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## ‘Weak winners’ of Women's empowerment: The gendered effects of dairy livestock assets on time poverty in Uganda

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### 1. Introduction

Women's empowerment and gender equity have become central to global development discourse and practice. Development agencies, donors, corporations, and non-governmental organizations no longer view women as simply victims of poverty but as key agents in solving poverty and a host of other social and economic ills (Cornwall and Edwards, 2010; Prügl, 2015). Within agriculture, development institutions (e.g. United States Agency for Development (USAID); United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)) are promoting women's empowerment and gender equality in an effort to increase agricultural productivity and reduce household food and nutrition security (Bishop-Sambrook, 2014; Meinzen-Dick et al., 2012; Quisumbing et al., 2014; Sraboni et al., 2014). In response, there is a growing effort among feminist scholars to assess the gendered outcomes of these efforts within the context of agriculture, especially in Africa (Said-Allsopp and Tallontire, 2014; Malapit and Quisumbing, 2015; Njuki and Sanginga, 2013).

The objective of this paper is to examine the ‘gendered asset gap’ (Lyon et al., 2016: 1) by assessing the effects and trade-offs of livestock assets for women's empowerment and gender equity within the East Africa Dairy Development (EADD) program in Uganda. EADD was initiated by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which is among the largest private foundations engaged in agricultural development in Africa. Working with Heifer International and four other organizations, EADD targeted smallholder farmers, including women, to receive ‘improved’ crossbred dairy cows<sup>1</sup> (Quisumbing and Roy, 2014). A goal of this initiative is to empower women and reduce gender inequities by increasing women's incomes through increasing agricultural productivity and sales of dairy products (Rubin and Manfre, 2014; Rubin et al., 2009).

To assess the effect of dairy assets for women smallholders we use the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) survey, together with in-depth interviews of farmers. The WEAI was developed to track changes in women's empowerment levels and degrees of inequality within the household, community, and economy (Alkire et al.,

2013). The WEAI incorporates five dimensions to measure women's empowerment in relation to agriculture: production, resources, income, leadership, and time. By measuring key dimensions of women's empowerment, the WEAI helps identify critical empowerment gaps in a context and culturally specific manner, which is important for creating appropriate development policies and interventions (Malapit and Quisumbing, 2015). Any assessment of women's empowerment must include the effects of development interventions for women and men in both the productive and reproductive sphere as well as on the labor dynamics within the household (Dunaway, 2014; Tallontire et al., 2005). The WEAI allows us to assess productive and reproductive activities, such as time, as separate and discrete and to reveal levels of intra-household inequality and poverty that women experience in their daily routines.

Drawing on the time poverty literature (Bardasi and Wodon, 2010; Noh and Kim, 2015; Arora, 2015), we argue that women's empowerment is not simply a function of increasing assets and income, but also the capacity to make choices about how to use one's time. This is particularly important in sub-Saharan Africa where smallholder farm women face considerable ‘time poverty,’ that is they work excessively long hours with insufficient time for rest or leisure (Arora, 2015). Time poverty for women is largely due to their ‘triple work burden’ in the production, reproduction and social spheres (Grassi et al., 2015: VI).

We contend that women's empowerment initiatives focused on dairy livestock assets can leave some women as ‘weak winners’ (Kabeer, 1999: 436). Our survey and interview results suggest that access to dairy cows provide important economic benefits to some women, including increases in women's control and decision-making power over dairy production and income. Access to dairy cows also appear to improve the social welfare of the household, especially in terms of increased milk consumption and investment in educational opportunities for children. However, our results also suggest that dairy livestock assets can increase demands on women's productive labor time. Women in our sample spent significantly more time on domestic and care work than men. Our in-depth interviews help to reveal the competing claims on women's time. Female participants described the challenge of

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<sup>1</sup> In Phase I of EADD (2008–2013), women were targeted to receive dairy cows, which include approximately 50 percent of the women participants in our study for this paper. In Phase 2 (2014–2018), EADD ended this strategy and instead worked with households that already had dairy livestock.

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juggling care for dairy cows with their household and reproductive responsibilities. In particular, accessing clean water for the cows imposes considerable time obligations that women found difficult to manage in the context of their existing labor obligations.

Women are not a homogenous category and our results show that women's vulnerability to time poverty was influenced by several key factors, including their age, household economic status, access to clean water, and levels of empowerment regarding decision-making input for dairy production. We conclude that women's empowerment initiatives that ignore the issue of time can increase some women's labor obligations and responsibilities, limiting women's life chances by forcing them to make difficult choices and trade-offs because of competing claims on their time.

This article is organized as follows. In the next section, we present the time poverty framework that guides our analysis. Next, we describe the EADD program in the study context section. We then describe our methods, including the WEAI survey instrument, our sample, and the in-depth interviews. We then present our findings, explaining the survey results for each of the five WEAI empowerment dimensions, together with analyses of time poverty and time poverty determinants. We draw on in-depth interview data to help provide meaning to our survey findings. We then discuss our results and the broader significance of our findings in relation to the concepts of women's empowerment and time poverty. We conclude by considering how our findings can contribute to development efforts concerned with engaging in the multiple dimensions of women's empowerment and gender equity.

