

Research Application Summary

Dryland agriculture in Kenya: Gendered risks, vulnerabilities and research gaps

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Abstract

The drylands of Kenya that comprise of Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs) make up about 80% of the total land area and support approximately 30% of the population, mainly pastoralists and agro-pastoralists. They are home to most of wildlife and other resources including minerals, precious stones, building materials, sources of energy and medicinal herbs. Although they contribute about 5% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), this is mainly through livestock production, implying that their potential is far from full exploitation. Hence, many resources lie unexploited in the midst of great want. The agricultural activities in these areas are mainly pastoralism and dryland farming that are challenged by weather variability and poorly developed 'bazaar' among other factors. Indeed, the livelihood options come with great risks that largely take socio-economic dimensions. In particular, gendered risks present much vulnerability to both men and women with varied consequences on both. This paper examines these risks and vulnerabilities from a gender perspective.

Key words: Arid and semi-arid lands, dryland farming, gender vulnerability, pastoralism, weather variability

Résumé

Les terres sèches du Kenya, qui comprennent des terres arides et semi-arides (ASAL), représentent environ 80% de la superficie totale des terres et soutiennent environ 30% de la population, principalement des éleveurs et agro-éleveurs. Elles abritent beaucoup plus la faune et d'autres ressources, y compris les minéraux, les pierres précieuses, les matériaux de construction, les sources d'énergie et les herbes médicinales. Bien qu'elles représentent environ 5% du produit intérieur brut (PIB), ceci est principalement grâce à la production du bétail, ce qui implique que leur potentiel est loin d'être en pleine exploitation. Par conséquent, de nombreuses ressources gisent inexploitées au milieu d'une grande pauvreté. Les activités agricoles dans ces zones sont principalement l'élevage et

l'agriculture des terres arides qui sont remis en cause par la variabilité du climat et ont peu développé le bazar entre autres facteurs. En effet, les options des moyens de subsistance viennent avec de grands risques qui prennent largement des dimensions socio-économiques. En particulier, les risques liés au genre présentent beaucoup de vulnérabilité aux hommes ainsi qu'aux femmes, avec des conséquences diverses sur les deux sexes. L'essentiel de cet article est d'identifier ces risques et les vulnérabilités dans une perspective liée au genre.

Mots clés: Terres arides et semi-arides, agriculture des terres arides, vulnérabilité liée au genre, élevage, variabilité du climat

Background

The drylands of Kenya are home to both pastoralists and agropastoralists who can be described as largely conservative regarding gender equality and specifically women empowerment. Among many dryland resident communities, women ownership of assets such as land and livestock is abhorred and generally seen as culture destructive (Mwenzwa, 2011b). Regarding decision-making as far as the same assets are concerned, consultation is largely unheard of and as such, women remain for the most part excluded from inheritance, even when the Constitution of Kenya guarantees such rights (Republic of Kenya, 2010). In as far as dryland agriculture is concerned, women have only land user rights while ownership of livestock is vested in men as fathers, husbands and sons (Mwenzwa, 2011a). For this reason, women face multiple challenges in dryland agriculture given that they do not own the land they use and can be best described as squatters subject to eviction at any time by their male counterparts. Arising from the foregoing, it is concluded that dryland agriculture is bedeviled by several challenges, which take a gender dimension which invariably lead to gender-based risks and vulnerabilities. This paper uses existing literature to document the gender dimension of dryland agriculture and the attendant challenges, risks and vulnerabilities from a gender perspective while at the same time identifying research gaps and recommending the best practices to minimise the risks and vulnerabilities.

Literature Summary

In the ASALs of Kenya, pastoralism and dryland farming are the most dominant livelihood activities that are also challenged by adverse weather conditions and anthropogenic activities. The later include casual deforestation, poor rain water harvesting, inability to afford agricultural inputs, inappropriate soil and water conservation practices and policy-related bottlenecks. In

particular, women are more vulnerable in dryland agriculture given that they do not own the land they use and are therefore subject to denial of its utilisation in case of any undesirable family dynamics including divorce or demise of spouse. In addition, the unpredictability and unreliability of weather, gender inequality regarding access to conjugal resources, low levels of income, reproduction activities and low literacy levels among women compromise their ability to diversify livelihood, which make them more vulnerable and at more risk of descending into poverty as opposed to their men counterparts.

Study Description

This is a review paper that has identified the various challenges, gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities in dryland agriculture and pointed out the risks for enhanced welfare of resident communities. It therefore utilises both content and textual analysis to discover the state of affairs in the drylands of Kenya with a special focus on dryland agriculture and related livelihood activities. It has in particular analysed annual agricultural sector surveys, economic surveys, policy documents and dryland district specific development plans among others. This has led to the conclusion that women face more risks and vulnerabilities in dryland agriculture as opposed to their men counterparts. As a result, it is recommended among others that to alleviate the foregoing, policy change is needed to come up with more targeted plans that ensure gender equity regarding access to productive resources especially for women. In addition, research is recommended on several dryland agriculture issues on a continuous basis to provide on-going feedback to policy

Research Application and Policy Relevance

The findings are important and informative in the implementation of the Social Pillar of the newest blueprint in Kenya, Kenya Vision 2030. In this development strategy which is anchored on three pillars-the social, political and the economic, there are flagship projects on gender and development, dryland development, the revitalisation of the agricultural sector including dryland farming and livestock development and gender equity among others. In addition, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 1 and 3 on eradication of extreme hunger and poverty and promotion gender equality and empowerment of women respectively are in line with the findings of this paper given that it will be an important reference point while implementing the vision projects especially in the drylands of Kenya. In summary the issues identified in this paper are important in making Kenya meet its commitment as stipulated in Vision 2030.

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