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2017/HD03/19278X

**EFFECTIVENESS OF STATE AND NON- STATE ACTORS' COLLABORATION
IN EMPOWERING WOMEN FARMERS IN ETHIOPIA**

Abstract

Empowering women has been a central focus for state and non-state actors since the Beijing Platform for Action, aiming to address women's exclusion from political, economic, and social domains. This study examines the collaboration between the Meta District Agriculture and Resource Management Office (MDAaRMO) and Care Ethiopia in empowering women farmers in Ethiopia, with the GROW project as a case study. Conducted in the Hawibilisuma and Ifajallela farmer associations in Oromia Regional State, the study aimed to: (i) examine gender-based opportunities and constraints affecting women farmers' agricultural engagement; (ii) analyze how collaboration between MDAaRMO and Care Ethiopia facilitates women's empowerment; and (iii) assess the effectiveness of this partnership in empowering women farmers empowerment.

Guided by Standpoint Feminist Theory, Capability Theory, and Collaborative Theory, the research employed an embedded mixed-methods design. Data were collected through 25 in-depth interviews, three focus group discussions, 10 key informant interviews, and a survey of 370 women farmers. Findings revealed that both social and institutional norms shaped women's agricultural participation. Positive influences included access to labour-sharing systems, which helped women to optimize time, financial resources, and agricultural information, as well as communal support networks that provided psychological stability and financial security during crisis. However, constraints such as lack of co-ownership of farmland, cultural practices like polygamy causing resource fragmentation, and extensive unpaid care work hindered their agricultural engagement. Moreover, limited direct access to agricultural extension services, compounded by gender-insensitive agricultural programs, has adversely impacted both the extent and quality of their participation in agricultural activities.

The collaboration between MDAaRMO and CARE Ethiopia, implemented through the GROW project, addressed key barriers to women's agricultural participation. The project empowered women farmers by facilitating access to agricultural resources, including information, training on natural fertilizer preparation, and water harvesting techniques all with statistically significant effects ($p < 0.001$) that enhanced the frequency of agricultural production. Access to agricultural information further strengthened women's joint and sole decision-making regarding the size of cultivated land and crop selection. Sensitization activities on income rights improved women's control over household finances, with 77.3% reporting joint and 18.4% sole decision-making on household consumption, while 78.1% and 23% did so for personal expenditures. Similarly, decision-making on agricultural investments rose, with 80.1% of women reporting joint and 1.3% sole authority. Moreover, Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) management training significantly enhanced women's savings practices ($p = 0.036$). Despite challenges such as low motivation and resource

misallocation among actors, the partnership had a positive impact on women's agricultural engagement and overall well-being. Recommendations include better alignment of incentives with outcomes, stronger accountability mechanisms, and improved task force awareness of roles and responsibilities.