

Practice Note 7:

Women's participation in marketing of bush beans

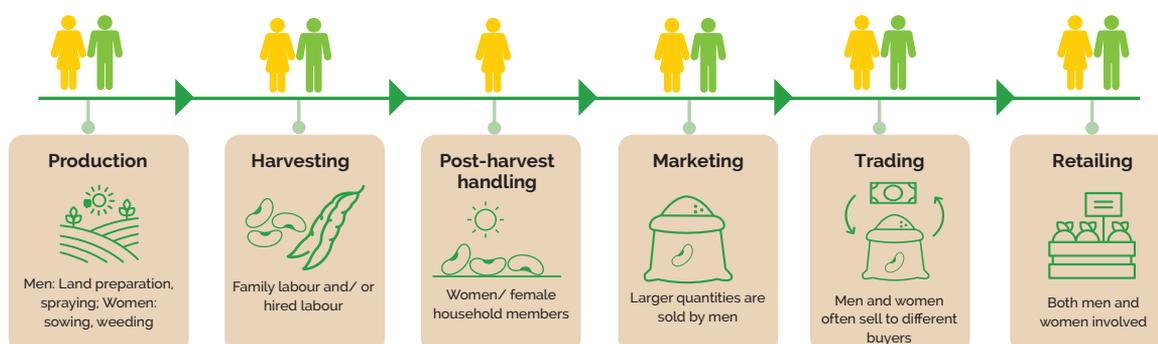
Introduction

Bush beans are one of the most widely produced crops in eastern Africa. They are a major component of smallholder agriculture in Uganda, typically grown on small plots of land and intercropped with maize, with low input use and low productivity. Bush beans are a crucial part of the Ugandan diet and are the second-most important source of protein for the local population. Bush beans have often been considered a women's crop, as they were traditionally grown for subsistence. However, since their increasing commercialisation, men have become involved in different production and marketing activities. At the same time, a displacement of women's labour does not seem to have taken place – instead beans have become a mixed crop from a gender perspective, not only at production level, but at different nodes of the value chain. As it is well known that women are often constrained in their ability to generate income from agriculture researchers from the EaTSANE project studied the potential of and barriers to market participation of women in the bush beans value chains in Kapchorwa, Uganda. They carried out focus group discussions with farmers, interviews with a wide range of value chain actors in the study area.

Division of labour in the bush beans value chain

Both women and men are involved in the bush beans value chain, from production to retailing. When bush beans are grown on a larger scale, as the household's main cash crop, men tend to be the dominant actors in marketing. Yet, when bush beans are grown on a smaller scale, women tend to have a larger role in production, marketing and trading. There are three categories of women in marketing:

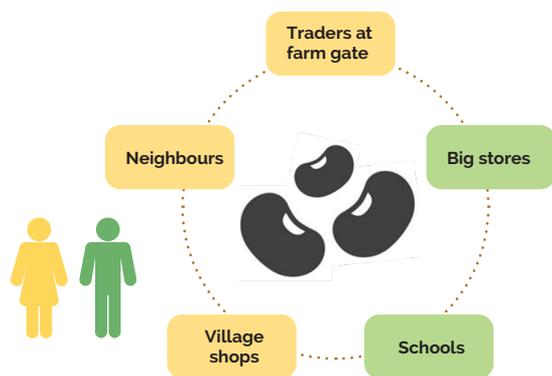
1. women farmers who grow beans and sell their produce to traders and directly to consumers,
2. women traders who source beans from farmers and sell it to retailers and/or directly to consumers, and
3. women retailers who procure from farmers and traders and sell from designated spots directly to consumers.



Division of labour in the bush beans value chain

Marketing outlets for bush beans

The most important modes of sale for beans are selling to traders coming to the farm gate, village shops, neighbours, schools and big stores in Kapchorwa town.



Marketing outlets for bush bean

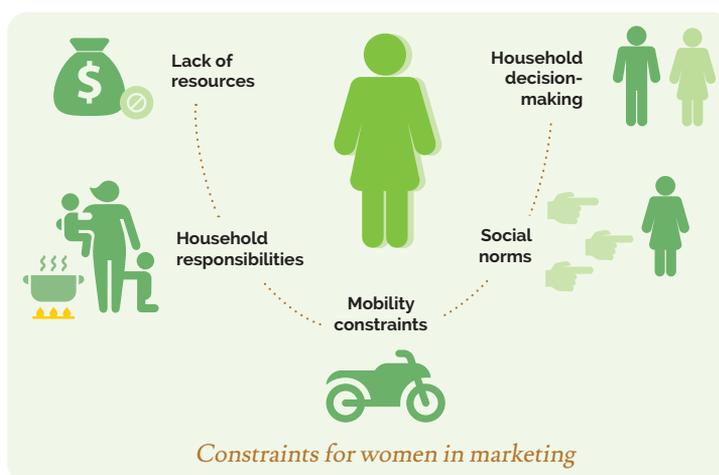
Most farmers prefer to sell to traders coming to the farm gate. Big stores in town may offer a better price but selling to them involves hiring motorised transport, which is expensive. Schools buy beans and vegetables. They may not offer the same prices as traders or big stores, but offer options to pay their children's school fees. Selling to village shops and to neighbours are considered to be the least profitable modes of sale. While men can access all of these marketing outlets, women are largely excluded from selling to big stores in town or to schools.

