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Gender-Linked Dynamics and Sustainable Small Holder Poultry Value Chains in Makueni County, Kenya

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Abstract: Understanding the gender-linked dynamics in the small holder poultry value chain is necessary for enabling sustainable agriculture and food systems. Small holder livestock production, including poultry keeping in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), plays important socio-economic and food security roles in rural communities. Poultry production contributes to sustainable food systems as it supports nutrient cycling through feed, manure, and soils. A qualitative study utilized data from 18 focus group discussions (FGDs) and 22 in-depth interviews (IDIs) to interrogate the gender-linked dynamics in the value chain and inform interventions for sustainable food systems. The data were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded into themes responding to the study question. The results highlight the gender-linked drivers, namely, the social and economic value placed on poultry, ownership, power positions, and decision making dynamics in production and management among small holder poultry value chain actors in Makueni County, Kenya. The study findings demonstrate the increasing economic and social value placed on poultry in households and communities. The study further discusses gender-disaggregated ownership and decision making in the poultry value chain, highlighting the need to engage all involved actors to develop sustainable food systems. In addition to the social and economic value of poultry to small holder farmers, it is necessary to factor in potential nutrition and environmental benefits. While small holder poultry production has the potential to contribute to sustainable food systems economically, nutritionally, and environmentally, this study found that more emphasis is placed on socio-economic value dimensions. Noteworthy is that in ownership and decision making, gender dynamics inform the role and position of the different actors in a sustainable small holder poultry value chain that is socio-economically, nutritionally, and environmentally sound.

Keywords: gender dynamics; sustainable food systems; decision making; poultry; Kenya



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1. Introduction

Livestock production, including small holder poultry value chains in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), plays important socio-economic and food security roles [1–3]. As SSA's demand for animal-source food rises in tandem with population growth, higher incomes, and urbanization [1,2], livestock production is becoming increasingly important. SSA and Asia are leaders in small holder poultry value chain enterprises, with poultry meat being the fastest growing component of global meat production, consumption, and trade. This presents an opportunity for small holder poultry value chain actors to tackle poverty, food insecurity, and malnutrition and promote sustainable food systems [2–4]. In Kenya, with over 32 million poultry, of which 70% are indigenous [2,5,6], the small holder poultry value chain plays a significant role in the economic and social life of rural resource-constrained households. In

these settings, poultry contributes to a cheap source of animal protein and cash income, generally contributing to household food security in high potential areas and in arid and semi-arid lands [4,5,7]. The production of poultry for commercial purposes has earned recognition in the rural socio-economy because it provides readily harvestable animal protein (meat and eggs) and revenue [2,6]. Traditionally, poultry in Kenya has been a preserve of women. However, in the last decade, with the transition towards a more (semi-)intensive poultry production system, poultry is increasingly regarded as an alternative source of livelihood, and other household members, especially men, are becoming more involved [8].

In addition to its nutritional and economic contribution, poultry is pivotal in sustainable food systems [9–11]. In small holder poultry production, it is possible to have sustainable farming practices that link the birds to the land and related resources and enhance the good health and wellbeing of the environment, animals, and humans. Livestock, including poultry production, increase ecosystem services by utilizing land through, for instance, nutrient cycling [9,10], which potentially contributes to the preservation of bio-diversity, and to carbon sequestration in soils and biomass. The agenda for sustainable livestock production requires making livestock systems economically more efficient. In the case of the small holder poultry value chain, sustainability can be enabled by managing productivity levels and practices that enhance ecosystem resilience [1,9,11]. Holistic approaches to poultry production that incorporate disease prevention through surveillance and vaccination, the integration of waste from production, and processing to compost manure are important for human, environmental, and soil health [6,9,11].

