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## Importance of urban farming

The present Chapter examines the various benefits and outcomes that farming households, and individual men and women derived from urban crop cultivation and livestock keeping. The benefits and outcomes are construed from the respondents' motives for taking up urban farming, the use patterns of the various urban agriculture products, and from the varied meanings men and women attached to urban farming and the resultant outcomes. The respondents' perceptions about the contribution of urban farming to overall household food and incomes are also considered. It is shown that while the contribution of urban farming to overall household food and incomes was marginal for the majority of farming households, such benefits were nonetheless greatly valued and bore varied meanings for men and women.

### Benefits of crop cultivation

It is apparent from Table 8.1 that urban crop cultivators were motivated primarily by the need to enhance household food security and nutrition, but also to earn and/or save some income. Other motivations included prospects for economic independence, the need to utilize readily available space and, to a more limited extent, culture and/or farming background.

Whereas the food-related reasons influenced men's and women's decision to farm to more or less the same extent, there were apparent gender differences among income-related reasons. Compared with women, men were more concerned about saving money on food expenditure and less so about gaining economic independence. Men generally regarded themselves – as was expected of them by society – as the main household breadwinners who were expected to provide finances not only for the purchase of food but also for meeting other non-food requirements. As such, any food produced by the household would

therefore ease their financial burdens and the money thereby saved – i.e. indirect or fungible income – channeled towards meeting other household needs, including the purchase of other food items.

*Table 8.1* Main reason for crop cultivation, by gender (%)

Reason	Male (n=68)	Female (n=112)
<i>Food-related reasons</i>		
Additional food/food security	40	42
Fresh food produce/improved nutrition	4	6
<i>Income-related reasons</i>		
Save money on food expenditure	31	18
Diversify income/investment opportunity	12	11
Economic independence	3	15
<i>Other reasons</i>		
Utilize available space	9	6
No other occupation	0	2
Custom/tradition/farming background	1	0
Total	100	100

Table 8.2 shows that each of the five most prevalent crops was self-consumed by over 80% of the cultivating households, with maize and *sukuma wiki* being the most widely and regularly consumed. A traditional vegetable, *suja* (black night shade) was an important item in diet diversification. A smaller proportion of the households earned some income from crops, notably from *sukuma wiki*, *suja* and spinach. Of these, *sukuma wiki* was the most widely sold crop, often over several months, while *suja* was the most marketable but was usually sold over only a few weeks.

*Table 8.2* Consumption and sale of crop products by cultivating households (%)

Crop	Cultivating households	Consumption	Sales
Maize	89	99	11
<i>Sukuma wiki</i>	85	91	64
Spinach	31	84	61
<i>Suja</i>	22	82	50
Bananas	24	83	13

Without any significant gender variations, only one-quarter of the crop cultivators considered home gardening as a major source of food and the rest regarded it as constituting a minor or even a negligible food source (Table 8.3). The urban farming households relied mostly on the market for food supplies. Eight percent of the households supplemented their food sources with own rural food produce, and another 6% made claims on relations and neighbours for food gifts and donations. Given their low and irregular incomes, the more such households depend on the market for food supplies the more vulnerable they are to food insecurity. When respondents were asked whether their households ever faced food shortages, 43% (N=200) of them answered in the affirmative.

The marginal contribution of urban crop cultivation to household food security is largely because of the small scale and limited diversification of crop production (see Chapter 7). Because of the limited space available to crop cultivating households, and because of non-adoption of intensification technologies and appropriate farming practices, many households realized low yields and consumed most of what they produced, leaving little, if any, for sale. And except maize grains that could be easily stored for future use, most other crop products were perishable and, for a lack of refrigeration facilities, farmers were forced to sell the produce even when future shortages were anticipated.

