

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/20276> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

**Author:** Simiyu, Robert Wamalwa Romborah

**Title:** "I don't tell my husband about vegetable sales": Gender aspects of urban agriculture in Eldoret, Kenya

**Issue Date:** 2012-12-05

## Livelihood diversification by farming households

As has come to be expected of the poor in diverse contexts (see Chapter 1), diversification of livelihood sources was an important strategy adopted by urban farming households in Eldoret to cope with changing economic circumstances, and labour, but also (in this particular case) land, were critical assets in the organisation of the diversified portfolio of activities. Livelihood diversification was particularly important in the town given the diverse, seasonal and low-paying nature of the limited income-earning opportunities in the market. This Chapter highlights the various farming and non-farming activities pursued by the households as well as their inter-linkages within the overall household livelihood systems.

### Farming activities

Farming in Eldoret municipality has been going on for as long as urban residents have had access to land. In any case, much of the municipal space comprises areas that were formerly rural and in which agriculture has historically predominated. Such areas came under the jurisdiction of the municipal council following outward municipal boundary extensions (see Chapter 3). While part of the land in such areas has converted to commercial land uses over the years, many landowning households that previously farmed – as well as migrants in those areas – have continued to do so both because of financial constraints to invest in commercial land development and because farming is a way of life.

However, consistent with trends elsewhere in sub-Saharan African cities, urban agriculture in Eldoret seemed to have especially grown in importance and surged since the decades of macro-economic restructuring (i.e. 1980s and 1990s). Thus, two of the 160 farming households surveyed reported more than 40 years

of urban farming, 4% had been farming since the 1970s, 16% since the 1980s, while 40% started farming in the 1990s and 37% since 2000. While the trend in Langas may be attributed to the fact that some landowners may be recent migrants into the town, a consideration of the length of plot ownership on the one hand, and the history of crop cultivation on the other, leads to a similar conclusion. Farmers who had acquired their plots during and after the decade of 1980s showed more urgency to cultivate their plots compared to those who acquired plots before then. The former took an average of 3.6 years before cultivating their plots compared to 11.2 years for the latter. In-depth interviews with urban farming households left no doubt that many of them had resorted to urban agriculture out of necessity and as a fall-back strategy after their main income sources dwindled. The following two examples will suffice:

After Chebet<sup>1</sup> was transferred to a new work station in Eldoret, her husband bought land in Langas in 1974 primarily because she wanted to operate from her own home in town. Although she started doing *some* farming – mainly maize cultivation – on the plot the following year rather than leave it idle, it was not until 1988 that she embarked on what she described as *serious* farming. In that year, Chebet left her job in the Ministry of Health as the government embarked on downsizing its workforce. As she put it: “There was no future in the employment so I opted for early retirement and took a ‘golden handshake’<sup>2</sup> instead and moved in to start *serious* farming.” She changed from maize to vegetable and dairy farming. The latter became her main source of income.

Obachi,<sup>3</sup> another urban farmer, was employed by Rift Valley Textiles Company (Rivatex) in 1985. After saving some money with the company’s co-operative society, he took a loan from the co-operative with which he bought a plot in Langas in 1990. He lost his job in 1997 when the company faced financial hardships which forced it to eventually close down. With the savings he had made over the years, Obachi cleared the balance on his loan, built a house on the plot and moved in. In 1999, he got a job with another textile company, Mountex, in Nanyuki town. Like at Rivatex, and because of his experience there, Obachi was employed in Mountex’s weaving department. However, two years later when the company substituted cotton with semi-processed textiles in a bid to remain competitive, Obachi and his colleagues in the weaving department were rendered redundant and laid off. Upon losing his second job, he moved back to Langas and embarked on urban farming. He started by keeping pigs, some of which he later sold to buy a cow.

A review of the policy and legal framework for urban farming in Eldoret (see Chapter 5) provided further evidence that the deteriorating economic circumstances contributed towards the surge in urban agriculture in at least two other important and interrelated ways: they yielded official tolerance for the practice and, as a result of this, led to laxity in the enforcement of relevant anti-urban agriculture by-laws.

Urban farmers in the municipality engaged in a variety of farming activities. Of the 160 households surveyed, 86% cultivated crops and 73% kept livestock.

<sup>1</sup> Interviewed on 23 May 2009.

<sup>2</sup> This was the popular term used at the time to refer to the financial benefits that were extended as a send-off package to civil servants who opted for early retirement.

