

# **The Gender Dimension of Rural Producer Organisations in Tanzania**

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## **Executive summary**

The study covered Rural Producer Organisations (RPOs) in three regions that is Morogoro, Arusha and Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. To have a variation in the findings, four types of RPOs were covered which include: Member based Cooperative Societies - covered the Federation down to primary societies; A network of farmers groups represented by MVIWATA; Member based farmers group represented by the Association of Kilimanjaro Special coffee Growers that has farmers groups who are members; and, Independent Farmers groups that sell coffee directly to the coffee auction at the Tanzania Coffee Board. The major objective of this study was to explore gender equity and mainstreaming in RPOs. Three methodologies used in this study were; focus group discussions that were mainly used for the RPOs in the villages, guided discussions with officials at higher levels and gathering and reviewing of secondary information. The major findings include: Most of the RPOs do not have any policy and have not mainstreamed gender in any of their its activities The word gender is unpopular to most of the groups RPOs do not have gender disaggregated data that can facilitate in monitoring of its activities, decision making and policy formulation RPOs that are in export crop producing areas, in this case coffee are male dominated. There are a few women members who are mostly widows RPO members/leaders lack lobbying and advocacy skills that can enable them to participate in various forums and expand their outreach RPOs lack training or sensitization programmes that can empower the members, men and women RPOs that have gender training/sensitization of their members, like MVIWATA; the members see the importance of streamlining gender and eventually having gender equity in their organisations Less than two percent of women have leadership positions in the Coffee Rural Producer Organisations. This is the opposite case with Savings and Credit Cooperative Societies such as Lego Mullo Savings and Credit society that provides financial services to its members and MVIWATA whose members have different activities and are involved in producing non-traditional export crops. In these two cases there are both female and male leaders in the RPOs and even the national management board 8 · 8 Where women have been leaders like the village chairperson of Legho

village, women seem to have confidence that they can even be democratically elected by both men and women to become leaders. Less than ten percent of women participate in meetings especially in the coffee growing areas. One of the reasons may be due to the workload which they have domestically and secondly the cultural background of people in these areas may be it is cultural. Women who attend meetings are shy to contribute own ideas. Membership in Primary Cooperative societies that are dealing with export cash crops tied to land ownership Generally this study reveals that gender equity and mainstreaming in RPOs is minimal though the government has a conducive policy and legal framework. The gendering process in rural producer organisations is slow and it varies from one society to another due to cultural differences and access to training. Mainstreaming Gender in budgets, training, exchanging experiences with other rural producer cooperatives and advocacy are fair alternatives though they need financial commitment from the rural producer organisations. But the participation of both men and women is vital as it will bring to life different set of values and will create a more caring, pluralist and compassionate rural society and thus create sustainable rural producer organisations.