*Table 8.3* Perception of the importance of crop cultivation as a source of food, by relationship to household head (%)

	Total (N=180)	Male head (N=67)	Female spouse (N=87)	Female head (N=24)
Only/major source	24	28	24	21
Additional/minor source	59	58	63	50
Negligible source/hobby	17	13	13	29
Total	100	99	100	100

Chi-square:  $X^2=0.4.667$ ;  $df=4$ ;  $p=0.323>0.05$ .

Contrary to the conventional wisdom that women hold a more favourable view of urban agriculture as a source of food, there were no significant gender differences regarding the urban farmers' perception of the contribution of crop cultivation to household food supply (see Table 8.3). This may not be entirely surprising though given women's reproductive and home-keeping roles, on the one hand, and the difficult economic circumstances that limited men's support for their families, on the other hand. Thus, confronted with a myriad household needs, and with their husbands absent from the home most of the time, many women were often forced to look for alternative food and income sources to supplement

home-produced food, and their husbands' financial contributions. Some women would even sell part of essential home-produced food without the knowledge of their husbands in order to purchase other food and non-food items. If, for these reasons, women's perception of urban crop cultivation as a source of food was relatively less favourable, a comparable view among men may still pass for a more positive perception than is usually associated with them. Thus, because much of women's efforts to respond to household needs were not known to, or were taken for granted and underestimated by their husbands, the latter may have erroneously overestimated the contribution of self-produced food (and of their own income contributions) to the sustenance of their households.

Compared to its contribution to household food supply, a smaller proportion (16%) of the respondents considered crop cultivation to be a major source of household income (Table 8.4). One in every ten respondents – that is, about one-quarter of those who considered crop cultivation to be a negligible source of income – noted that their households had not earned any income from the activity. Whereas some of these respondents may have been simply unaware about some income being generated from home gardens, it was also the case that maize, one of the most prevalent crops, was rarely sold because many households realized only limited output that could last them just a few months, usually two to three months, before they could start buying grains for the rest of the year. Although, overall men and women held a comparable view of the contribution of urban crop cultivation to household incomes, further disaggregation of the data indicated some gender differences in the perceptions. It would seem that crop cultivation was perceived slightly more favourably as a (major and additional) source of household income by female household heads, and especially female spouses than by male household heads (see Table 8.4). As shall be demonstrated shortly, men's underestimation of the economic value of crop cultivation was underpinned by women's concealment of incomes generated from home gardens.

*Table 8.4* Perception of the importance of crop cultivation as a source of income, by relationship to household head (%)

	Total (N=180)	Male head (N=67)	Female spouse (N=87)	Female head (N=24)
Only/major source	16	12	17	17
Additional/minor source	45	25	53	38
Negligible source/hobby	39	63	30	46
Total	100	100	100	101

Chi-square:  $X^2=17.068$ ;  $df=4$ ;  $p=0.002<0.05$ .

Notwithstanding its apparent marginal contribution to overall household incomes, crop cultivation was valued by men and women for varied reasons. The fungible income value of gardening was of particular significance to men as captured by Mhubiri's and Mudavadi's comments below:

The vegetables we grow on the plot are very important for the household. We save money on vegetables. We also buy sugar, milk and other minor household items from the sale of vegetables. Sometimes my children are also able to meet some school needs from the vegetables such as transport to school and books (...). Nowadays I take a lot of interest in urban farming because if I don't I will be the one expected to meet all these expenses. You can't manage at this time. It is very difficult to get money out there.

(Mhubiri, 30 May 2009)

I do not give my wife money directly. Instead I plant it in the soil so that she can get it from there when she starts selling vegetables. That is the only way she can access money whenever she wants it without bothering me since she is the one in charge of selling the vegetables. I normally don't ask for the money unless I am very broke. Otherwise if you give her money once, you will have to be giving her every time. That way you can't save any money for development.

