tavenner, Fraval, Omondi, & Crane, 2018). This last issue has been found to be a determining factor in women’s formal milk market participation, notably among married women (Omondi, 2014).

Understanding women’s preferences for market engagement is crucial for successful low emissions dairy development, as LEDD has been aligned predominately with the formal milk marketing sector working with dairy co-operatives and producer organizations. A sole focus on the formal sector risks discounting the majority of Kenya’s dairy farmers who engage in informal dairy market transactions. With estimates that as much as 85% of dairy products are sold informally in Kenya (Hooton & Amore, 2008), it is vital that efficient intensification (high-yielding, low-emissions per unit) strategies include informal actors – women in particular, who constitute the majority of informal market participants.

This brief summarizes preliminary findings and recommendations from an ongoing analysis of CCAFS-sponsored synthesis data on gendered participation in informal milk markets in four counties in central and western Kenya. Emergent recommendations for gender-inclusive LEDD are included. This study and ongoing research seek to contribute towards informing more equitable and inclusive technologies and interventions through a gendered analysis of farmers’ differential ability to engage in and benefit from different markets.

Understanding gendered preferences for milk markets

Characteristics and differences in morning and evening milk sales

Farmers participating in semi-intensive dairy in Kenya generally milk their cows two to three times per day. For farmers with access to formal marketplaces, the first milking of the day (morning milk) is usually delivered to a cooling facility for sale. Morning milk volume is generally much higher than evening milk volumes. Milk that is marketed formally provides farmers with payments on a bi-weekly or monthly basis – income that is generally controlled by the household head.

The second milking of the day (evening milk) is usually not delivered to formal marketplaces but is rather used for home consumption or sold through informal market means to neighbors or local shops. Traditionally, the evening milk, which has a lower volume than the first milking of the day, is controlled by women and consumed or sold at their discretion. However, an increased focus on sales to the formal, commercial milk market, a space customarily dominated by men, means women run the risk of losing control over evening milk sales.

Formal dairy market realities

Farmers that are associated with producer organizations and registered farmer dairy societies make up the majority of formal market participants. These organizations are often male dominated (in terms of leadership and membership) and may promote male control over milk income, notably through the structure of their payment plans. Because producer organizations and other groups are unable to process raw milk received from suppliers, they enter into contracts with private or national processing companies to secure a stable marketplace.

Most producer organizations in turn deposit payments to members on a monthly or bi-monthly basis to a single account which is usually in the name of the “household head”. While women can open accounts in their own name, most married women with accounts report this income to their husbands and generally receive an agreed-upon proportion of the total proceeds. In some cases they will turn over all earnings to their husbands.

In addition to providing a competitive market to sell milk, producer organizations often offer additional services, such as “check off” systems, veterinary services, and credit and loan opportunities. In the “check off” system, farmers can purchase dairy inputs and supplies using their delivered milk as collateral. These services provide concrete incentives for women to sell at least part of their milk to producer organizations, as the informal market offers no such arrangements. By not requiring cash up front, women are able to use the check off system with minimal spousal negotiations or conflict.

Informal dairy market realities

In Kenya, informal dairy markets are most commonly defined to include actors and processes engaging in dairy product transactions outside of a formally structured dairy value chain. The difference between an informal dairy product transaction and a formal one is typically characterized by the presence or lack of standardized milk hygiene testing. Producers opting to sell their milk through informal markets generally sell their milk directly to consumers (including larger entities like milk bars, hotels, restaurants, and schools) or deal with independent “middlemen” vendors commonly known as “hawkers.”

Motivation for married women’s sale of milk to informal channels is underpinned by the assumption that these transactions will remain close stay close to the domestic sphere and be small relative to other sources of household income. Milk sold informally through hawkers is subject to more frequent cash payments (daily or weekly). Since this is usually a small amount (<\$1 USD), women will not report this income to their spouse and will use it at their discretion, often to purchase small household essentials.

In this way, women engaging in informal transactions are often able to exert more control over dairy income. Women selling to or working in the informal sector as vendors (“milk hawkers”) are circumventing male-dominated formal structures and increasing their access to income.

Preliminary Findings from Kenyan sites

- **Women prefer milk marketing via both formal and informal value chains** (cooperatives or self-help groups and independent vendors)
- **Norms of masculine headship shape women’s participation in/benefit from LEDD**
- **Gender norms around cattle production can differ depending on the localized cultural-ethnic context**
- **Only 10-15% of married women report deliberate joint financial and labor planning with husbands**
- **Cattle and commercial production are imbued with culturally masculinized meaning**
- **Women working as ‘hawkers’ are often circumnavigating gender norms that restrict women’s ability to generate and control income**

Gender dynamics in Kenya are, of course, dynamic, contested, and open to change. Yet the above examples illustrate that formal milk market participation (which is packaged alongside dairy intensification) has potentially disempowering effects for women. This echoes research in livestock value chains and agriculture more broadly (Mudege, Kapalasa, Chevo, Nyekanyeka, & Demo, 2015; Quisumbing et al., 2015; Waithanji, Njuki, Mburu, Kariuki, & Njeru, 2015) which suggests that as production becomes more commercialized, women may not be able to derive the same benefits as men, due to structural norms that legitimize men's privilege over these commodities.

Conclusions

Initial findings suggest that increasing flow of milk into formal markets alone may exacerbate existing gender disparities in terms of inequitable asset control, decision making, and labor dynamics. While current LEDD initiatives have deftly used formal markets as a strategic entry point to reach farmers, the formal sector tends to reinforce existing gender inequalities. Women, especially married women, are likely to lose control over dairy income and decision-making in dairy resources with increased commercialization. Because LEDD has been pursued through the formal sector, this creates a dilemma for creating gender equitable development outcomes.

In distinct ways, both formal and informal market mechanisms provide important avenues toward agency and prosperity for women and their families. For successful implementation, LEDD policies and projects should target women – the primary dairy laborers – in ways that capture both formal and informal parts of the dairy value chain. Furthermore, LEDD policies and projects should be planned in such a way that they do not jeopardize women's strategies of control over dairy income – for example, by making informal payments hyper-visible. As an increase in profits from dairy are indicated as generating greater interest from men, who have left dairy to women because of its paltry profits, LEDD also runs the risk of creating gender imbalances while promoting greater productivity.

Emergent recommendations for gender inclusive LED dairy

While gender relations are highly localized, the following recommendations are offered for gender inclusive LEDD dairy:

1. Promote **checkoff services**, which allow married women to obtain intensification benefits from milk incomes at lower-than-market rates, without having to secure an amount in cash and in most cases without spousal negotiations.
2. Strengthen the role of cooperatives as loan guarantors for shareholders, increasing women's **access to credit**
3. Prioritize the **voices of women** in assessing what gender equity looks like in LEDD dairy.

4. Consider the social trade-offs involved in formal. Consider how **gender intersects with other forms of social identity** to influence decisions on informal or formal market participation.
5. Consider the social trade-offs involved in formal market participation in the design and implementation of LEDD programs.
6. Policy interventions that make informal markets more visible or legible could potentially reinforce gender norms that limit married women's ability to access dairy income directly.
7. Invest in **labor-saving technologies** to ease women's labor burden.
8. Promote **women's self-help group models** to circumnavigate male ownership of dairy cattle.

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