2. Gender Dynamics, Sustainable Food Systems, and Livestock Production in Kenya

Gender roles and relationships in small holder poultry value chains influence the division of work, the use of resources, and the sharing of benefits between women and men [5,7,12,13]. Further, these roles and relationships influence the uptake of sustainable food system practices. Additionally, in agricultural production, the division of farm tasks between women and men varies according to the enterprise, the farming system, the technology used, and the wealth of the household [12–14]. Within the small holder poultry value chain, the typical role of women and men, including the division of labor, varies from region to region [14–16]. In the different settings, ownership of livestock is strongly related to social, cultural, gender, economic, and agro-ecological factors [7,10,11,15,16]. Although men and women can jointly carry out some of the husbandry practices, they also have distinct roles in animal management activities [14–16].

There is a growing body of literature on gender and intra-household dynamics of small holder livestock farming, including the small holder poultry chain [2,5,8,12,14–16]. This literature reveals that men and women farmers in Kenya are actively involved in livestock, including poultry production, but the types of activities and involvement in decision making and accessing the benefits vary. While women, with help from children, are often responsible for poultry keeping, they typically face greater challenges than their male counterparts and have poorer access to and control of the resources required for poultry production [13,16–18]. Poultry production entails day-to-day rearing activities, including feeding, cleaning, and the vaccinating of chickens to produce eggs and meat [17,18]. Understanding the various gender-linked drivers, including norms, relations, and roles in asset access, ownership, and control by household members, paves the way to better appreciate how these norms and roles could affect interventions and vice versa [12,13,16,19,20]. In many instances, women are limited by gender-linked norms in their ownership of the poultry, decision making powers regarding them, or income from their sale as well as animal-source food consumption [5,9,13,17].

A qualitative study was conducted to determine the gender-linked dynamics in the small holder poultry value chain. The study was carried out with participants in sampled villages in an arid and semi-arid rural setting in three sub counties—Makueni, Kibwezi East, and Kibwezi West—of Makueni County, Kenya. The study site was described in detail in two earlier papers [13,14]. An estimated 75 to 80 percent of all farm families in Makueni

County keep poultry, mainly indigenous chicken [12,13,21]. Indigenous poultry production is a core economic activity that also acts as a buffer during harsh climate seasons when crop production fails. The average household bird numbers range from 12 to 20 birds depending on the location [12,13,21].

Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following question. How do gender-linked drivers influence the food system sustainability of the small holder poultry value chain in Makueni County? We interrogate these drivers and link them to the dimensions of the Sustainability Assessment of Food and Agricultural (SAFA) systems framework [6] and provide recommendations for designing and implementing successful small holder poultry value chains for sustainable food systems. SAFA considers environmental integrity, economic resilience, social wellbeing, and good governance as the four dimensions of food system sustainability [1,6].

3. Methodology

An exploratory qualitative research design was employed to generate data on gender-linked drivers in the small holder poultry value chain.

3.1. Sampling

The study employed purposive non-probability sampling to identify participants for focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs). Non-probability purposive sampling was the appropriate sampling approach to use for a small number of participants (actors in a small holder poultry value chain) who could provide detailed and in-depth information to address the research questions.

Once the researchers were introduced to the communities by gatekeepers, mobilization was carried out. The IDI and FGD participants were selected by taking into consideration gender representation. The research team provided information regarding the participation of the small holder farmers. The potential participants were also given an opportunity to ask questions and have their concerns addressed, after which their informed written consent was obtained.

3.2. Data Collection

Twenty-two in-depth interviews (IDIs) and eighteen focus group discussions (FGDs) explored nuanced gender-linked drivers in the small holder poultry value chain. The study tools were piloted prior to the actual data collection. The IDIs enabled access to emic in-depth perspectives from men and women small holder farmers to inform the study objectives. Study participants for the interviews were purposely selected, informed consent was obtained, and an interview was conducted in Kamba by a trained research assistant. Discussion/interview guides (Table 1) were used, and interview proceedings were audio-recorded for transcription. FGDs were conducted with the discussants identified purposively and informed consent obtained. The FGDs had between 6 and 8 participants and were conducted in well-ventilated spaces in line with the COVID-19 guidelines. The FGDs were facilitated by a moderator and had a note-taker making summary notes to complement the audio recordings. The FGDs were used to corroborate and complement the information generated through IDIs.