While men can access all of these marketing outlets, women are largely excluded from selling to big stores in town or to schools. This is often due to mobility constraints and negative community perceptions. Since women are taking care of the household, it is also difficult for them to carve out time and look for potential buyers.

Key constraints for women's participation in marketing

The researcher team found out that several factors make it very difficult for women to engage in crop marketing:

1. Many women continue to have limited access to and control over key resources to engage in marketing, including access to capital and credit, and education and training.
2. Selling crops requires time and effort, making it difficult to women to also manage their household responsibilities – including family caretaking, cooking, housekeeping and agricultural and livestock-related tasks.



Constraints for women in marketing

3. Women's mobility is restricted by monetary constraints to hire transport, norms around women's ability to drive or ride a motorcycle, and contentious and widespread association of women's mobility to possible sexual misdemeanour. The travel distance required for marketing is also often not compatible with women's labour and household obligations.
4. Negative perceptions with women stepping out of the house continue to be prevalent in many rural communities – for example, that women indulge in immoral activities if they stay out of the house too late or for too long. Community and particularly male attitudes towards women's involvement in marketing can be negative, keeping the selling of vegetables and greens on a large scale as a men's domain.



- Men are the traditional heads of households, which gives them the final say in decision making processes, including on investments or capital expenses which could support women's engagement in marketing. Women, in turn, are required to respect the status of men in households.

Impact of market participation on women

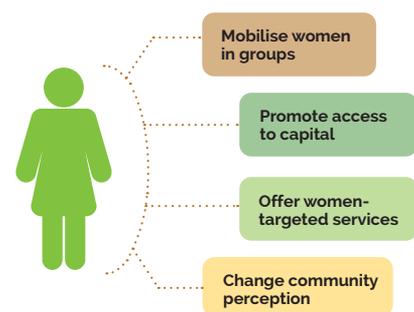
Women who are involved in the marketing of beans are able to gain an income to fulfill basic household needs and personal needs. Women tend to spend the majority of their income on supplements to household food supply whereas men are often perceived to be bad with finances (handling money). Gaining an income also increases the independence for women and reduces pressure on men to singlehandedly take care of household expenditures.

Not everyone might view this as positive. There are often community concerns that increased market participation could be detrimental to the household as women may start ignoring their household responsibilities. However, this study did not come across instances of this actually happening.

Ways to improve market participation of women

Initiatives aiming for enhancing market participation of women have to be multi-faceted. The following aspects offer a starting point for research and development initiatives that pursue this objective:

- Group formation.** Mobilising women in groups is critical as targeting them as individuals may not be successful. Women's groups can be important vehicles to encourage collective production and marketing. In some villages, such groups already exist and would need to be strengthened.
- Access to capital.** Business activities, including trading in beans, require investment. Women need access to capital and credit, including financial literacy training and access to bank and mobile banking.



Recommendations

- Women-specific services.** Agricultural extension services should be tailored to meet the needs of the women, focusing on skills enhancement and marketing acumen, including market identification and access strategies. One approach to improve access to extension services could be to engage female extension agents, especially in an area like Kapchorwa, where there are strict norms regarding women venturing out and on women-men interactions.
- Changing community perceptions.** Engaging only with women is not likely to yield the necessary results: men need to be a part of such interventions. Involving men as partners of women is important to identify, discuss and address negative community perceptions around women's involvement in marketing.

Conclusion:

Currently, women's participation in marketing does not seem to go beyond selling small-scale produce. This is particularly evident in the beans value chain where men tend to be the dominant actors in marketing as soon as the produce is grown on a larger scale (unless a woman is the head of household).





Women's restriction to producing and selling crops that are grown on a small scale is driven by the need to manage reproductive and productive responsibilities. However, many women would like to increase their involvement in marketing in order to contribute to household income and enhanced financial independence.

Government and private actors should promote this willingness through targeted interventions. Entry points for enhanced participation of women in marketing are through women's groups to improve their awareness, better access to services and engagement with community norms and assumptions.

About the EaTSANE project

The EaTSANE project is an interdisciplinary research project on diversified agriculture, nutrition, and value chains, implemented by research and development institutions from Kenya, Uganda, Germany and the Netherlands in the period from 2018 until 2021. The main objectives are to develop more sustainable farming practices and improve diets of households in Teso South, Kenya and Kapchorwa, Uganda by diversifying the food system with a participatory action research approach. The research teams identified practical implications across the project activities, which led to a set of practice notes.

Further reading and training materials can be found: <https://www.eatsane.info/publications>

Colophon

This Practice Note is based on the research by Sunanda Poduwal, conducted for EaTSANE: Poduwal, S. 2019. Women's participation in marketing in nutrition-sensitive value chains – a qualitative study. MSc thesis, Maastricht University, the Netherlands.



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