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Gendered Land Use Decision-Making and Income Control in Avocado Farming: A Case Study of the Southern Highlands of Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

The growing demand for avocados in Tanzania has led to land reallocation and changes in agricultural practices, particularly in the Southern Highlands, where land is being increasingly dedicated to avocado farming. This study addresses the gap in the existing literature by investigating intra-household decision-making regarding land sales and allocations for avocado farming, as well as income management, with a focus on gender dynamics and their implications for gender equality. The study used an explanatory sequential design to collect quantitative data through structured interviews with 151 respondents and qualitative data through focus group discussions. The study's findings showed that more than half of the respondents (69.5%) reported that men within households made decisions regarding land sales and allocation for avocado farming exclusively. Additionally, approximately 70.2% of the respondents stated that men predominantly made decisions about how to use the income earned from avocado sales. Furthermore, most households (99.3%) reported no conflicts over decisions, with women often choosing silence to maintain family harmony. The study recommends that the Tanzanian government implement well-organized and integrated awareness campaigns and interventions to mitigate the negative influence of the social and cultural factors that deter women from participating in decision-making on land and money use.

Keywords: Avocado Farming; Land Use Decision-Making; Income; Gender; Household

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1. Introduction

Avocado (*Persea Americana*) production has surged globally, driven by its high demand in both domestic and international markets ^[1]. Known as the 'green gold,' it has become the fifth most traded fruit globally, following bananas, grapes, apples, and almonds ^[2]. Consumption has notably increased in Europe and Asia, driven by health trends, social media influence, and the enhanced availability of ready-to-eat avocado fruit ^[3, 4]. In Tanzania, the profitability of avocado farming has attracted numerous farmers, positioning the country as the third-largest avocados producer in Africa, behind South Africa and Kenya ^[5]. With avocado exports reaching 11,237 metric tons valued at USD 33 million in 2021, Tanzania's avocado trade also increased to 15,000 metric tons and USD 45 million by 2023 ^[5].

The avocado production in Tanzania is concentrated in various regions, including Njombe, Mbeya, Iringa, Songwe, Arusha, Kilimanjaro, Tanga, Kagera, Kigoma, and Morogoro ^[4]. The increased demand for avocado farming has led to significant changes in land use, with farmers replacing tree and timber plantations as well as cash crops like tea and coffee, with avocado farms. Land that was previously used for staple crops such as maize and beans is now being allocated to avocado production due to the higher profitability of the crop ^[6]. This shift in land allocation raises important concerns about how household decisions are made concerning land sales and allocation for avocado farming, as well as the utilization of income accrued from avocado farming, especially in the context where decisions are often dominated by males who in most cases are heads of the households.

Existing literature shows that women are frequently excluded from decision-making processes over land and household income ^[7]. Various empirical studies show that, despite playing a vital role in agricultural production globally, women are always excluded from the management and control of land and household income generated from agriculture ^[8-12]. Similarly, it has been observed that capacity-building programs sometimes inadvertently reinforce these gender inequalities when they fail to challenge entrenched norms, leading to unintended consequences, such as situations where

men perceive women's increased empowerment as a threat to their control over land and household income ^[7]. This study builds on these insights, hence offering a nuanced understanding of the gendered dynamics of decision-making in Tanzanian avocado farming households.

Several studies have examined various aspects of avocado farming in Tanzania. For instance, research has looked into how avocado production and trade contribute to reducing poverty and income inequality ^[13]. Other studies have focused on the challenges that traders and farmers face within the avocado value chain, and how international value chains can drive improvements in agricultural innovation systems ^[14, 15]. Additionally, local trade dynamics in avocado farming have also been examined ^[4]. However, there has been limited research on how gendered dynamics influence decision-making within households regarding land sales, land allocation for avocado farming, and the management of income generated from the crop. To date, only a study by Swai and Ubaldus ^[16] has attempted to address this topic in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania; however, it provides minimal detail on the subject. This gap in the literature has motivated the current study, which seeks to answer the questions: How do gender dynamics shape decisions regarding land sales and allocation for avocado farming, and income utilization? To what extent do household decision-making processes regarding land sales and allocation for avocado farming, as well as the use of income generated from avocado cultivation, lead to conflicts among household members?