The IDIs and FGDs were audio-recorded after obtaining informed consent from the study participants. Recordings were transcribed alongside the fieldnotes and translated into English for coding and analysis.

The transcripts were anonymized to protect the identity of the study participants. The focus group discussions were disaggregated by gender. Thematic and content analysis was applied on the transcribed and coded data to inform the primary research question. Coding was conducted on NVIVO QSR computer software NVIVO 12. Coded outputs were aggregated into themes and presented as excerpts and narrative text in this paper.

Table 1. Summary of questions for FGDs and IDIs.

Summary of Questions for the FGDs and IDIs	
Guiding questions for FGDs	
a.	What are the key activities of the community?
b.	What are the key activities of men and boys/women and girls in the community?
Exercise: Mapping of household gender roles	
Aim: To identify the (a) different gendered domestic and economic activities and (b) communal understanding of norms on access and control of resources.	
How?	
c.	Ask the community to map out a typical 'household' structure in their community, with different members.
d.	List key activities of each identified household member, focusing on income-generating activities, domestic chores, and household decision making.
e.	Can you give reasons to explain the order of importance, explaining the reasoning behind the ranking?
f.	Have there been any changes in your roles over time?
a.	If yes, what do you think were the reasons behind the change?
b.	If not, do you think it should change? If yes—why? If no—why? (Note different responses).
g.	Has there been any change in your decision making power over time?
a.	If yes, what do you think were the reasons behind the change? (Probe on changes due to conflict).
h.	If not, do you think it should change? If yes—why? If no—why? (note different responses).
Guiding questions for IDIs	
a.	What are some of the poultry varieties you keep? Why these varieties? Could you please tell us how long you have been keeping poultry in your household?
b.	Are your poultry for own consumption or for commercial use? Why that preference? What are some of the tasks involved in poultry rearing? Who between men and women perform these tasks? Why? Who makes decisions on who performs what (poultry-related task) in the household? Why do you say so?
c.	Tell us a little about the housing structures. Who owns them/the land in which they've been set up?
d.	Is there any equipment you need to raise poultry? If yes, do you have this equipment in your household? Who owns/can access these equipment/facilities? What do you mean when you say that someone owns the equipment? What can one do with what they own?
e.	Who owns poultry in this household? Why do you say so? Is there joint ownership? How is this arranged? What proportion of men/women own poultry?
f.	Division of labor: What roles do men/women do in relation to poultry/goat keeping? Who determines these roles/duties? When own poultry, are they involved in day-to-day activities such as feeding? How about when it is women fully owning the poultry, are men involved? Do you feel that men and women have equal say in the day-to-day management of poultry?
g.	What benefits do households obtain by owning poultry? Who in the household enjoys these benefits? In what ways? Between men and women, who has a say in how these benefits are shared? Why do you say so?
h.	In the case of when poultry is traded in the market, who decides on the sale? Why do you say so? Between men and women, who takes poultry to the market? Why is it this person? Who can use/access proceeds from sale of poultry in the household? Who makes the decision on where the proceeds from the sale are able to be spent in the household?

4. Results

A total of 175 informants, comprising 80 (47.5%) men and 95 (54.3%) women, participated in 18 FGD sessions and 22 IDIs (Table 2). The FGD sessions and IDIs generated gender-disaggregated information on inter alia poultry ownership, gender roles, and engagement in decision making and access to and control of the proceeds of the sale.

Table 2. Summary of FGD and IDI participants.