(Mudavadi, 1 July 2009)

On the other hand, because women were more disadvantaged in terms of accessing alternative income sources, they tended to take up crop cultivation also as a means of gaining some economic independence necessary for exercising agency. In other words, they considered gardening as a way by which they could meet practical needs related to feeding their families and, in the process of doing so, also advancing their strategic interests, including gaining autonomy, self-esteem, and enhanced social status in the household and within the community. This was illustrated by the following comments of a female respondent:

If I did not do farming in town, I would not have been able to offer you this cup of tea. I would have had to look for my husband for money to buy milk, sugar and a loaf of bread. I would not even know where to look for him at this time of the day. Even if I am lucky to find him, he will not give me the money without asking many questions (...). The alternative would be to talk to you while just looking at you, yet you are a very important visitor to me. Because I make some money from my *sukuma wiki* garden, I don't ask my husband for small amounts of money and he knows that whether he is there or not, we cannot go hungry in this house. Sometimes he even asks for money from me.

(Mama Atieno, 17 May 2009)

Similarly, although Njeri's husband – who worked in another town and was not a regular co-resident of the household – regularly sent her money for household upkeep, the money was not always enough and Njeri met part of her household's food needs from gardening. On the significance of the home garden to her social standing and autonomy, she noted thus: “although he does not say so, I know my husband appreciates what I do on the plot because whenever he is

around he does not see me bothering him about money to buy vegetables and other minor kitchen items.”<sup>1</sup>

As a strategy to achieve some economic independence and autonomy, many women underreported or even totally concealed the income they earned from their gardens (see also Dennery 1996; Maxwell 1995), especially from the sale of *sukuma wiki*. This was possible due to women’s gender roles related to home-keeping, food preparation, garden-tending, and marketing of produce that enabled them to control the use of crop produce and to access income from sales (see Chapters 9 and 10). Secondly, women were able to conceal income from their gardens because many men tended to undervalue the economic significance of home gardens in the first place, and spent most of their time outside the home thereby giving women space to manoeuvre. When asked how much income their households earned from gardening, some men would express surprise that anyone would expect any produce to be sold from such small *mama’s* gardens, yet their spouses would confide that they actually made some money out of the gardens. In one such instance, a female respondent with a small vegetable garden had this to say:

The problem with men is that when they know you have some money, however little, they stop supporting you financially. Moreover, there are other important obligations that require finances, such as contributing to my women’s group and tithing in church, which are difficult to secure from my husband. Therefore, whenever I sell *sukuma wiki* from my garden, I do not tell him. (...). Luckily, he is away most of the time so he never gets to know about it. Thus, he continues to make his usual contribution towards household up-keep. When I put together whatever I earn from *sukuma wiki* and whatever I save from what he gives me, I am able to meet personal obligations and at the same time keep the household going whenever my husband’s income is not forthcoming.

(Mama Atieno, 17 May 2009)

Since my husband does not sell vegetables and he is rarely there when I am selling, I never tell him the exact amount I make from the sales. If I make Kshs. 1,000, which is the minimum I make in a day, I tell him I have made Kshs. 500. Still he thinks it is a lot of money and encourages me to use it wisely so that I don’t bother him with financial requests. I have decided to invest in women’s groups to generate more income.

(Shimuli, 27 June 2009)

As with Mama Atieno and Shimuli (above), home gardening was particularly instrumental in building social capital for many women. Income from urban agriculture, especially from vegetable sales, formed an important basis for women’s participation in credit-based social networks by enabling them to meet their obligatory financial contributions to such networks. By far more women than men participated in such networks. The first of the two most important types of credit-based social networks identified in Langas consisted of rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAs), popularly known as ‘merry-go-rounds’.

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<sup>1</sup> Interviewed on 19 May 2009.