<sup>3</sup> Interviewed on 6 June 2009.

Sixty per cent engaged in both crop cultivation and livestock-keeping, while 28% cultivated crops only and 13% kept livestock only. Table 6.1 shows that female-headed households were more likely to keep livestock only than male-headed households. Because women were more disadvantaged in terms of property ownership and access to financial capital, they seemed to consider livestock keeping as offering an important alternative asset-building opportunity. Not to mention that livestock constituted important liquid assets that could easily be converted into cash income to meet immediate household needs. Moreover, compared to married women who were more restricted in terms of ownership and sale of livestock, female household heads enjoyed greater freedoms in these respects, and were therefore more motivated to keep livestock.

*Table 6.1* Farming activity, by gender of household head (%)

Farming activity	Male (N=127)	Female (N=33)
Crops	91	76
Livestock	71	79
Crops and livestock	61	55
Crops only	29	21
Livestock only	9	24

Crop cultivators grew a variety of crops. By far the most common of these were *sukuma wiki*<sup>4</sup> – a green leafy vegetable of the kale variety – and maize, which were each grown by two-thirds of all the 160 households. Maize is a staple crop used in making Kenya’s popular *ugali* dish (maize meal or tough porridge), while *sukuma wiki* is its regular accompaniment. Other crops cultivated by at least 10% of the households included spinach, bananas, *suja* (black night shade), sugarcane, cowpeas, *nduma* (arrow roots) and onions. Appendix 6.1 summarizes the variety of crops grown by the study population and their relative occurrence among households. It is noteworthy that apart from bananas and sugarcane, all the other crops are essential food crops. The number of crops grown per plot ranged from one to nine, with a mean of 3.5. The level of crop diversification on household plots did not vary with gender i.e. female-headed households cultivated as many types of crops as did male-headed – a mean of 3.4 and 3.5, crops, respectively.

<sup>4</sup> *Sukuma wiki*, a local Kiswahili name, translates literally ‘push the week’, in reference to the vegetable’s importance in the diets of low-income households due to its high yield and low price.

At least nine different types of livestock were raised in the study area. Chickens and sheep were the commonest livestock, kept in both cases by one in every three households. Others, in order of prevalence, included cows (20%), ducks (17%) and pigs (12%). Goats, pigeons, turkeys and geese were also kept, but to a much lesser extent. Between them, the households under study kept a total of 572 chickens, 265 sheep, 261 ducks, 116 cows and 109 pigs. Thirty goats, 71 pigeons, 13 turkeys and 11 geese were also kept by the respondents. On average, livestock farmers kept 12.4 animals of 1.7 different varieties. The broadest variety was 4 types of animals. The importance of urban crop cultivation and livestock keeping to the livelihoods of farming households and to the well-being of men and women within those households is the focus of Chapter 8.

### Non-farming livelihood activities (NFAs)

Besides farming, the households engaged in multiple other livelihood activities. At the time of the survey, only 14 (or 9%) of the 160 households did not engage in any non-farming livelihood activity (NFA). The 146 (or 91%) that did shared 230 opportunities between them. Overall, a total of 195 household members were involved in NFAs; of these 113 were men and 82 were women. Table 6.2 shows how these income sources were distributed among household members and gender categories. It can be noted that only 18 (or 9%) of the household members involved in NFAs were household members other than heads of households and spouses (in the case of male-headed households), and all of them were men. This reflects the fact that there were fewer out-of-school adults in the households and that, compared to male children, female children tend to marry and move out of their parents' households early. Moreover, school-going children were not a major source of labour for income-earning activities for many households, mainly because of their preoccupation with studies, which many parents seemed to lay greater emphasis on. Where school-going children were involved in livelihood activities, they did so mostly on weekends while out of school.

Yet even when adult members of the household other than the spouses engaged in income-generating activities, they did not seem to be necessarily obligated, nor was it mandatory for them, to contribute towards the household budget:

I also have two sons who work. One is a teacher in a private primary school while the other works in a wholesale shop in town. Occasionally, when they have money they contribute to the household budget but I do not want to insist on that because I know they also have their own needs to cater for. Sometimes they also give me money out of own volition.

(Njeri, 19 May 2009)

My nephews always leave the house very early saying they are going to look for work to do but they cannot buy anything in the house; not even sugar.

