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# Husband and Wife Perspectives on Farm Household Decision-making Authority and Evidence on Intra-household Accord in Rural Tanzania

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**Summary.** — We use OLS and logistic regression to investigate variation in husband and wife perspectives on the division of authority over agriculture-related decisions within households in rural Tanzania. Using original data from husbands and wives (interviewed separately) in 1,851 Tanzanian households, the analysis examines differences in the wife's authority over 13 household and farming decisions. The study finds that the level of decision-making authority allocated to wives by their husbands, and the authority allocated by wives to themselves, both vary significantly across households. In addition to commonly considered assets such as women's age and education, in rural agricultural households women's health and labor activities also appear to matter for perceptions of authority. We also find husbands and wives interviewed separately frequently disagree with each other over who holds authority over key farming, family, and livelihood decisions. Further, the results of OLS and logistic regression suggest that even after controlling for various individual, household, and regional characteristics, husband and wife claims to decision-making authority continue to vary systematically by decision—suggesting that decision characteristics themselves also matter. The absence of spousal agreement over the allocation of authority (i.e., a lack of "intra-household accord") over different farm and household decisions is problematic for interventions seeking to use survey data to develop and inform strategies for reducing gender inequalities or empowering women in rural agricultural households. Findings provide policy and program insights into when studies interviewing only a single spouse or considering only a single decision may inaccurately characterize intra-household decision-making dynamics.


*Key words* — decision-making, authority, farm households, women

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Except for the rare couple that shares common preferences and equal access to resources and information, the distribution of decision-making authority between spouses can be expected to affect the allocation of household resources. [1] Scholars seeking to understand these intra-household dynamics have generated a rich literature on the broader measures, determinants, and household consequences of spousal bargaining power and decision-making (Doss, 2013; Kebede, Tarazona, Munro, & Verschoor, 2013; Malapit & Quisumbing, 2014). These household dynamics are important to resource allocation in many contexts, and certainly in low resource, high risk, and relatively isolated environments with strong gender norms, such as arise in many rural parts of the developing world.

Since the 1980s the concept of women's status has expanded from solely encompassing education and socio-economic levels to explicitly including women's access to and control over resources and most recently, empowerment (Kabeer, 1999; Malhotra & Schuler, 2005; Mason, 1986, 2005; Mosedale, 2005). [2] Although definitions vary, to be "empowered" is to have the rights, capacity, and assets to be able to make choices (Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007; and see Alkire, Meinzen-Dick, Peterman, Quisumbing, and Seymour (2013) for a fuller discussion). Intra-household bargaining power is one component of empowerment, for which decision-making authority is used as an indicator (Doss, 2013; Heckert & Fabric, 2013; Kabeer, 2001; Mason, 2005). We refer the reader to recent excellent reviews in Kebede et al. (2013), Doss (2013), and Malapit and Quisumbing (2014) for a more thorough discussion of intra-household bargaining and decision-making processes. Our own focus is on the measurement of women's bargaining power, including how indicators of women's intra-household authority vary across husband and wife self-reports, and across multiple household decisions, particularly as such variation might inform policy and development interventions in a rural developing country context.

Understanding how farm households allocate intra-household authority is difficult given the paucity of data on key rural household decisions and decision-making processes. In this paper we use original data that show how perceived authority over multiple household and farm management decisions in rural Tanzania varies by spouse. In so doing we contribute to the literature on intra-household decision-making in two ways. First, while the existing literature mostly tests decision-making authority within a particular domain of decisions as a function of spousal characteristics such as age and education, our data cover 13 different farm household decisions, and include important farm household co-variates such as health and the division of labor among market, farm, and home. This allows us to examine the role of decision-maker characteristics across multiple decisions for the same household. Second, while existing empirical work is largely restricted to a single spouse's account of decision-making authority and assumes the reported division of authority is understood by both spouses, our household survey is based on a relatively large random sample of farm households,

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including 1,851 complete husband-wife surveys, that asks the same questions of both spouses separately. This allows us to examine both husband and wife claims to decision-making authority and the incidence of accord and discord over those claims. In cases of discord, we posit that policy and development interventions may be misplaced if they are targeted based on analyses using decision-making reports from a single spouse.

The paper is structured as follows. In Section 2 we briefly review the literature on intra-household decision-making. Though our work is not designed to add to debates on the outcomes of decision-making authority, this literature provides the foundation for our empirical work, particularly studies focused on the determinants of decision-making authority and challenges to the unitary household model. Section 3 describes our data and methods, and we present our original findings in Section 4, using survey responses from a random sample of couples in Tanzania across 13 different agricultural and household decisions. We find a husband's allocation of decision-making authority to his wife varies according to his wife's age and education, consistent with hypotheses that having greater assets (in terms of human or physical capital) can offer better exit options for women and thereby increase their decision-making power. Novel, however, is our finding that for rural women for whom farming is the main livelihood, health status also matters, as does the relative amount of time the husband contributes to home labor. Findings also suggest that, on average, intra-household accord over which spouse holds decision-making authority is more likely in households where women have higher levels of education. But accord is lower in households where the woman is more active in market labor—in such cases the wife's higher self-perception of decision-making authority is not matched by the husband's perception (contrary to some findings for urban settings; e.g., Bertocchi, Brunetti, and Torricelli (2014) suggest market access increases women's household authority from the perspective of both spouses). Overall our empirical investigation suggests that analyses based on population-level male and female averages may mask significant husband-wife differences of opinion over who holds decision-making authority within households. In cases of husband-wife discord, different development efforts to increase women's authority and ultimate empowerment might be recommended depending on whether the wife or the husband is interviewed. Section 5 concludes.