Sub-County	Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)			In-Depth Interviews (IDIs)		
	Total Sessions	No. of Men	No. of women	Total Sessions	No. of Men	No. of Women
Makueni	6	22	27	8	1	7
Kibwezi East	6	31	25	7	1	6
Kibwezi West	6	24	24	7	1	6
Total	18	77	76	22	3	19

4.1. The Social, Economic, and Nutritional Value of Poultry among Small Holder Farmers

Poultry is beneficial to the household's social, economic, and nutritional wellbeing. However, there are social and cultural factors which moderate the ownership and management of poultry at the household level. For example, due to patriarchal social organization among the Akamba, land and resource ownership is accorded to the man as the head of the household. Consequently, benefits from poultry belong to the family as proceeds go to the whole and not an individual. As men argued in the FGDs, "Poultry are part of the family assets and, like other assets, poultry is jointly owned". [Men FGD05].

The men's position is given credence by women, as captured from one of the IDI participants below:

Let us say they [poultry] are ours. Now we assist one another and the project has become ours. This because when I sell we are together, we eat together. [Female IDI019].

According to the study participants, ownership of poultry at the homestead elevates a woman's status. It shows that a woman can take care of the family and thus is protected from ridicule from other women. An FGD group member noted the following: "You know women laugh at each other. Imagine your homestead without chicken as a woman yet it is the easiest to take care of. So, you have to have chicken so as not to be laughed at by the other women. . . As a woman I feel very happy when I wake up and see my chicken roaming around" [Female FGD07].

Chickens also elevate a family's level of preparedness to receive visitors or improve aesthetics at home. This is captured in the following excerpts: "At times you may get a visitor and slaughter him/her chicken or give him/her like a gift [Male FGD05]. In addition, chicken is a source of beauty for the home compound. They beautify the compound as they move around [Male FGD06], and lastly, we keep them for home beauty. They make the home compound look attractive as they walk around" [Male FGD02].

From an economic standpoint, poultry rearing is emerging as a major source of income for many families in Makueni county, Kenya. The following excerpts summarize this:

Poultry is a source of income, for consumption and we also keep poultry for business purposes. Lastly, we keep them for home beauty. They make the home compound look attractive as they walk around. [Male FGD07].

It is (chicken) a quick source of income. Compared to goats, it is easy to sell chicken for emergencies. Selling 3 chicken would save you from selling a goat and at the same time meet the emergent need that you had. [Female FGD02].

You can sell the poultry easily unlike the cows and the goats. You just call someone to come and buy it. We used to rear the improved breeds and a customer would come and slaughter them and buy at Kes 300 per kg. This is very profitable because you do it in your own homestead and there is no rent or licenses to be paid for and you can help yourself financially in a significant way Also, you will find that you do not need large capital to start, you can farm cow peas which you grind and feed to the poultry. [Female IDI01].

The low input required to keep the indigenous poultry endears it to many small holder farmers and, in turn, the poultry cushions them during harsh economic times. Notably,

money from poultry in this study was regarded as easily accessible for emergencies, and the solving of minor family problems was noted because chickens are quickly converted to cash to meet immediate or emerging needs. Poultry are easily sold, and the money used on short notice:

When I get an emergency here at home, I will sell about 3 of them [poultry] and the rest will still remain to keep me going. [Female IDI10].

Poultry is also known for its nutritional benefits to the family. Women can freely cook meat or eggs from their poultry for family or visitors. This makes poultry an easily accessible animal-source food that small holder farmers can utilize to improve their household nutrition, particularly during crop failure, as well as their livelihoods through the generation of income, as illuminated in the following excerpt:

Poultry are good for nutrition; they help farmers get healthy meat. It is a source of income especially for the woman because, for the goat she has to ask for her husband's permission to sell it but for the poultry she can sell them without having to ask for permission. So, it helps in the economy of the women and in the nutrition of the family. [Female IDI06].

4.2. Household Poultry Ownership and Decision Making in Small Holder Poultry Value Chain

Every household in the study area owned, on average, 12–20 chickens. As illustrated in Figure 1, men and women regard their position in relation to household poultry ownership differently. Women consider themselves as the primary owners of chicken (65.3%) and therefore key in their production and management. According to the women respondents, children (15.3%), youth (8.8%), and men (8.5%) follow in that order. On the other hand, men regard women as the key owners of chicken (36.8%) or themselves as joint owners with women (34.1%). As sole owners (10.3%), men perceived themselves as being on par with youth (10%) and slightly above children (8.8%).