By examining the gendered distribution of power within households, the study aligns with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Goal 5, which aims to empower women and promote gender equality ^[7]. Ultimately, this study contributes to the broader understanding of how gender norms and identities shape agricultural practices, thus emphasizing the need for gender-sensitive policies and interventions that address local realities in rural agricultural settings ^[7]. The findings of the study inform policy recommendations meant to enhance gender equality in Tanzania's avocado industry and support the country's commitments to improving women's rights and economic justice by 2026 ^[17].

2. Theoretical Underpinnings

This study is guided by Family Systems Theory (FST), originally developed by psychiatrist Murray Bowen between 1946 and 1959. According to Bavelas and Segal ^[18], a family system consists of interconnected individuals whose relationships are characterized by ongoing communication. Over time, these interactions form patterns that define the essence of the family system. FST predicts and explains how family members interact uniquely within their unit and distinct from their interactions outside the unit ^[19]. It posits two main hypotheses: firstly, that the family operates as an autonomous system with its own rules and boundary-making processes; secondly, it is an adaptable system, responding to internal and external stressors by adjusting its rules and boundaries ^[19].

Alan Carr's proposals in 2016 expanded the FST's principles by asserting that the family functions as a social system that supports the survival and well-being of its members, organized into subsystems with distinct boundaries that differentiate it from the broader social and cultural systems ^[19]. Family interactions are governed by recursive patterns, encompassing roles, routines, rituals, and processes that foster and resist change within the family unit ^[19].

FST has developed as a crucial framework for understanding human functioning and dysfunction within their family contexts. Central to its application are shared belief systems that underpin family dynamics. These belief systems manifest in explicit and implicit relationship rules delineating expectations regarding roles, actions, and consequences, guiding family interactions and the members' behavior ^[20]. Cultural and spiritual beliefs play a significant role in shaping shared values and assumptions, which are passed down through generations and influenced by interactions with significant others and the broader social environment ^[20]. It is important to note that, although the term 'family' has a general meaning, in the context of this study, it is used specifically to refer to the household.

The FST offers a useful lens to examine how household members negotiate decisions related to land sales, land allocation for avocado farming, and the utilization of income accrued from the sale of the crop. The the-

ory views the household as a semi-autonomous decision-making unit shaped by internal norms, cultural values, and power dynamics. Within this framework, cultural norms often grant men greater authority in making unilateral decisions about land sales, land use for crop cultivation, and the use of income generated from land, thereby reinforcing gender inequalities in access to and control over productive resources. Studies have indicated that in many developing countries, especially in the Global South, land ownership, land sales, land allocation for crop production, and intergenerational transfers are governed by a complex interplay of customary, religious, and statutory laws ^[21]. However, these systems frequently exclude women from land ownership, inheritance and property rights ^[22, 23], thereby institutionalizing their marginalization in land-related decision-making within the household.

Subsequently, in Tanzania, existing literature shows that, while the Land Act and Village Land Act of 1999, as well as the Land Disputes Settlements Act of 2002, provide women with legal rights to control and manage land, the persistence of customary tenure systems often undermines these laws ^[24]. In practice, land ownership and decision-making continue to be male-dominated, with women's rights frequently dependent on marital or kinship status. However, efforts by women's organizations like the Tanzania Women Lawyers Association (TAWLA) have shown signs of progress by advocating for gender-sensitive policy reforms and achieved community-level successes ^[25]. These developments highlight the evolving nature of household systems as they adapt to broader social and legal influences.

Finally, FST enables the study to account for both internal family dynamics and external pressures such as market forces, policy environments, and legal frameworks that influence how decisions on land issues and income are negotiated. This theoretical lens is particularly useful for revealing how gender roles and responsibilities are socially constructed and reproduced within households, as well as how they adapt to or resist change.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Study Area

This research was conducted in Madandu and Igima villages within the Wanging'ombe District Council of the Njombe Region in Tanzania's Southern Highlands (**Figure 1**). This highland region, located in the south-west part of the country, at the northern end of Lake Nyasa/Malawi, includes portions of the Iringa, Mbeya,

Njombe, Rukwa, Ruvuma, and Songwe regions. Also, the Wanging'ombe District Council is situated between latitudes $8^{\circ} 8'$ and $9^{\circ} 8'$ south of the equator and between longitudes $33^{\circ} 5'$ and $35^{\circ} 8'$ east of the Prime Meridian [26]. The District Council borders with Njombe District Council and Makambako Town Council to the east, Njombe Town Council to the south, Iringa Region to the north, and Makete District Council to the west [26].

