

**WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN MILK VALUE-ADDITION IN NYERI  
COUNTY, KENYA.**

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## ABSTRACT

Smallholder dairy farming is one of the common sources of income for women in rural Kenya. In most rural households, women do most of the livestock rearing work, including feeding cows, milking, and selling raw milk. However, despite putting a lot of labor, income obtained from milk is inadequate. Observably, processing plants that buy raw milk make huge profits after value-addition from sales of yoghurt, ice cream, pasteurized, sour, and powdered milk. Ideally, milk value-addition by female milk producers would, not only increase their incomes, but also create new employment opportunities. Recently, women farmers have begun embracing value addition, despite numerous challenges. This study sought to explore women's participation in milk value-addition in Mukurweini and Nyeri Central sub-counties, in Nyeri County based on the following objectives; determining the prevalence of milk value-addition practices, determining the difficulties faced during milk value-addition and milk processing, examining the tactics that female farmers employ to enhance milk's value and shelf-life, and suggesting effective methods to make milk value-addition gender inclusive. The study relied on a mixed method approach. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussion (FGD). The study was guided by the Feminist Agri - food System Theory (FAST) and tools to collect data such as the Gender Roles Framework (GRF) (i.e. the Harvard Analytical Framework). These majorly focus on assigning jobs within the household depending on gender roles and access to resources. The study relied on a descriptive research design and the target population was women milk producers. A sample of 350 respondents was studied, collected data analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program and finally presented. Results from the study showed that less than 10 percent of women in Nyeri County participate in milk value-addition practices. Cultural constraints, lack of access to resources, limited knowledge, and traditional attitudes or mentalities were identified as key parameters accounting for the low participation of women in milk value-addition practices. The results indicated that the few women who participate in milk value-addition practices in the study area have attempted to overcome the challenges by forming self-help groups and pursuing knowledge on milk value-addition technologies through formal and informal training. This study recommends an increase in deliberate efforts by the government to enhance awareness about milk value-addition practices among rural dairy farmers, in particular women. As observed, many lack knowledge on how to adopt such practices. The study also recommends a change of policies by the government to make financial resources, such as loans, more accessible to rural women, in addition to organizing training programs by national and county governments to sensitize women about new dairy farming methods and encourage them to abandon their traditional attitudes.