Members of such groups usually contributed equal amounts of money and met at given intervals. The money collected at each meeting was given in lumpsum – what in local parlance is referred to as *pouring* – to one member at a time until all members in the group were reached. The order in which members received their money was usually predetermined, typically by lottery. Sometimes rather than *pour* the money for members, the group could agree to purchase a particular item or set of items for members using the money collected. Mama Sella's story typifies benefits that many women derived from participating in such groups. Her household cultivated a variety of crops including maize and vegetables on just under one-quarter of an acre of land. Different crops were grown during different seasons to mitigate seasonal variability and maximize productivity. Mama Sella was directly responsible for the garden because her husband, a mason and carpenter, was always out looking for work in schools and churches. Part of the farm produce was consumed by the household and the surplus sold to earn some income. Mama Sella made about Kshs. 500 from vegetable sales everyday throughout most of the year. She used part of the money on household food and other non-food essentials, and saved the rest with two merry-go-round groups. One group consisted of 27 members, each of whom contributed Kshs. 200 every week, and the other had a membership of 11 and each member contributed Kshs. 1,100 fortnightly. On how she had benefitted from her membership of the groups, Mama Sella stated thus:

The money has helped me to spruce up my house. I have bought household items like cups, vacuum flasks, and furniture clothing. The money has also enabled me to buy clothes and shoes for myself and my children. When visitors come in you are not embarrassed because the house looks presentable; and myself and my children too. People can tell that you are a responsible married woman who can maintain a house and take care of yourself and your children. (...) My husband does not like me participating in women groups but I will continue (...) What surprises me is that when you serve him with tea in a new vacuum flask and nice cups bought with merry-go-round money he is always very happy (...) The most recent money I received from one of the groups enabled me to assist my daughter. I received the money when she was just about to deliver. Because she got pregnant before marriage, my husband was not willing to take any responsibility so I was left to struggle with her alone. The money enabled me to admit her to a maternity hospital. Fortunately she delivered without any complications.

(Mama Sella, 30 May 2009)

The second category of social networks comprised groups whose main objective was to provide members with the avenue to access financial credit from conventional banks and formal micro-finance institutions, which lent money using the group guarantee model rather than against collateral. Would-be individual borrowers were required to organize into groups and to save money through those groups at regular intervals. After saving with a group for some time, an individual could then apply for a loan, which would be granted based on the mem-



ber's cumulative savings and endorsement by other group members. Some women had accessed financial credit, in some cases substantial enough to constitute major investment capital for their households. One example will suffice.

From a minimum daily income of Kshs. 1,000 that Shimuli<sup>2</sup> earned from *sukuma wiki* sales, she used about Kshs. 200 everyday on her kitchen budget, and made a daily contribution of Kshs. 200 to a 10-member ROSCA, and a weekly contribution of Kshs. 1,500 to another women's group of 15 members. The latter group was established with the aim of enabling members to access credit through a credit scheme of a local bank. But before she could join the groups, Shimuli had to first ask for permission from her husband, Mudavadi, a well-known vegetable farmer in Langas. Mudavadi was initially apprehensive of the idea claiming that such groups were time-wasting and forums of gossip and that joining them would interfere with his wife's work on the plot. He wanted her to be always available at home to attend to vegetable customers. However, because Shimuli understood the benefits of joining such groups, she sought to allay her husband's fears that doing so would interfere with her work, and managed to convince both groups to reschedule their weekly meetings from week days to Sundays when her children would be at home to attend to the customers while she attended group meetings. Mudavadi reluctantly agreed with this arrangement. After saving for some time with the second group, Shimuli applied for a loan of Kshs. 120,000 after consulting her husband, which she was granted. She used the money to build four rental rooms on their plot, although the money was not enough to complete the rooms. Shimuli was repaying the loan with proceeds from vegetable sales 'without any problem', her husband had become fully supportive of her plans, and he was himself planning to take a loan to complete the rooms. About his wife's progress, Mudavadi<sup>3</sup> commented that contrary to his earlier negative perception of women groups, he had come to realize that they were actually beneficial forums, and that "she is nowadays free to join as many groups as she can and to plan for any money she may get from such groups."