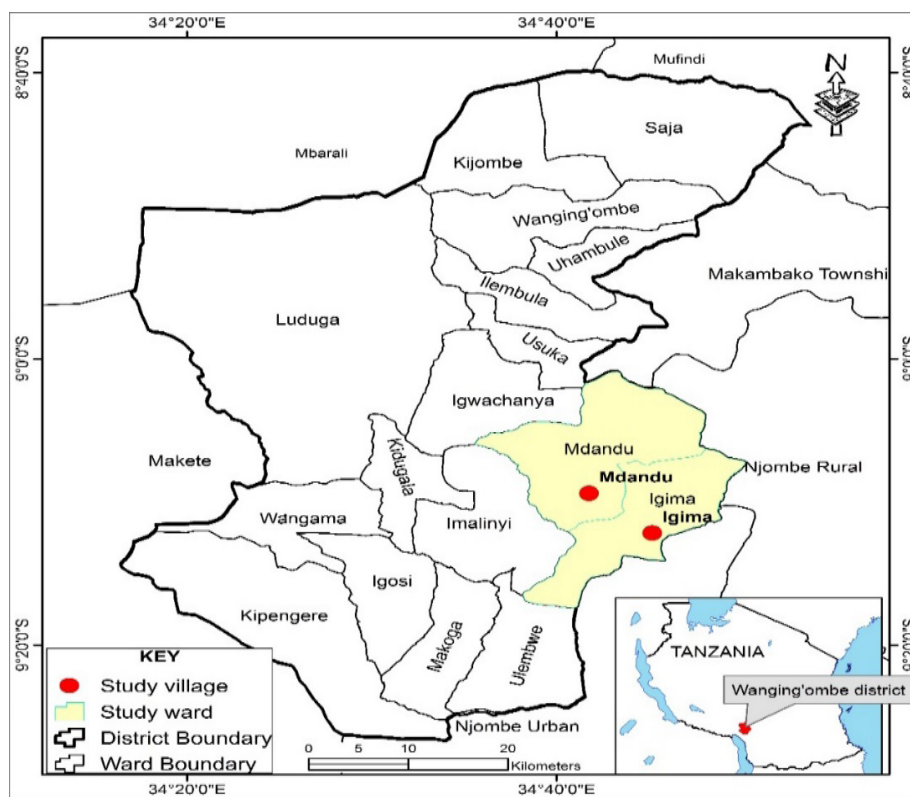


Figure 1. Map showing the study villages in Wnging'ombe District Council.

Wanging'ombe District Council was purposefully chosen because of its potential for avocado production in Tanzania. The council is divided into two main agro-ecological zones: the highland zone and the lowland zone. The villages of Madandu and Igima are situated in the highland zone of Wanging'ombe District Council, which is part of the southern highlands and features undulating terrain with sporadic mountains and plateaus rising to 1,800 meters above sea level [26]. This area has a humid climate with temperatures below 15°C and 900 to 2000 millimetres of annual precipitation, which falls between November and December before ceasing

in April or sometimes May [26]. The majority of the soils in this area are suitable for a variety of cash and food crops, including avocado, wheat, Irish potatoes, apples, maize, bananas, beans, green peas, and sweet potatoes.

Avocado cultivation in the Wanging'ombe District Council involves both small-scale farmers and large-scale domestic and foreign investors. Since 2021, there has been a significant increase in avocado production in the district council. In the 2020/2021 production season, production stood at 1,325.13 metric tons, rising sharply to 4,613.00 metric tons in the 2021/2022 production season, and further increasing to 5,834.20

metric tons in the 2022/2023 production season (**Figure 2**). This surge aligns with observations by previous studies ^[6, 14], which attribute the rise in avocado production in the Southern Highlands to growing global demand and corresponding increases in market prices. The high commercial value of avocados, along with

their relatively short maturation period (3 to 4 years compared to 10 to 20 years for timber), has made them an attractive alternative for many farmers. As a result, avocado cultivation is increasingly replacing exotic tree species such as pines and eucalyptus, which have traditionally been grown for timber and pole production.