(Mam Sella, 30 May 2009)

When I earn my money (as a teacher), I normally do not discuss with my mother how much I earn or what to do with it. However, I always contribute towards the household budget.

(Kimani, a widow's son, 2 June 2009)

In other words, households did not necessarily function as unitary economic actors owing to (sometimes) incongruent preferences, interests and perceived obligations of different household members. Complementarity of roles and effort in constructing household livelihoods and income-pooling was more evident between spouses. The complementarity manifested in the diversity of the activities themselves, the trade-offs between them and the gender roles they fulfilled.

*Table 6.2* Distribution of NFAs, by gender at individual and household levels

	N	No. participating	% of total	No. of NFAs	Average no. of NFAs
<i>Individual level*</i>					
Male household head	127	95	75	118	0.93
Female spouse	119	52	44	54	0.45
Female household head	33	30	82	40	1.21
Other male member	-	18	-	18	1.00
Other female member	-	-	-	-	-
Total		195		230	
<i>Household level**</i>					
Male-headed household	127	116	91	185	1.45
Female-headed household	33	30	91	45	1.36
Total	160	146	91	230	1.44

\* Chi-square:  $X^2=37.804$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p=0.00<0.05$ ; ANOVA:  $p=0.00<0.001$ . 'Other male member' category was excluded from the analysis.

\*\* ANOVA:  $F=0.261$ ;  $p=0.610>0.001$ .

The NFAs were spread across various sub-sectors, the majority of which were in the informal sector (see Appendix 6.2). Only 17 (or 9%) out of the 195 working members were regular salaried employees in the formal sector. The rest eked a livelihood in the informal sector as self-employed entrepreneurs or wage earners. Most of the income-generating activities were in petty trade involving groceries and essential household items (e.g. charcoal, firewood, paraffin and food items) (16%,  $N=230$ ), hawking of a wide range of merchandise (15%), and casual labour in construction and agriculture (13%). Other important sources of livelihood included small manufacturing and construction-related artisanal works such as masonry, metal fabrication and welding, and carpentry (10%), retail ki-

osks (5%), transport services (4%), and other services such as beauty and hair-dressing, and community work (3%). Rent from housing was a particularly important source of regular income for some households (26%).

It can be construed from Table 6.2 that the level of participation in the job market varied significantly with gender, being highest among female household heads, both in terms of their proportional representation as well as the number of NFAs they took up. This was particularly the case in comparison with married women, and could be attributed to the absence of other household members to complement the incomes of female household heads who mostly acted as the sole bread winners for their households. In the final analysis, the difference in the means of NFAs between male- and female-headed households was not statistically significant.

Cultural norms, gender roles, and differential capabilities and economic status between men and women helped to delineate boundaries defining the type and location of activities for men and women. Women mostly engaged in what have traditionally been regarded as women activities. They mostly traded in groceries including fruits and vegetables, other food items such as maize flour, sugar, salt, and cooking fat, etc. as well as essential household commodities like paraffin and charcoal (Appendix 6.2). These activities generally required little start-up capital, sometimes involved own produce from urban agriculture, were usually carried out on a small scale, and primarily for household use. The scale of women's livelihood activities could be attributed to the fact that, on average, they lacked large amounts of capital to invest in big projects. It has also been known that in times of adversity, and given their child-caring responsibilities, unlike men, women are usually prepared to swallow their pride and do whatever is necessary to feed their families. The following is a case in point:

When Baba Daddy<sup>5</sup> built a house on his plot in Langas and moved in with his family upon losing his job with an insurance company, his wife, Mama Daddy, proposed to him the idea of planting vegetables on the plot and starting a small kiosk in front of the house. Baba Daddy was strongly opposed to the idea, preferring instead to use the plot as a car parking lot. However, one time when Baba Daddy was out of town his wife went ahead to till the plot and to start selling items in a makeshift structure she erected in front of their house. On his return home he was 'very disappointed' to find that this had happened. He picked a quarrel with his wife but eventually gave in and it was not long before he came to realize how 'wise' his wife was – without a job, his economic circumstances continued to deteriorate until he had to eventually sell his car. He explained his opposition then as follows: "Initially, I was not so keen with her kind of business. I did not want to let myself down and to look like a failure. Many of my friends had cars and they used to visit me. In those days, I didn't understand why someone would want them to park on the roadside and not in my compound because of vegetables and unsightly structures. I used to think about big business. I was also thinking about putting up a storey building on my plot and not kiosks, but after losing my job I lost that focus."