The cases presented above highlight some of the varied meanings of social capital leveraged by crop cultivation for women, and the implications of the same for gender relations and well-being outcomes for households and individual household members. For Mama Sella, social capital – and by extension urban farming – apparently held greater significance as a means with which she was able to play her reproductive and care-giving roles more effectively, to assert her gender identity, and to enhance her standing in the community. Conceptually, Mama Sella's account also questions the practical-strategic dichotomization of gender needs/interests. It is clear from her perspective that by being able to fulfil her household's immediate daily survival needs, Mama Sella simultaneously furthered what would be regarded as medium- or longer-term strategic interests (see Hovorka 2006). On the other hand, Shimuli's account shows how social capital built using income from crop cultivation could empower women in terms of enabling them to gain economic independence, to enhance their bargaining power at the household level and, as a result of this, to reconfigure gender relations by earning their husbands' trust as capable decision-makers even in matters that are traditionally regarded men's domain (in this case investment in housing).

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<sup>2</sup> Interviewed on 27 June 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Interviewed on 1 July 2009.

## Benefits of livestock keeping

As with crop cultivation, livestock keepers, irrespective of gender, perceived livestock keeping as constituting a modest source of food. Table 8.5 shows that almost nine in every ten respondents considered livestock keeping to have made either no,<sup>4</sup> negligible or only minor contribution to their households' food requirements.

*Table 8.5* Perception of the importance of livestock keeping as a source of food, by relationship to household head (%)

	Total (N=148)	Male head (N=49)	Female spouse (N=72)	Female head (N=24)
Only/major source	13	14	13	13
Additional/minor source	36	39	36	33
Negligible source/hobby	51	47	51	54
Total	100	100	100	100

Chi-square:  $X^2=0.415$ ;  $df=4$ ;  $p=0.981>0.05$ .

The relative insignificance of urban livestock keeping as a source of food could be attributed to the fact that only a limited range of livestock products constituted regular food items in household diets. Only milk, and, to a lesser extent, eggs were regularly consumed by households – 83% of all cattle keepers and 72% of chicken keepers consumed milk and eggs, respectively. Other livestock products were either only periodically or rarely consumed, if at all. Although many farmers who kept chicken, ducks and sheep – 72%, 67% and 42%, respectively – said they had at one time or another slaughtered their stock for home consumption, this happened on very rare occasions. Nonetheless, many households still attached greater importance to the limited, and often rare, livestock food products than the latter's quantitative value as a proportion of overall household food supply would suggest. This was partly for nutritional and cultural reasons. For instance, Wandera lamented the loss of his dairy cow as follows:

“Before my cow died after an accident, I used to take good tea in my house whenever I wanted to. My cow's milk was of very high quality, and there was always milk in my house. But nowadays if I want to take tea I have to buy milk, which is very expensive and you cannot get good milk in the market. Most vendors dilute their milk with water and since I cannot afford milk from the shop, black tea is the order of the day in my house these days.”

Similarly, as negligible as chicken and sheep meat might have been as food sources, their cultural value was much greater among members of the Luhya and

<sup>4</sup> Seven percent of the respondents noted that their households had not derived any food from the livestock they kept.

Kikuyu ethnic communities, respectively. The chickens and sheep were slaughtered for food periodically during cultural ceremonies, special occasions, and for ‘important’ visiting friends and relatives. Thus for a household of eight, like Mama Ben’s,<sup>5</sup> five chickens would constitute infinitesimal proportion of household food over several months. But for Mama Ben, the five chickens she kept gave her a peace of mind and sense of pride knowing that she could “comfortably feed important visitors, as is expected of a respectable Luhya woman, at any time even if they found (her) without any money in the house.” The cultural significance of sheep to Kikuyus was underscored by the fact that Kikuyu-headed households were not only more likely than farmers from other ethnic backgrounds to keep sheep – they constituted 77% (N=52) of all sheep keeping households – they were also more likely to have done so as much for cultural reasons as for income.

Much like its perceived value as a food source, livestock keeping was considered by a large majority of respondents to have made either only marginal or no contribution to household incomes (see Table 8.6). Only 8% of the respondents considered it as a major source of household income. On the whole, the contribution of livestock keeping to household incomes was perceived in more or less the same way by men and women.