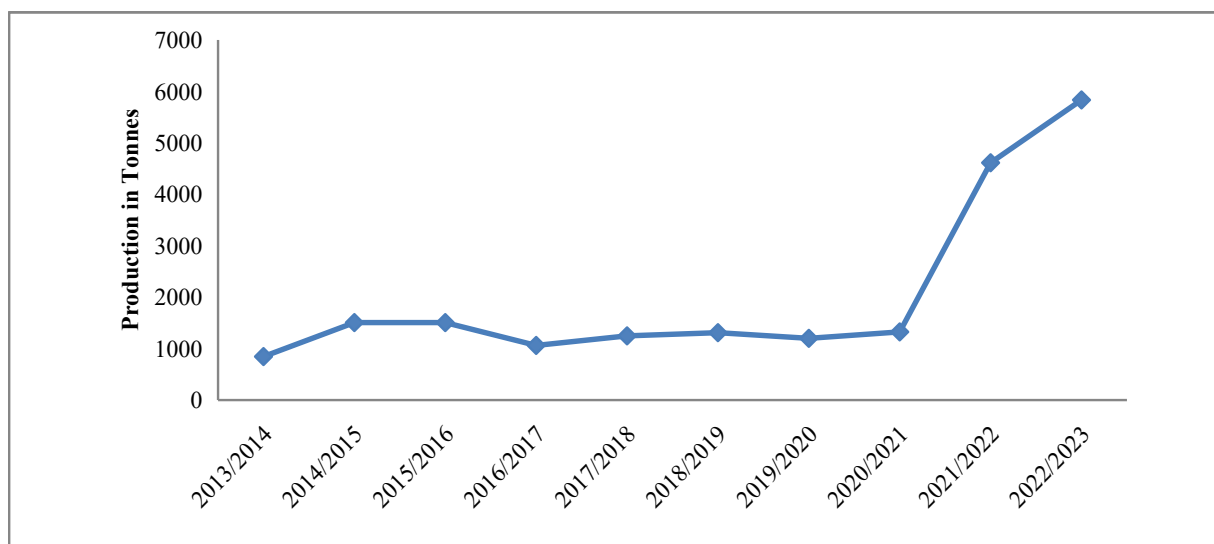


Figure 2. Trend of avocado production for 10 years in Wanging'ombe District.

Source: Secondary data from the office of Wanging'ombe District Council.

3.2. Research Approach and Design

This study used mixed methods research by employing an explanatory sequential design to collect and analyze quantitative data in the first phase, followed by qualitative data in the second phase (**Figure 3**). The first phase occurred in June 2023, and the second phase in September 2023. The study employed a mixed-methods research approach to integrate the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative paradigms, thereby counterbalancing the limitations inherent in each when used independently ^[27]. Quantitative methods offer broad generalizability through statistical representation, while qualitative methods provide depth and context by capturing participants' lived experiences, meanings, and social realities.

The explanatory sequential design was employed in this study because it allowed the researcher to first gather broad patterns and trends through structured

interviews with 151 household respondents, and then to explore these patterns more deeply and contextually through focus group discussions (FGDs). The two-phase structures ensured that qualitative data were used to explain and elaborate on the quantitative findings, especially in areas where statistical data alone could not capture the nuances of gendered power relations, land ownership norms, and intra-household authority. Participants for the FGDs were purposively selected from among those who participated in the first phase ^[27-30], allowing the study to intentionally follow up with individuals who represented specific response categories or demonstrated unique patterns; for example, the female-headed households (like widows, separated and divorced) and married women but were hardly restricted to make decisions on land sales, allocation for avocado farming and income generated from avocado cultivation. This targeted follow-up enriched the

understanding of why and how certain decision-making patterns emerged, which could not have been discerned through numbers alone. Using this design also enhanced the validity and trustworthiness of the findings. The qualitative phase served as a means of triangulating the quantitative data, either confirming or expanding on the initial quantitative results. For instance, while survey data showed limited household conflict over land and income decisions, the FGDs revealed that

cultural expectations of submissiveness among women may suppress open expressions of disagreement. Such insights were only accessible through the sequential and integrated approach. Finally, gender dynamics and household decision-making are complex and often embedded in cultural norms; therefore, relying solely on numerical data would have been insufficient to fully capture the lived experiences and power relations within households.