---

<sup>5</sup> Interviewed on 7 June 2009.

Women's livelihood activities further highlight the interconnectedness between gender roles, choice of occupation and household food security and well-being (see Floro & Swain 2010). Besides being practical in light of the limited capital available to them, the choice of food-related activities by women was also strategic in the sense that when the household did not have money for food, it could divert the stock for household use and replenish it when money was available. For instance, Gitau's wife, Ann, used to sell Irish potatoes, maize, vegetables, tomatoes and onions until 2007 after being involved in a road accident as she traveled to the market to source for the commodities. On the importance of his wife's business then, Gitau<sup>6</sup> commented thus: "we never used to have money problems because she could provide when I came home empty-handed. Even if we had no money completely, we could not sleep hungry because she could cook part of her stock." In this way, and as has been noted by Floro & Swain (2010: 4), the "non-pecuniary benefit provided by the unsold inventories, which can be directly used to meet food needs (...) can more than compensate the foregone additional earnings that may be gained by choosing another occupation". However, as Wanjiru's and Amanda's cases below indicate, this strategy does not necessarily assure food security in the longer term in other important ways. On the contrary, in the absence of other income sources, depletion of stock may expose the household to greater vulnerability:

I used to sell vegetables and Irish potatoes but it reached a time when I stopped because I ran out of stock. Whenever I did not have customers to buy the produce, we would consume it ourselves (...) that is why when I later got some little money I decided to start selling maize, beans and firewood. The advantage with these commodities is that they don't go bad easily. If there are no customers, you can still keep the stock and sell another day.

(Wanjiru, 26 May 2009)

I used to operate a small business of selling charcoal, Irish potatoes, beans, maize and vegetables by the roadside. It was our main source of daily bread. I used to come home with between Ksh. 400 and Ksh. 500 per day. During mid-month when most people are always broke I used to get about half of that and I had no problem getting food for the family. Since I used to buy items in bulk, we would use some of them in our household and still maintain my stock. However, when violence broke out after elections, I was not able to continue with the business. We ended up using all the items ourselves until the stock ran out. I have not managed to find money to restart the business. Life is now very difficult for us.

(Amanda, 26 July 2009)

Moreover, because they were expected to 'stay home' and perform domestic duties, women's livelihood activities were highly localized – mostly within their neighbourhoods closer to their homes (see also Owuor & Foeken 2006). This was particularly expected of women who had young children to take care of. As the case of Njeri indicated, women sometimes had to sacrifice their income-earning activities for the sake of child care. Njeri used to sell herbal medicine, which was

---

<sup>6</sup> Interviewed on 22 August 2009.



her main source of income besides urban farming. Her business involved hawking the herbal products around the estate and beyond, which she could no longer do after giving birth. As a result, she relied more on urban farming and her husband's occasional remittances for survival.

In contrast, men enjoyed greater latitude as to where they could look for income opportunities and were not bogged down by domestic responsibilities. Their obligations – paying school fees, medical expenses, and other lumpsum expenditures like housing or land purchase – also required that they look for higher paying jobs wherever. As such, a higher proportion of men compared to women worked outside the neighbourhood without restrictions from their spouses. A few men worked in other towns and were not regular residents in Langas, although they remained the heads and the main breadwinners of their households. Besides, more men than women possessed some skills in apprenticeship and as such they participated in the small manufacturing and services sector to a greater extent than women (see Appendix 6.2). Yet even opportunities for unskilled labour that were regularly available in town such as menial labour in building and construction were too arduous and risky for women and were generally seen as men's work.

In theory, men's unrestricted spatial mobility, dominance of the public space, flexibility in time use, and skills endowments placed them in a more advantageous position in terms of appropriating opportunities and resources available in the marketplace. In reality, however, desired income-earning opportunities were difficult to come by and far between, and many men remained redundant over long periods of time. Even those with specialized skills and training of some kind did not fare any better as the demand for their services was mostly erratic and returns were often low. As a consequence, many men started showing greater interest in urban farming. The circumstances of Makai, Gitau and Mhubiri are testimony to this.