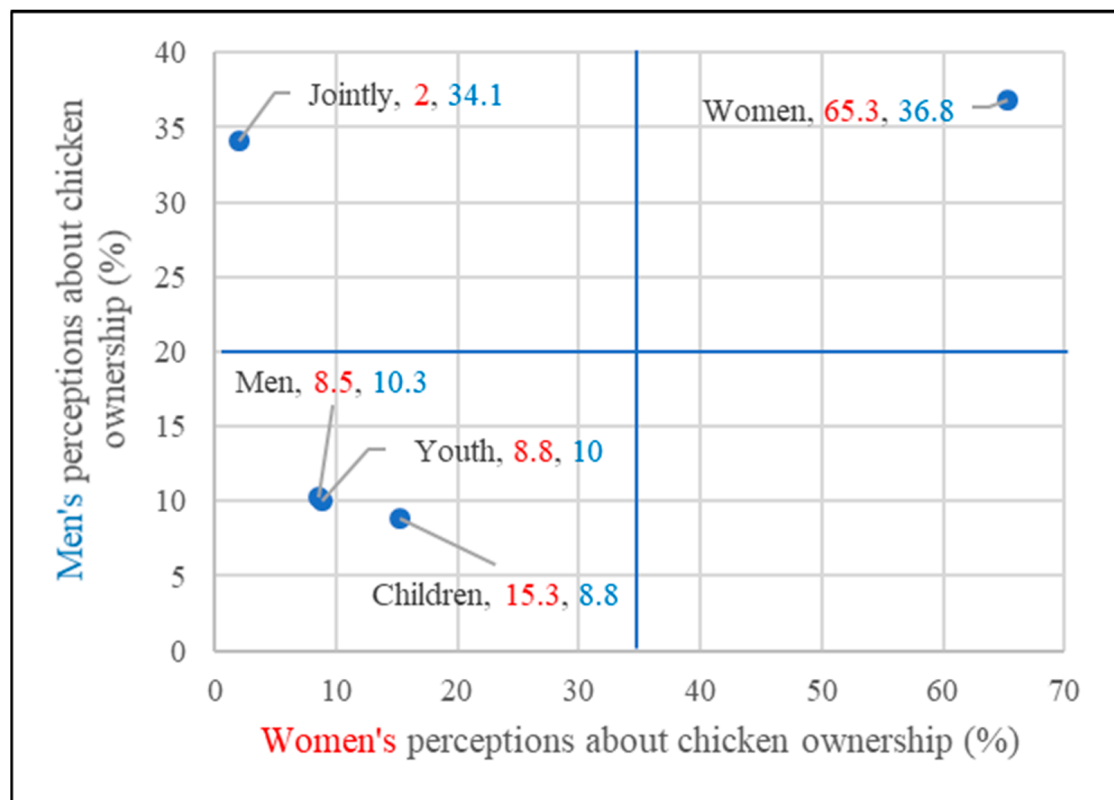


Figure 1. Scatter plot of women's vs. men's perceptions of poultry ownership.

Ordinarily, for subsistence, poultry rearing is primarily a woman's forte; she can sell, gift to a friend or family, or even cook without much consultation with her husband. However, when the poultry numbers grow and attract the man's attention, women must consult their husbands. This was captured by an IDI respondent: *Like mine, you know I cannot dispose about 1000 poultry without letting my husband know* [Female IDI016].

This move towards joint ownership presents new gender dynamics for rural chicken production. While most of the women perceive themselves as the chicken owners, as elaborated on in the FGD and IDI data, women have to accommodate men's overarching reach and authority in decision making as household heads in chicken production and management. Women do this to ensure they have their husband's support and to avoid domestic conflict. These power dynamics were more pronounced among younger women than older women in the study.