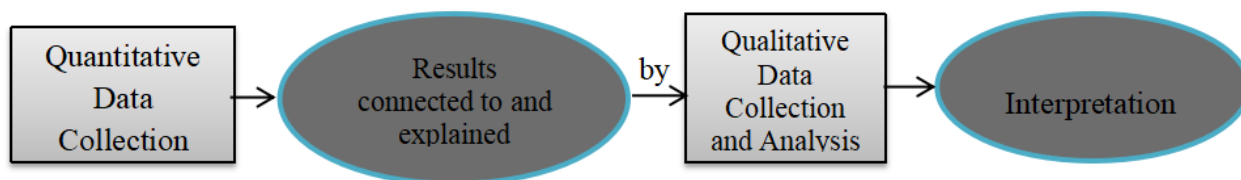


Figure 3. Explanatory sequential design.

3.3. Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The study employed both purposive and multi-stage sampling techniques to select the study villages and simple random sampling to select the sampled households. The first stage involved selecting Wang'ombe District Council out of the 6 district councils in the Njombe Region, which is one of the country's leading councils in avocado production. The second stage involved purposive selection of the Mdandu Division out of the three divisions of the district council. The fourth stage involved the deliberate selection of Mdandu and Igima wards out of the five wards (Mdandu, Igima, Itulahumba, Usuka, and Igwachanya) of the Mdandu Division (Figure 1). The fifth stage involved selecting two villages, one from Mdandu and the other from Igima wards, which were among the villages with the highest avocado production in the region. Finally, the study employed simple random sampling to select 151 sampled households, which were 26.3% of the total of 575 households involved in cultivating avocados from Mdandu and Igima villages. Mdandu and Igima villages had 260 and 315 households, respectively. Because the number of households was not the same in those villages, it was considered appropriate to use the proportional allocation method to ensure that the number of selected households in a particular village

was proportional to its total number of households, as follows: Mdandu village = $\frac{151}{575} \times 260 = 68$; Igima village = $\frac{151}{575} \times 315 = 83$

3.4. Methods of Data Collection

Quantitative data were collected through structured interviews. The structured interviews were administered on a face-to-face basis to the 151 sampled heads of households who were farming the avocado crop via an interview schedule instrument. The heads of households were the primary respondents, as they were presumed to be involved most in land and income decision-making. However, in cases where the head was unavailable, any household member aged 18 or above with adequate knowledge of the topic was interviewed. Subsequently, in the situation where no household head or household member aged 18 or above was found, the household was replaced by selecting another household through the simple random sampling process. The interview schedule was designed to solicit data about those who made decisions on selling or renting the land, allocation of land for avocado farming, use of income accrued from avocado selling within the household, and the occurrence of household conflict related to these decisions. Structured interviews were used in this study because of their ability to standard-

ize responses across all participants, hence enabling comparability and quantification of gendered patterns. Subsequently, the face-to-face mode helped to clarify questions, encourage participation, and reduce non-responses, as this study was conducted in rural settings where some respondents could not read and write.

The qualitative data were collected through FGDs with women who were among the respondents participating in the first phase of quantitative data collection. Accordingly, four FGDs were conducted, with two held in each village. The exclusion of men in FGDs increased the women's epistemic agency, allowing them to feel more secure and free to divulge critical information that would not have been possible if men had participated in the FGDs. The FGDs explored perceptions of land ownership, the decision-making processes within households regarding land sales and allocations for avocado farming, the utilization of income from avocado farming, and the potential for conflicts arising from these decisions. The qualitative component was essential in capturing the cultural and emotional dimensions of gender roles, such as women's submission or silence on conflicts that were often not evident in structured surveys. Finally, the study collected secondary data from government reports at the district level, land laws and policies and journal articles from different websites.