*Table 8.6* Perception of the importance of livestock keeping as a source of household income, by relationship to household head (%)

	Total (N=148)	Male head (N=49)	Female spouse (N=72)	Female head (N=24)
Only/major source	8	6	7	17
Additional/minor source	44	41	42	58
Negligible source/hobby	48	53	51	25
Total	100	100	100	100

Chi-square:  $X^2=6.889$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p=0.142 > 0.05$

That livestock keeping accounted for insignificant proportions of household incomes owes to the fact that livestock sales were a rare occurrence and only happened at critical moments. The sale of live animals and birds was indeed a particularly important and sometimes only way of raising ‘quick money’ to attend to urgent financial needs. Sheep, pigs, chickens and, to a lesser extent, cows were the most important liquid assets among the livestock. Fifty seven percent of pig keepers and 27% of sheep owners had at one time or another sold their animals to earn some income. Although cows were rarely sold, cow milk earned

<sup>5</sup> Interviewed on 16 August 2009.

some income for 55% of cattle keeping households (in each case over several months). Among the small stock, live chickens and chicken eggs were the most important sources of income. Forty-four percent of chicken farmers had at one time or another sold chicken eggs and another 46% had sold live birds, although the former was done with greater frequency than the latter.

Though limited overall, the value of livestock keeping as a source of income during critical moments can be illustrated by the following instances:

When Mudavadi's<sup>6</sup> children were once sent home for school fees when his main business had not earned him any money for several months, he decided to sell three of his four dairy cows to send the children back to school because he did not want them to miss school. Similarly, Muraya<sup>7</sup> recounted how his mother died in their rural home at a time he had no money in his pocket, and neither did his close friends. Yet as the first-born of his family and with his father already deceased, Muraya was expected to play a key role in his mother's funeral arrangements. Although he had 19 rental rooms – his main source of income – his mother's death occurred mid-month and so he could not ask his tenants for rent. Chickens were the only liquid assets he had. He sold four big ones to a local food kiosk and raised Kshs. 900 which enabled him to travel to the rural home and thereby avoid "the embarrassment of not making it for his mother's funeral on time".

Indeed, compared to the need for food, the income motive was by far a more important factor for taking up livestock keeping among both men and women (see Table 8.7). Given the highly monetized nature of the urban setting, livestock (large ones in particular) were seen as an important form of liquid assets that could easily be converted into cash income to meet lumpsum household expenditures such as education and medical expenses whenever there was need. However, while women – and to a greater extent, female household heads – were more concerned with prospects for earning and/or diversifying income than men, only men (although a small minority) cited the need to save money on food expenditure as the reason for choosing to rear livestock. Such men tended to cede to their wives the power to make decisions about the use of income from the sale of livestock products – mostly milk – often, as in the case of crops, on condition that the women did not ask for regular household budgetary support.

The importance of livestock keeping as a source of income for women could be attributed again to their relatively limited alternative income sources, and to a lack of asset-building opportunities. On the other hand, the limited influence of 'economic independence' as a factor in women's decision to keep livestock (relative to its role in crop cultivation) relates to the fact that unlike income from gardening, it was more difficult for women to conceal income from the sale of livestock products, especially large stock that were the most significant income

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<sup>6</sup> Interviewed on 1 July 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Interviewed on 19 August 2009.

*Table 8.7* Main reason for livestock keeping, by sex of respondent and by relationship to household head (%)

	Male head (N=49)	Female spouse (N=72)	Female head (N=24)
<i>Income related reasons</i>			
Investment/diversify income	55	63	71
Save money on food expenditure	8	0	0
Economic independence	4	6	0
<i>Food-related reasons</i>			
Additional food/food security	14	14	13
Fresh food/improve nutrition	12	11	0
<i>Cultural reasons</i>			
Custom/farming background	4	6	4
<i>Other reasons</i>			
Hobby/pastime	2	1	4
Had no other occupation	0	0	8
Total	99	101	100

sources. In any case, and as shall be shown shortly, cultural norms, unequal power relations, and limited financial endowments constrained women's ownership of, and access to incomes accruing to the sale of large stock.