A trained mason, Makai specialized in construction of brick tanks and renovation works. However, for four months preceding the interview, Makai had not secured any job contract. As a result, he had to diversify his income sources. Sometimes he travelled outside the municipality to procure vegetables (*sukuma wiki*) in bulk which he then sold in the town on wholesale terms. But this happened only seasonally and when he could afford. As his wife revealed, there were times when both she and Makai were forced to “look for menial jobs, especially weeding people's farms on the outskirts of Eldoret town in order to secure a meal for the family.” Because of this, Makai placed high premium on urban farming.

On his part, Gitau specialized in welding and fabrication works. However, most of the time he was idle for lack of customers. In a ‘good month’, Gitau could fabricate two windows and one door and as he lamented: “Windows do not pay well but doors are better because one door can earn me between Kshs. 2,000 and Kshs. 2,800. But you can't easily get such jobs, so you do whatever you can get.” Much like Makai, Gitau increasingly turned to urban farming to provide for his family.

The circumstances of Mhubiri, a carpenter and mason, were not any different. Mhubiri's main income-generating activity involved making furniture for schools and churches. Besides, he ran a carpentry workshop which came in handy when the contracts were not forthcoming, although income from the workshop was irregular and low. For him, the main purpose of the workshop was to keep his *fundis* (i.e. carpenters who work for him) busy so that whenever he got a contract in a school or a church they would be readily available for the job. He would sometimes sell sheep and chickens in order to pay for a trade license for his carpentry shop whenever he had no money and the licence fee was due. And whenever he got lucky and made good sales from the workshop or his contracts, he would restock. When Mhubiri was out looking for contracts, his wife stood in for him at the workshop. However, he never gave her any money from workshop sales. By the time of the interview, Mhubiri had not secured any contract in several months. According to his wife,<sup>7</sup> Mhubiri had resorted to hanging around the workshop and the home most of the time and although he previously used to concern himself mostly with his pigs and sheep, he had started showing more interest in crop cultivation than he used to when money was flowing in more regularly. He had started helping out once in a while with some farm work and was getting more involved with decisions about farming activities on the plot. Moreover, because furniture did not sell well, he always pressed his wife to give him money whenever he saw her selling items from her business and vegetables in the garden. Often she declined, preferring to spend the money on essential household requirements, to which Mhubiri usually reacted angrily and harshly.

Makai's, Gitau's and Mhubiri's circumstances give credence to the claim that while vocational training may ease individuals' entry into relevant sectors in the informal economy, it does not necessarily raise productivity because of the saturation of the sector (Kabeer n.d.). Mhubiri's case also shows how men sometimes respond to redundancy with anger and frustration, which may strain intra-household relations or even lead to gender-based violence (Narayan *et al.* 1999). In Mhubiri's own admission, it helped that he was a Christian pastor who had tried to minimize misunderstanding in the house by taking his family the Christian way. As he noted: "Religion brings wisdom so that you try to understand each other rather than fighting. (...) If for some reason she does not agree with you, you give her space." Mhubiri's story also demonstrates how, owing to persistent and growing economic hardships and shrinking opportunities in the public arena, men were increasingly retreating into the domestic space as an alternative site of making a living. However, unlike women's entry into the public space that comes up against male-imposed rules of exclusion augmented by cultural construction of appropriate female behaviour, men's retreat into the domestic realm is more or less a *laissez-faire* affair. This is because men own physical domestic spaces while women often rely on the men to not only attain entitlement over the spaces but also to transform them into livelihood sources. Moreover, while women's participation in economic activities outside the home does not necessarily result into men's loss of control over women's economic activities, men's involvement with home-based livelihood activities was usually accompanied by

---

<sup>7</sup> Mama Sella, interviewed on 30 May 2009.

women's (relative) loss of space for economic manoeuvre, and of control over their economic activities.

As was noted in Chapter 4, men's increasing inability to effectively provide for their families had forced many women to move in the vanguard of providing for their households. Many men did not seem to mind this development to the extent that the women helped them to fulfill their responsibility of supporting their families. In some instances, men themselves started off their wives, while those who had initially resisted or been apprehensive about their wives' involvement in income-generating activities eventually supported their wives' initiatives and even took greater interest in the activities. Some men even found time to assist their wives in their activities, while others took up some domestic chores in order to free their wives so they could attend to their income-earning opportunities outside of the home.

In this respect, women's participation in the marketplace is not only incompatible with social expectations of their role as mothers, wives and home-keepers, but also transforms gender division of roles, work and space. This conclusion finds resonance with Sonkoro's situation.