3.5. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were first cleaned and coded, and then exported to the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 software for analysis. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to summarize the responses and identify trends in household decision-making patterns. These statistics are presented in the form of tables (**Tables 1–4**) to enhance clarity and interpretability. Each variable, such as decision-making on land use, control over avocado income, and presence of household conflict, was categorized and analyzed independently to establish the distribution of responses among different household members. The use of descriptive analysis was appropriate for this study, as the main objective was to establish the patterns and extent of gender-based differences in intra-household decisions,

rather than to establish causal relationships.

Qualitative data were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. Thematic coding was conducted manually, identifying key patterns and recurrent themes related to methods of land acquisition and allocation for avocado farming, as well as the gendered land use decision-making and income control authority within households, and the occurrence of household conflict related to these decisions. These qualitative insights were used to triangulate and interpret the quantitative findings, thereby providing deeper context and explanation for the numerical trends. This integration of qualitative narratives enriched the interpretation of data and allowed the study to capture the socio-cultural dimensions of household decision-making.

4. Results

These study findings are arranged into three sections: (1) Decision-making within the household on the distribution and sale of land for the production of avocado fruits (2) intra-household decision-making on the use of money generated from avocado production, and (3) conflicts arising among household members as a result of intra-household decision-making.

4.1. Intra-Household Decision-Making on Sale and Allocation of Land for Avocado Farming

This study started by examining how the land for avocado farming was acquired at the level of the household. The results presented in **Table 1** indicated that the land for avocado cultivation at the household level was obtained through the establishment of new avocado farms by clearing forests (76.8%), conversion of land with planted trees (e.g., pine and eucalyptus) to that of avocado farms (26.5%), and conversion of cropland into avocado farms (21.9%).

When asked how the decisions were made at households, results in **Table 2** showed that, among the 151 respondents, more than half 105 (69.5%) indicated that the decision on opening new lands for avocado farming, conversion of land planted with trees and cropland

into avocado farms or selling cropland to domestic and foreign investors was solely made by men. The rest, 31 (20.5%), 14 (9.3%), and 1 (0.7%) of the respondents indicated that the decisions were made by women alone,

jointly and with spouses, respectively. Also, the study revealed that all the responses indicated that decisions by women alone were from only women who were single, separated, divorced, or widowed.

Table 1. Methods of acquiring land for avocado production.

Response	Frequency	Percent
The establishment of avocado farms on most newly cleared land	116	76.8
Conversion of land planted with trees to that of avocado farms	40	26.5
Conversion of cropland into avocado farms	33	21.9

Multiple responses.

Table 2. Intra-household decision-making on land for avocado.

Category of Decision Makers	Frequency	Percent
Male alone	105	69.5
Female alone	31	20.5
Spouse	1	0.7
Joint decision (all members of households)	14	9.3
Total	151	100.0

According to the results of this study, most married females did not have the right to own land or make decisions on how their land should be used in the household. During the survey interview, men stated that they made decisions without consulting their wives because they were the leaders of their families in accordance with their customs, traditions, and practices, which empowered them as the rightful landowners. Women provided similar testimony in aa FGD in Igima village, who all agreed that the decision within the household about whether to sell the land or allocate it for avocado farming was solely made by men. They further pointed out that women were excluded from decision-making on land use because they were not the landowners. These findings further suggest that the landowners, who were predominantly men, had the authority to make land-use decisions and, most importantly, the right to transfer the land to others. Therefore, men were considered to wield power over land use and could decide what to

do with their land.

4.2. Decision-Making Processes in Households with Regard to the Utilization of Avocado Production Revenue

Similar to decision-making on the sale or allocation of land for avocado farming reported in the preceding section, men maintained a more favorable decision-making power over the income accrued from avocado sales than women. The results in **Table 3** revealed that most of the decisions regarding utilization of avocado production revenue were made exclusively by males/husbands (70.2%). In a few instances, about 19.9%, 9.3%, and 0.7% of the sampled respondents reported that decisions on the usage of money generated from avocado sales were made by women/wives, jointly (spouse and other household members), and spouses, respectively.

Table 3. Decision-making on income from avocado production.