Older women can make decisions on their own without necessarily having to seek permission from a spouse. This came with the 'joint' ownership that has now shifted ownership and decision making to men. While it is an opportunity to empower women, the role of men as household heads dominates commercial poultry production. Here, the gender norms elevating the role of men as head of households and resource owners become pronounced, as summarized in the following excerpts:

I want to say this, it depends on the reason why you rear the poultry; it could either be commercial poultry or ordinary poultry. If kept for commercial reasons, this is a form of self-employment or even family business and therefore we should jointly control the business [Male FGD02].

Poultry are jointly owned by men and women, I keep poultry together with my husband and because I am not in a position to go and negotiate on the prices when it comes to selling, he is usually the one who takes them to the market. He brings all the money from the sale home and we budget for it collaboratively. [Female FGD06].

As in most rural settings, land ownership is patrilineal, and women only have user rights for food production, including the rearing of livestock such as chicken. It is the man as the head of the household, and not the woman, who has the highest bargaining power position. While poultry may generally be regarded as a woman's livestock, the production and management are institutionalized within the social norms that dictate household-level arrangements of the use of resources such as labor to look after the poultry, money to buy feeds and medicine/vaccines, as well as access to water and space to rear them. So, while women are the face of chicken production, men may indeed operate off-stage. This was aptly captured in a man's FGD: *I will not say that poultry are owned by women because they [women] are called after the family head. The truth is that men fear going to sell poultry and mostly the sale of poultry is done by women* [Male FGD04].

The commercialization of poultry and opportunities for income were notable in the study area. The household head, often a man, wielded the most authority, and women had to therefore seek his authority to rear poultry and even make decisions around their management.

4.3. Self-Organization and Ownership in Small Holder Poultry Value Chain

In recent years, as in most other parts of Kenya, county government and non-state actors have recognized the benefit of female empowerment through poultry keeping. There have been efforts through training and follow up to initiate poultry farmer groups to empower women through commercial poultry production and enhance rural small holder farmer livelihoods. While an individual woman's access to resources for poultry production is limited, collective action enables higher bargaining power and access to resources:

We get into groups because you cannot make it on your own; you need support from others for one to survive. Secondly, groups are saving avenues for the members [Male FGD06].

Women groups for poultry rearing are thus an emerging platform to increase how many women are in power positions in rural poultry management. This brings about the

possibility of increased incomes which are beneficial to households and empowering for women. However, there is still a dilemma for women at the household level in regard to ownership and decision making. Women are still expected to align to gender norms that require the involvement of men as household heads in the making of decisions regarding and activities of large-scale poultry production. While women can make a livelihood out of poultry production, and even join new women farmer groups, this only works as long as the women involve men, cognizance the man's position as the head of the household, and engage him in decisions that involve money.

In the small holder poultry value chain, ownership positions are outlined to represent the increasing role of men, but there still remains an imbalance in the division of labor. From the study, in most households, men and women are increasingly jointly rearing poultry. Notably, though, routine duties around the day-to-day management of these are still left to women. Women and children, including youth around the home, conduct most of the daily routines in rural poultry management, namely, feeding, watering, and cleaning of the poultry houses. A further exploration to detail the engagement of youth in poultry production is needed since the FGD and IDI data grouped them alongside children in their role in the division of labor. Men support in the actioning of these routine duties in the absence of women. The understanding is that women can rear poultry for subsistence freely in the homestead and can decide when to slaughter the poultry for household use. Women also decide on when and how many eggs to sell or prepare and for which members of the household:

Poultry belong to women. For example, if I leave home without attending to the poultry, I will keep getting calls from home asking what to do with the poultry in terms of food, whether to release them from poultry houses among others [Female FGD03].

It is the woman who makes all the specific decisions around feeding of the poultry, and giving them medication. The man does not have time to look after poultry. The woman also does the selling. The man does not have time to look after poultry [Female FGD02].

Men become more engaged in poultry management with the intensification of production. Their roles are linked to decision making in relation to resource allocation and use for poultry production and management while women are left to deliver on the day-to-day activities of taking care of poultry.