Except once in a week when Sonkoro's wife could take a break from her business, she left the house very early every morning to travel long distances to cereals markets away from Eldoret and returned late in the evenings. As a result, she rarely performed household chores such as cooking and laundry, let alone urban agriculture tasks; she left the work to her children, husband and a female relative. However, rather than complain about his wife's failure to meet her social responsibilities in the household, Sonkoro seemed to excuse his wife as demonstrated by the following remarks:

"My wife does not cook or even wash clothes. She always returns home very tired. Her work is tiresome. She wakes up at 6.00 am and returns at 6.00 pm, sometimes even later than this, every day except on Saturdays when she takes a break to go to church. When the children are away in school, the girl who works for her at the kiosk assists her with household chores. I am always around the homestead most of the time and because the plot is small, I do all the farm work by myself. (...) I don't mind because her business generates most of the household income. Besides, we usually sit down with her to decide on what to do with the money she makes from her business."

(Sonkoro, 22 May 2009)

Besides the pragmatic aspect of doing whatever was possible to sustain household livelihoods, including letting women engage in business away from home while men themselves stayed at home and even performed 'female duties', this changed behaviour of men may also be attributed to the modified social milieu that is the urban context. Being migrants in a multi-cultural town and removed from their rural cultural settings, urban residents are under less pressure to conform to cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity, not the least because they are out of sight of the custodians of culture and close relations. In addition, those in town with whom they have cultural and other social ties are bound, for similar reasons, to be also undergoing a similar transformation thereby removing

any stigma that would be associated with performing ‘untraditional roles’. Sonkoro underscored this point when he cited his own – as well as many other men’s – circumstances as the reason many men no longer restricted their wives’ involvement in business, noting thus:

Many communities used to frown at women engaging in business, associating the activity with prostitution. This is no longer the case. Many of us now allow our women to venture into business so long as it can bring food in the house. (...) In town women also mix with people from different cultural backgrounds who do some things differently. They end up learning from other communities. So it is difficult to restrict them, when you are not able to provide for the family and yet they see fellow women doing business and feeding their families.

(Sonkoro, 22 May 2009)

However, some men seemed unsettled about their women’s involvement in income-generating activities, particularly those undertaken outside the home and that held prospects for propelling women to greater economic independence. The underlying fear for such men was that they would lose authority and decision-making power in the household as a consequence of their wives’ enhanced economic status. Nonetheless, the men were in most cases resigned to the reality because of the importance of such income-generating activities to household livelihoods, while at the same time working harder to regain their status as the main breadwinners and decision-makers. Such masculine anxieties and the responses they elicited from men had implications for intra-household gender relations in the long-term; the relations would most probably improve if the economic circumstances of the men improved vis-à-vis their wives’, but perhaps deteriorate if the reverse happened or the status quo protracted.

When Baba Daddy<sup>8</sup> lost his job in 1997, he and his family were staying in a rental house in Eldoret town, although he had bought his Langas plot earlier. They couldn’t relocate to their rural home “because that would have demoralised the children”. Instead, he decided to build a house on his Langas plot and moved in with his family. Initially his wife, Mama Daddy, planted maize on the plot but she later on switched to vegetables which she considered to be more profitable. She cultivated *sukuma wiki* and spinach which earned her at least Kshs. 100 every day. She used part of the money for the household budget and saved the rest with women groups.

With the savings she made through women groups, she was able to start a *mitumba* (second-hand clothes) business. The business was ‘very profitable’. Unfortunately during the post-election violence, all her stock of clothes was stolen and the boutique burnt down. After losing her business, she concentrated on urban agriculture and started selling vegetables, fruits, onions and tomatoes in a kiosk on their compound. She used part of the income to contribute to her social groups. She was a member of three groups – Itiro, Sisido and Banyore. From her several payouts from the groups and with the help of her husband, Mama Daddy was able to put up a shop on the plot, which was an extension of their house. The shop was the main source of income for the household.

Through one of the groups (Sisido), Mama Daddy had also received credit from a micro-finance institution. She used the first loan of Kshs. 50,000 to expand her stock in the shop

---

<sup>8</sup> Interviewed on 7 June 2009.

and the second loan of Kshs. 90,000 to buy a motorcycle for a transport business. The transport business earned her Kshs. 400 every day, part of which she used in repaying the loan. In the meantime, she was also planning to restart the *mitumba* business, and had two sewing machines with which she also planned to start a tailoring business.