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Male (husband)	106	70.2
Female (wife)	30	19.9
Spouse (husband and wife)	1	0.7
Jointly (spouse & other members of household)	14	9.3
Total	151	100.0

As indicated in the survey findings, women in the FGDs in Madandu Village asserted that even when they participated in avocado farming activities, they had no control or decision over the income generated from avocado sales. Men who were considered the heads of their households decided unilaterally how the avocado income should be used without seeking the consent of their wives or the other members of their households. Additionally, women claimed that men did not necessarily buy small household items, such as soap, salt, and cooking oil, among others, and that, in some instances, they could give money to women or household members of households and direct them on how to spend it.

4.3. Conflicts Arising from Household Decision-Making

This study aimed to investigate whether decisions made regarding land sales and allocation for avocado farming, as well as the use of income, led to conflicts among household members. Results in **Table 4** showed that most sampled households (99.3%) reported no disputes among household members. Besides, only 1(0.7%) respondent reported conflicts among members. These results indicated that no conflicts arose from household decision-making regarding the sale of land, land allocation for avocado farming, or the income generated from avocado sales.

Table 4. Conflicts among household members resulting from intra-household decision-making.

Type of Response	Frequency	Percent
No conflict among members	150	99.3
Conflict among members	1	0.7
Total	151	100.0

Similarly, information from the FGDs indicated that most women in their villages preferred peace to conflicts in their families. It was further revealed that men preferred submissive women to the assertive ones. This was because, they argued, that if a woman was not submissive to her husband, her marriage could not last long. Therefore, disapproving of a man's acts, which could be appropriate or not, was considered an act of misbehavior that could cause a marriage to fall apart.

5. Discussion

5.1. Land Acquisition for Avocado Production

In light of the findings presented in the preceding section, it is evident that avocado farming led to the opening of new lands for farming and the conversion of land previously planted with exotic species of pine and eucalyptus, as well as cropland, into avocado farms. Households made such conversions to diversify their sources of income by growing avocado produce or selling land to local and foreign investors for avocado cultivation. This finding aligns with the results reported

by Mabele and Kiwango ^[6], who observed that avocado cultivation had increasingly replaced tree plantations in Njombe District through two primary mechanisms: (i) substituting trees for timber with avocado plants, and (ii) establishing avocado orchards on newly cleared land. Other studies have also documented a significant shift from timber plantations to avocado farming in the Njombe Region of Tanzania. This shift was driven by multiple factors, including the need for poverty alleviation and environmental conservation efforts ^[5]. Avocado cultivation offers a sustainable income source that reduces dependency on the exploitation of natural resources ^[5].

5.2. Intra-Household Decision-Making on Land Sale and Allocation for Avocado Farming

This study found that decisions within households regarding the sale and allocation of land for avocado farming in Tanzania's Southern Highlands are primarily controlled by men. Women were often excluded from decisions about how land was used or transferred. The findings further indicated that women were often un-

aware of land sales, including those involving local or foreign investors. This reflects a broader patriarchal system that limits women's ownership and control of land in rural areas.

In Tanzania, gender disparity in land governance is reinforced by a combination of patriarchal social norms, religious practices, and the coexistence of statutory and customary legal systems. Literature shows that, although Tanzania has introduced various legal reforms, such as the 1971 Law of Marriage Act, the village Land Act and the Land Act of 1999, which were meant to promote gender equality in land ownership, their practical impact remains limited. Customary and religious laws often take precedence in rural areas, thus undermining statutory provisions. For example, the Customary Law Declaration Order No. 436 of 1963 and religious traditions, such as Islamic and Hindu inheritance practices, continue to influence land ownership and inheritance, often excluding women from ownership and decision making on the use of it ^[31-33]. These contradictions between customary and statutory law weaken the enforcement of women's land rights. Even though national policies like Vision 2025 and the Five-Year Development Plan III (2021/22–2025/26) emphasized gender equality, implementation is hampered by entrenched cultural norms embraced in customary law and limited legal awareness.

