

Differential returns from globalization to women smallholder coffee and food producers in rural Uganda

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Abstract

Background: Globalization-related measures to liberalize trade and stimulate export production were applied in Uganda in the late 1980s, including in the coffee production sector, to revitalize agricultural production, increase incomes to farmers and improve rural food security.

Objective: To explore the different effects of such measures on the health and dietary outcomes of female coffee and food small holder farmers in Uganda.

Methods: We gathered evidence through a cross-sectional comparative interview survey of 190 female coffee producers and 191 female food producers in Ntungamo district. The study mostly employed quantitative methods of data collection, targeting the sampled households. We also utilized qualitative data; collected three months after the household survey data had been collected and their analysis had been accomplished. Using qualitative interviews based on an unstructured interview guide, extra qualitative information was collected from key informants at national, district and community levels. This was among other underlying principles to avoid relying on snapshot information earlier collected at household level in order to draw valid and compelling conclusions from the study. We used indicators of production, income, access to food and dietary patterns, women's health and health care. Of the two groups selected from the same area, female coffee producers represented a higher level of integration into liberalised export markets.

Results: Document review suggests that, although Uganda's economy grew in the period, the household economic and social gains after the liberalization measures may have been less than expected. In the survey carried out, both food and coffee producers were similarly poor, involved in small-scale production, and of a similar age and education level. Coffee producers had greater land and livestock ownership, greater access to inputs and higher levels of income and used a wider variety of markets than food producers, but they had to work longer hours to obtain these economic returns, and spent more cash on health care and food from commercial sources. Their health outcomes were similar to those of the food producers, but with poorer dietary outcomes and greater food stress.

Conclusions: The small-scale women farmers who are producing food cannot rely on the economic infrastructure to give them support for meaningful levels of production. However, despite having higher incomes than their food producing counterparts, the evidence showed that women who are producing coffee in Uganda as an export commodity cannot rely on the income from their crops to guarantee their health and nutritional wellbeing, and that the income advantage gained in coffee-producing households has not translated into consistently better health or food security outcomes. Both groups have limited levels of autonomy and control to address these problems.

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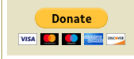
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