## 2. INTRA-HOUSEHOLD BARGAINING AND DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY

The relationship between intra-household decision-making authority, resource allocations, and positive outcomes for women and children has been observed in many different cultural and economic contexts. In India, for example, increased women's authority relative to their husbands' is associated with increased use of modern contraception and to declines in infant and child mortality (Jejeebhoy, 2002). Similar reproductive, maternal, neo-natal, and child health outcomes have been observed in Latin America (Becker, Fonseca-Becker, & Schenck-Yglesias, 2006), in Africa (e.g., in Egypt (Kishor, 2000) and Mali (Castle, 1993)), and in Southeast Asia (Beegle, Frankenberg, & Thomas, 2001). Increasing women's bargaining power is associated with increased expenditure shares on key household goods such as health and education, which can lead to improved child outcomes (see Doepke and Tertilt (2014) for a comprehensive review). There has also been a recent and robust examination of nutritional outcomes relating to women's household authority across multiple countries (Haddad, Pena, Nishida, Quisumbing, & Slack, 1996; Richards, Theobald, George, Kim, Rudert, Jehan, & Tolhurst, 2013), including Bangladesh (Bhagowalia, Menon, Quisumbing, & Soundararajan, 2012), Senegal (Lépine & Strobl, 2013), Nepal (Malapit, Kadiyala, Quisumbing, Cunningham, & Tyagi, 2013), and Ghana (Malapit & Quisumbing, 2014).

Given such evidence of the potential benefits of greater women's intra-household authority, a growing body of empirical work in development economics has sought to identify predictors of women's bargaining power in the household. Historically the simplest models of household decision-making have relied upon a unitary household model (Bobonis, 2009; Quisumbing & Maluccio, 2003). Such models effectively assume that household members pool household income and/or that husband and wife preferences can be treated as homogeneous (or, alternatively, that only the husband's preferences are relevant determinants of household resource allocations). A vast body of scholarship, however, now suggests that husbands' and wives' relative intra-household decision-making authority is highly relevant to resource allocation, that is, most households do not fully pool income and in many cases spousal preferences are not homogeneous (Attanasio & Lechene, 2002; Duflo, 2003; Duflo & Udry, 2004; Haddad, Hoddinott, & Alderman, 1997; Hoddinott & Haddad, 1995; Lundberg, Pollack, & Wales, 1997; Balasubramanian, 2013; Richards et al., 2013).

Our analysis draws from theoretical insights offered by various co-operative and non-co-operative bargaining models which offer alternative characterizations of intra-household decision-making processes that may better reflect actual patterns of decision-making than a unitary household model. Co-operative models posit that household bargaining outcomes are negotiated directly between spouses and that outcomes rely on each spouse's relative ability to claim power and to threaten defection from a less-than-desired negotiation outcome by invoking an outside option, such as the threat of spousal sanctions through divorce (Manser & Brown, 1980; McElroy & Horney, 1981) or non-co-operation within marriage (Chen & Woolley, 2001; Kanbur & Haddad, 1994; Konrad & Lommerud, 2000; Lundberg & Pollak, 1993). Non-co-operative models assume independent actions on the part of both spouses lead to a self-enforcing Nash equilibrium, which may or may not be Pareto efficient (Lundberg & Pollack, 1994).[3] One key difference in co-operative and non-co-operative models is the stability of the bargaining outcome: co-operative models are presumed stable in the absence of any changes to the spouses' relative bargaining power, while non-co-operative equilibria may shift as new information about the spouse's position and strength becomes available. Results consistent with non-co-operative bargaining models have now been observed across a range of developing country contexts (e.g., Katz, 1995; Kebede et al., 2013; Mabsout & Van Staveren, 2010; Malapit & Quisumbing, 2014; McPeak & Doss, 2006; Udry, 1996; Castilla & Walker, 2013), emphasizing the potential for shifts in women's decision-making authority to lead to shifts in welfare and other outcomes for women and households.

In this context, some empirical research has focused on finding valid measures of decision-making authority in addition to measuring outcomes of women's bargaining power (Agarwal, 1997; Basu, 2006). Most models consider women's property, financial assets, and engagement in market labor to be key determinants of women's authority over household decisions (Antman, 2014; Attanasio & Lechene, 2002; Bertocchi et al.,

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