While large livestock constituted an important fallback for households with regard to meeting lumpsum expenditures, at a personal level men and women benefitted from livestock keeping differently and unequally. Large livestock held greater significance as liquid assets for men than for women. And although women enjoyed more freedom over the sale of small livestock and related products as well as cow milk, such livestock products generated more limited incomes that were in any case mostly used for household expenditure. In most Kenyan communities large livestock were traditionally considered the property of men. The continuity of such cultural norms was evident among livestock keeping households within the urban context. Besides, the keeping of large livestock – especially dairy cows and pigs – required considerable financial investment, technical knowledge about animal husbandry, and high labour input. Access to these resources was generally skewed in favour of men. As such, women were underrepresented among owners of large livestock, but were associated with small livestock to a greater extent than men (see Chapter 7).

Of particular relevance is the fact that cultural norms seemed to also limit women's freedom to sell large stock over which they had ownership rights. Mama Sella's story is illustrative:

When you have an emergency, you can sell sheep quickly to solve the problem. But whenever that happens, it is my husband who sells. He can sell even without telling me. He will

just say he wants to sell and you cannot object. As I grew up I never saw women sell sheep or cattle; it is men who do. Even when I want to sell my sheep we have to agree with my husband then he will look for someone to buy. But I can sell chickens and ducks without telling him.

(Mama Sella, 30 May 2009)

It must be pointed out though, that unmarried women were not as restricted as their married counterparts regarding ownership of large livestock and access to income from livestock sales. Thus, whereas Mama Sella contended that women from her Kikuyu ethnic community traditionally did not sell sheep (and cows), it was the case that many unmarried Kikuyu women in Langas kept sheep and were personally responsible for sales whenever they wanted to. One such woman put it this way: “Any time I have an urgent problem that needs money, I personally walk to the butchery and the butcher will come running. They know I keep good quality sheep and the demand for sheep is so high that I will always get the right price.”<sup>8</sup> On the whole, female heads of households generally exercised greater control over household assets and enjoyed greater autonomy and decision-making power even when they had grown-up sons and other adult males in their households (see also Chapter 9). This may partly explain why the proportion of female household heads was slightly higher than married women among farmers who took up livestock keeping as an investment or as a means to diversify their income (see Table 8.7 above), and why female household heads perceived livestock keeping as a source of household income more favourably than married women (see Table 8.6). Furthermore, as alluded to in Nyambura’s comments above, freedom of mobility also meant that female heads of households had better access to market information and could therefore appropriate available market opportunities, including selling their livestock, without recourse to male patronage. Such conclusions challenge one of the basic propositions of ‘the feminisation of poverty’ thesis that female-headed households are some of the poorest of the poor and that their well-being circumstances are worse off than those of male-headed households. The conclusions somehow validate the contention that female-headship may in some instances by itself lead to better livelihood outcomes and well-being for women and other household members (Baden 1999; Chant 2007; Angeles 2009).

However, despite men’s control over large livestock – which constituted important income sources – the high labour requirements involved in rearing the livestock necessitated greater consultations and responsibility sharing between spouses and, as a consequence, women used their labour contribution to negotiate access to income from livestock sales (see Chapters 9 and 10). The implication of this – in addition to the fact that married women were restricted by gender norms

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<sup>8</sup> Nyambura, interviewed on 28 May 2009.

from selling large livestock by themselves and often relied on their husbands to access the market – is that both spouses came to understand the real economic value of what in most instances were more or less joint ventures regardless of livestock ownership claims. It is not surprising therefore that the perceptions of married women and male household heads as to the contribution of livestock keeping to household incomes were similar (see Table 8.6).