## 2. Women's empowerment and time poverty

To enhance women's empowerment, agricultural development agencies are focused on efforts to increase women's incomes, often through access to assets, such as livestock. Compared with men, women typically have less access to, or control over, key agricultural resources such as land, labor, technology, livestock, education and training (Ransom and Bain, 2011). In part, this attention is a response to growing concerns about how to sustainably feed a global population expected to grow to 9 billion by 2050 (World Bank, 2009). A key assumption is that when women's income increases she is more likely to invest it in a manner that enhances the health, well-being, and food security of their family (Chant, 2016). The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (2011) argue that with similar access to, and control over, resources and inputs as men, women could increase yields by 20–30 per cent, which could raise agricultural output by 2.5–4 per cent in developing countries and potentially reduce the number of food insecure people by 12–17 per cent (FAO, 2011). From this perspective, investing in women is 'smart economics' (Prügl, 2015: 618) that will increase women's incomes but also increase economic productivity and provide greater social returns (Chant, 2016).

From a feminist perspective of women's empowerment, a focus on income and assets can make the challenges confronting women seem less momentous. In this article, we conceptualize empowerment as a multidimensional process that expands women's control over resources (e.g. physical, human, financial) (Cornwall, 2016) and their agency and capacity to 'make strategic life choices' and to act on them (Kabeer, 1999: 437). From this perspective, the wellbeing of women is not just a function of their income or consumption, but also their capacity to make choices, including how to allocate their time (Bardasi and Wodon, 2006). For example, efforts to increase women's income by providing them with livestock assets may increase their time and labor burden in a context where women have limited power and autonomy to negotiate how they use their time or labor.

Time is a scarce resource and women often lack independence and autonomy over how to use their time, which can increase their levels of time poverty (Bardasi and Wodon, 2010; Chant, 2010; Noh and Kim, 2015). Individuals experience time poverty when working long hours in the paid labor market or unpaid domestic work, which leaves them with

less time for rest or leisure (Bardasi and Wodon, 2010). This is a global problem with women spending 'at least twice as much time in unpaid domestic work as men', a disparity that is typically much higher in developing countries (USAID, 2015: 3). Women, especially rural women in Sub-Saharan Africa, are particularly vulnerable to time poverty. Social and cultural norms help to define and reproduce a rigid gender division of labor where women disproportionately work in unpaid labor activities, including household labor, care work, and subsistence agriculture, that are frequently invisible and unrecognized (Bardasi and Wodon, 2010; Grassi et al., 2015). Time poverty for women is exacerbated then when there is a lack of infrastructure and technology that can provide basic necessities, such as safe water, cooking fuel, labor-saving technologies, transportation, as well as access to social and economic amenities, such as markets, schools and health care centers (Grassi et al., 2015; USAID, 2015). Among the most vulnerable to time poverty are women in poorer households with fewer assets and less access to labor, including labor from other household members, especially children (USAID, 2015).

Examining the gendered distribution of time use and time poverty is critical to understanding and addressing women's empowerment and gender equity. Assessment of the gendered asymmetries in time use can reveal the specific form and degrees of inequality within the household between men and women, as well as girls and boys (Noh and Kim, 2015). For example, time use studies have helped us understand the extent to which the unpaid work of women in the household contributes to its survival, which has typically been underestimated (Noh and Kim, 2015). Time use studies have also revealed that a characteristic of women's work within the household compared to men, is that women often work on different activities at the same time, not sequentially (Blackden and Wodon, 2006). Women may be caring for children while also milking the cow or cooking the mid-day meal while cleaning out the stall.

Women are often compelled to work long hours to accomplish all the demands on their time. Time use and time poverty studies are important for understanding the trade-offs that women may be forced to make when they do not have enough time to allocate to certain activities (Blackden and Wodon, 2006). For example, some case studies have found that by increasing demands on women's time, animal ownership may decrease the time and quality of care for children as well as women's time for ensuring household food and nutrition security (Grassi et al., 2015; Rawlins et al., 2014). It is also important to understand the effects that time poverty can have on women's personal well-being and individual empowerment and not simply the wellbeing of others. For instance, time poverty can leave women with less time to engage in income generating activities, leaving women dependent on the income of men (Kabeer, 2015). It can have negative implications for women's health, including both physical and mental wellbeing (Grassi et al., 2015). Finally, time poverty can impede a woman's ability to expand her individual capabilities through engaging in activities, such as education, skills development, social groups, or collective actions (Lyon et al., 2016; USAID, 2015).

## 3. Study context

Initiated by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in 2008, EADD is one of the leading market-oriented development initiatives in East Africa. Working with Heifer International as the lead implementation agency, the goal of EADD is to incorporate poor smallholder farmers into dairy value chains and cooperatives as a means for reducing poverty by increasing farmer incomes. The project has been implemented in Uganda, Kenya, and Rwanda in two phases: Phase I (2008–2013) and Phase II (2014–2018).<sup>2</sup> In Uganda, the goal is to aid 43,000 dairy

<sup>2</sup> Tanzania was part of EADD initially but has subsequently been removed from the countries where EADD is active.

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