From the face of it, Mama Daddy's household had benefited a great deal from her involvement with social networks with the initial facilitation of income from urban agriculture, which had enabled her and her household to withstand the general economic hardships and the shocks that were associated with the post-election violence. The story of intra-household relations was a bit different though. Her husband, Baba Daddy, worked for an insurance company, a job he had got only recently. The company paid him on the basis of commission and his income had not stabilised. He also owned shares in two companies but the dividends were not good. And although he saved with his employer's co-operative society, his shares had not grown big enough to earn him a reasonable loan.

While he appreciated and had been very supportive of his wife's progress, Baba Daddy was at the same time increasingly getting unnerved by the progress, which appeared to threaten his masculinity. Noted he:

"(...) my wife belongs to several women's groups. I support her in that. The groups have really boosted her business and she is now doing very well financially. It is also forcing me to work harder so that she does not beat me financially, otherwise she will become too powerful in the house. I won't have a voice in the house if she has more money than me. I am planning to buy a motorbike soon and give it to my son without her knowledge. I expect the motorbike to generate Kshs. 500 per day. I also recently bought two pigs, which I kept at my friend's place. In another one year they will have multiplied and I should be able to generate considerable income from them. My wife is not aware of my plans. I just want to surprise her one day then she will realize that I am the man of the house."

Among married women in Langas who participated in the present study, Kikuyu, but also Kisii women were more involved in the marketplace and enjoyed greater mobility than women from other ethnic communities. This reflects a general trend in the country. Older women and unmarried women were also found to enjoy greater autonomy in market-based activities compared, respectively, to younger and married women. For instance in contrast with the high level of autonomy enjoyed by Sonkoro's wife (referred to earlier), the participation of Onyancha's wife, Moraa, in the marketplace was more restricted.

With her husband's support, Moraa (27 years old) operated a kiosk by the roadside in Langas estate, not far away from their home. The kiosk was the most important source of livelihood for the household. Moraa specialized in groceries. She got part of her stock – e.g. *sukuma wiki*, cowpeas, onions, *suja* and pumpkins – from their plot; but most of the produce came from the market in the town. Occasionally, Onyancha would accompany his wife to the market in Eldoret town to buy the produce. At some point, the prices of commodities went up so much so that they could hardly survive in the business unless they looked for a cheaper source of produce elsewhere. Rather than let the wife do it, Onyancha himself started traveling to their rural town of Kisii twice a week to bring produce like sugarcane, avocados, pineapples and bananas for his wife to sell in the kiosk.

Sonkoro's wife and Moraa are both from the Kisii community. Beyond this, they have stark differences between them. Moraa was younger (27 years), had a little child, and her husband was an active participant in the job market who had contributed to her business start-up. On the other hand, Sonkoro's wife was older

(51 years) and her youngest children (twins) were fourth form students in a boarding secondary school. In addition, she had a female relative who stayed with her. Sonkoro's wife was also the main breadwinner since her husband was out of work. This comparison illustrates how intersections of age, socio-economic standing, household compositions, and bargaining power presented differential opportunities for women in the same locality.

### Trade-offs between urban agriculture and non-farming activities

The contribution of urban farming vis-à-vis non-farming activities to household livelihoods varied between households and over time; so was the nature of trade-offs between them. It has already been stated that many households had initially resorted to urban agriculture as a means of coping with difficult economic circumstances once their main income sources dwindled. Initial investment in urban farming invariably came from non-farming activities. For some households, urban agriculture soon became an important source of livelihood requiring full-time commitment. For others it remained a supplemental and survival strategy undertaken on part-time basis or as an important means of safeguarding incomes from other livelihood strategies to be channelled towards other developments. In such cases, income earned from urban farming was dedicated to household consumption and was rarely re-invested in other livelihood ventures. For other farmers, urban agriculture provided an important basis for other income sources and, especially in the case of women, for social capital formation that was critical for their participation in non-farming livelihood activities. As shall be demonstrated more elaborately in Chapter 8, like Mama Daddy (referred to earlier), many women used earnings from urban agriculture – especially from the sale of vegetables – to meet their financial obligations to their social networks and in turn accessed financial resources from and through their groups which they invested in other livelihood ventures. Male farmers too reported back-and-forth trade-offs between urban agriculture and their other income activities. It has already been mentioned, for instance, how Mhubiri had to sell sheep and chickens in order to pay for a trade license for his carpentry shop whenever he had no money and the licence fee was due, and how he would use income from the workshop and carpentry contracts to restock.