While women oversee the buying and selling of poultry, eggs, feed, and drugs, they often rely on their husbands to enable these transactions through the provision of transport to and from the markets to buy or sell as well as the money to make the purchase of feed and medication, including vaccines.

Despite women's overall involvement in the daily management of poultry, men work on activities such as the building and repair of poultry shelters, but also in the purchase of inputs (feed and drugs, including vaccines). Men, in some households, are also indirectly involved in the sale of birds and eggs by providing a means of transport to deliver these to the market. Even if women are the sole decision makers in relation to the sale of poultry, they mainly sell poultry at the farm gate, or if they decide to go to the market, they meet brokers or middlemen along the way who buy their poultry at a lower price (normally half price) than it would sell for at the market. Gender dynamics are expressed not only at the household production level but they also play out along the value chain in relation to distribution and markets.

Emergent in this study was the theme of self-organization and ownership in the small holder poultry value chain. In recent years, as in most other parts of Kenya, county government and non-state actors have recognized the benefit of female empowerment through poultry keeping. There have been efforts through training and follow up to initiate poultry farmer groups to empower women through commercial poultry production and enhance rural small holder farmer livelihoods. While individual women's access to resources for poultry production is limited, collective action enables higher bargaining power and access to resources:

We get into groups because you cannot make it on your own; you need support from others for one to survive. Secondly, groups are saving avenues for the members [Male FGD06].

Thus, as illustrated above, women groups for poultry rearing are thus an emerging platform to increase the number of women in power positions in rural poultry management. This brings about the possibility of increased incomes which are beneficial to households and the empowerment of women.

5. Discussion

The small holder poultry value chain encompasses both extensive and small-scale intensive management systems and is practiced by many households in developing low-income countries [2,10,22]. Poultry rearing for subsistence farming is common practice in the rural setting, with most households having at least 10 poultry at any one time [23]. Noteworthy is the economic and social value that poultry contributes to households and communities.

With the potential for commercialization in Makueni, a small holder poultry farmer is likely to rear more birds in the coming years. There is a need to link the social and economic value of poultry in the small holder value chain to sustainable food system practices that extend to the environment as well as animal and human health and wellbeing to inform the design and success of interventions and programs [10]. Poultry are reared free range for the purpose of enriching the family's nutrition through poultry meat and eggs as well as to be a ready source of disposable income for women to meet immediate family needs [2,13].

Gender roles, relations, and power positions define ownership and decision making in the poultry value chain at the household level that are reflected in the intensity of participation and distribution of the gains or benefits and to the importance of poultry to households [13–15,22]. These gender-linked dynamics influence how the poultry value chain is practiced by small holder farmers. Despite prevailing perceptions that women control poultry, men have a higher power position in decision making related to the buying or selling of produce from the small holder poultry value chain, as evidenced in this study. The women in our study were mainly responsible for executing all the production-related roles, including routine poultry management duties with help from children and youth; this is a common norm and practice in many rural settings [5,7,15,23]. Youth in these households were also represented as supportive in the poultry management activities that women would ordinarily conduct. Youth engagement and support in poultry production is an opportunity that can be tapped into and supported for inclusive empowerment in agricultural production and trade [23].

Appreciating gender dynamics is a stepping stone towards the identification of entry points that ensure equal participation in practices that are sustainability-oriented in relation to ensuring that the production is safe, cost-effective, and environmentally friendly [22,23]. Such practices enable small holder poultry value chain actors to participate within and benefit from a sustainable food system.

Common in many agricultural communities in this study, due to the power position of women in relation to the ownership of land and related resources necessary for food production, was that women were regarded as subservient to husbands. In most rural settings, land ownership occurs through a patrilineal system [10,23,24]. Hence, women only have user rights to the land for subsistence production, not ownership rights [17,24]. Given men's control over land resources and decision making in the allocation of income, marketing, and labor, the commercialization of poultry production may result in shifting gender relations in a way which disadvantage women [24–26]. This is evidenced in this study where men's position in decision making influences the poultry value chain, especially when poultry is kept for commercial markets. This seems to be the emerging trend in rural poultry production and management, but women small holder farmers are navigating this trend through membership to collective groups, for example, in cooperatives and *chamas*, which provide them with a higher status and enable them to own and manage poultry as a group [17,26,26–28].

More men are entering into rural poultry production alongside their spouses in a 'joint ownership' model, as illustrated in our results. 'Joint ownership' in poultry production means that men dominate the making of major decisions for rural poultry production, disease control, and markets, which may limit the benefits accessed by women who still contribute largest in terms of management and production tasks [13,26,28–30]. This commercialization of poultry and opportunities for income bring with it the dilemma of the position of women in poultry management, especially in the making of decisions to sell [10,13,23,29,31,32]. Here, the gender norm of the role of men as head of households and resource owners becomes pronounced as they see potential for increased profits by the intensification of the poultry value chain. The increasing interest of men in the production and marketing of agricultural products under commercialization does not necessarily decrease women's labor [13,23,29,31–33].

Farmer groups and collectives, including those for the small holder poultry value chain, provide women with a platform to access information, inputs, and even credit to boost their poultry farming activities, allowing surplus beyond mere subsistence to be created [13,23,31,33,34]. The power of collective action creates higher bargaining power and access to resources and thus benefits the small holder poultry value chain. It helps enhance livelihoods, food security, and ensures female empowerment [12,14,19,24,29,31,33,35].

Leveraging on collective bargaining power through organizing women into groups for the small holder poultry value chain is also useful to promote access to resources and benefits [13,23,29,31,32,34]. Having knowledge of the social and cultural value of poultry, including actor roles and relations, is also helpful for targeting and aiding the design and implementation of interventions aimed at promoting sustainable small holder poultry value chains [6,10,14,19,24,29,31,33,35]. When the identified social and cultural drivers are factored into the promotion of small holder poultry value chains, this will enable the practice of responsible production and consumption and contribute to end hunger through achieving food security, improved nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture where all actors are involved to enable livestock production that contributes towards the sustainability of livelihoods as well as the environment [1,3,9,10,14,19,24,29,31,34].

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, whilst, traditionally, poultry is seen as reserved for women, ownership of the birds in a small holder poultry value chain and access to the benefits of doing so are not exclusively part of the domain of women, as illustrated in this study. With the evolving poultry value chain, where ownership and access to resources now includes men as well as women in groups, more inclusive approaches are needed to enhance sustainability. In working towards sustainable food systems, small holder poultry farmers, taking into consideration the gender-linked drivers that define their roles in the value chain, need their capacity extended to enable them to adopt sustainable production practices. Since gender norms and social relations between men and women define aspects of access to, control, and the benefits of the resources necessary to enhance the stability of small holder poultry value chains, it is critical to consider these norms in designing interventions that target inclusive empowerment, especially for women. Such interventions should seek to engage men as allies in the poultry value chain so that production practices that aim to develop sustainable food systems are embraced.

Limitations of the Study: This qualitative study is part of a larger impact study that has a quantitative component; this paper presents and discusses only the qualitative results. Some of the findings are therefore complementary to those (mostly quantitative and qualitative) already published in Waweru et al., 2023 [13] and Ogolla et al., 2022 [14].

Author Contributions: S.A.B., I.K.N. and J.C. conceived the broader study. J.C., I.K.N. and S.A.B. oversaw the implementation of the study. M.N., D.O. and S.A.B. conceptualized and designed the manuscript, M.N., M.M.M. and D.O. collected, entered, and analyzed the data. M.N., with support from S.A.B., wrote the first draft of the manuscript, D.O., J.C. and I.K.N. critically reviewed and

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Data Availability Statement: The qualitative transcripts can be accessed from the Harvard Dataverse <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/YD78S6>. The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are also available from the GIVE project data manager (kenwawerum@gmail.com) on request.

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