Trade-offs between farming and non-farming livelihood activities can also be seen in terms of labour allocation. How male and female labour was allocated between the two types of activities largely depended on their (perceived) relative contribution to household livelihood, the type and nature of urban agriculture and the location of the activities, and seasonal trends. In the typical case where urban agriculture was a supplemental livelihood activity undertaken on-plot or in the

backyard, women dominated and labour requirements for other livelihood activities were not significantly affected. This was especially the case where crops were involved, and the animals kept could fend for themselves (e.g. sheep and small livestock like ducks and chickens). In such cases, the allocation of labour between urban farming and other activities was more flexible; it was rare for households to withdraw labour from or withhold it for other income sources in favour of urban farming. The common practice was for household members to attend to their plots before proceeding to and/or after returning from other activities, and/or during the days they were not undertaking the other activities such as on weekends. In the case of women who participated in petty trade within their neighbourhoods, they simply juggled between farming and their other income-earning activities. Alternatively, outside labour would be hired to perform urban agriculture activities. In cases where none of these options was tenable, it was more likely that urban agriculture would suffer from the patterns of labour allocation, as exemplified by Makori's dilemma below.

Makori and his wife Jane kept chickens (their main farming activity in the town) and also operated a food kiosk located a few metres away from their residence in Langas. The kiosk was their household's main source of income. Jane took responsibility for the chickens and spent most of her time at home taking care of them, while Makori was in charge of the kiosk. Occasionally Jane would help out with work at the kiosk. Similarly, Makori assisted with some chicken-related tasks, and particularly cared for the chicks at the food kiosk where it was easier to warm and feed them. Jane had also recently taken up a 'profitable' second-hand clothes business which involved regular travel out of town. She travelled to her rural town of Kisii every Friday and Sunday, as a result of which she no longer took good care of the chickens, resulting into low productivity. Whereas she previously collected at least a tray of eggs (or 30 eggs) every day, she had started collecting very few and sometimes none at all. Makori shared his wife's sentiments, noting that although he took responsibility for the chickens when his wife was not around, he was not able to give them full attention as his wife would do. He could only afford to go back home and check on them just once every day because he had to make sure that everything went well at the kiosk, stating that in his absence the workers could not attend to their duties well. Although he valued his chicken enterprise, Makori maintained that if things went wrong at the food kiosk, he would not be able to provide for his family. As to the impact of his wife's new business on the chicken project, he only lamented thus:

"If my wife would be around most of the time, we would now be having about 100 chicks and not the 20 or so chicks that we now have. When the hens want to hatch, my wife notices easily and promptly prepares eggs and nests for them. As for me, I would not know. Before she took up the new business she used to spend most of her time looking after them and so she had come to understand their behavior very well. Because her business shows good prospects, she cannot abandon it for the sake of the chickens. We will see how best to take care of the chickens."

A different pattern was observed among households that placed greater premium on urban agriculture whether as a source of food or (particularly) income, and where the activities to be performed were time-specific. In such cases household members would occasionally suspend other livelihood activities to attend to

gardening. Ongeris<sup>9</sup> and Mhubiri's<sup>10</sup> cases illustrate the role of seasonality and time specificity in labour allocation in favour of urban agriculture (see also Chapter 10).

A retired teacher, Ongeris had informally opened his own primary school in Langas estate, where he spent most of his time on day-to-day management of the school. He owned a one-acre plot in another estate (Jasho Farm) where he grew Irish potatoes. He had also rented two acres on the outskirts of Langas, where he had planted maize. When asked about how his school management duties related with urban agriculture, he had this to say: "When there is need, I can skip my school duties to go and do farm work. I have put there someone to take care of the plot but I go there from time to time because it is far and my wife cannot manage to look after it. (...) With these two plots I always ensure that I am there myself to ensure that everything is done the way I want."

On his part, although Mhubiri had started participating more in urban farming, it was his wife and children who continued to do most of the work on the plot. He only participated in farm work when he had some free time and, when he did, he performed some specific tasks, namely, looking for chemical fertilizer as well as sourcing and applying pesticides and fungicides. However, sometimes he had had to "suspend other activities to come and participate in urban farming especially when it rains because the rains cannot wait for you".

---

<sup>9</sup> Interviewed on 7 June 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Interviewed on 30 May 2009.