This gender inequality in land ownership and decision-making within the households is not only unique to Tanzania. Other studies from both the Global South and North support the findings of this study by underscoring the fact that structural and cultural barriers significantly limit women's control and decision-making over land use. Existing literature highlights that across Sub-Saharan Africa, women, particularly those in male-headed households, face considerable restrictions in land ownership and decision-making over land use within the households ^[34, 35]. For instance, Aduma et al. ^[36] observed that patriarchal laws in Nyando Sub-County, Kenya, often presume that men should control key resources, such as land, while women are expected to defer to their husbands or male relatives. As a result, women often lack authority within the household over land use management and control. Gallagher et al. ^[37] also observed persistent gender inequality in land own-

ership and decision-making in Kenya's Takengon and Central Aceh regions, where land is typically registered under men's names. Research from both Eastern and Western Kenya confirms that men generally take charge of land-use-related decisions ^[38].

Shubhangini ^[39] observed a similar pattern in India, where women perform the majority of agricultural labor but men retain control over land and make the primary decisions on it. Furthermore, a study by Mahmud et al. ^[21] in Bangladesh found that rural women's voices are rarely considered in household decisions due to deep-rooted expectations of women remaining submissive to men. This leaves men in charge of land-related matters and agricultural inputs like fertilizers, chemicals, and tools, while women are often relegated to off-farm tasks such as fetching water and gathering firewood ^[40]. Likewise, Putten and Nur-E-Jannat ^[41] and Shibata et al. ^[42] in rural Bangladesh, found that men typically control land use, despite women's substantial contributions to farming. This hinders women's participation in critical household decision-making regarding land sales and crop allocation.

However, there are contrasting cases that suggest potential for change. In Rwanda, Mahmud et al. ^[21] reported that land-related decisions such as land sale, leasing, or mortgaging are often made jointly by spouses, reflecting a more inclusive decision-making process. Similarly, Murugani ^[43] found that in South Africa's Limpopo Province, women are often empowered to make land-related decisions, either individually or in joint ownership with their partners. These contrasting findings highlight the pivotal role that supportive legal systems and shifting cultural norms can play in fostering gender-equitable land governance. Despite these promising examples, the overall trend remains concerning. In rural Tanzania, as in much of Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia, women continue to face systemic barriers to land ownership and decision-making on it. Even in high-value sectors like avocado farming, which generate substantial income, women are frequently excluded from key household decisions. These patterns of exclusion are perpetuated by legal inconsistencies, cultural beliefs, and limited enforcement of women's land rights, all of which reinforce male dominance in house-

hold and agricultural governance.

5.3. Household Decision-Making on the Use of Avocado Income

The exclusion of women from decision-making also extends to control over income. This study found that decisions regarding the use of income from avocado sales were predominantly made by male household heads, with women largely excluded from such financial decision-making. This reflects broader patterns of gender inequality in rural households, where patriarchal norms limit women's control over economic resources. Similarly, Swai and Ubaldu [16] observed in Njombe Urban, Southern Highlands of Tanzania, that income from avocado farming was exclusively controlled by men. The International Labor Organization (ILO) [44] noted that traditional gender roles often restrict women's autonomy in managing income from agricultural activities. Likewise, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) [45] reported that women in Tanzania have limited access to financial resources, including credit, which reduces their decision-making power within households. The Tanzania Gender Networking Programme [46] also found that men generally dominate household financial decisions, leaving women marginalized.

In many developing countries, men continue to dominate decision-making within households, especially in matters related to income generated from agriculture. In Bangladesh, for example, Mahmud et al. [21] found that husbands often made decisions about crop cultivation, marketing, and how to use income from land, with little or no input from their wives. This pattern reflects a broader trend identified by Shibata et al. [42], who noted that men tended to control decisions across both social and economic spheres. In Mozambique, Maereka et al. [12] observed that young and adult men had more control over the production and sale of common beans compared to women. They further noted that although women participated in farming, they lacked autonomy over the income generated. Similar situations exist in Kenya and Pakistan, where men typically decide how agricultural production and household income are managed [47, 48]. French Gates [49] highlighted

cases where men sold crops grown by women and kept the income, reinforcing their authority. Deep-rooted cultural norms that favor male dominance continue to disadvantage women, both economically and within the home [50, 51].

Nonetheless, exceptions do exist. In Limpopo Province, South Africa, Murugani [43] found that women were empowered to manage their income and participate in agricultural decision-making. These women controlled revenues from both government grants and agrarian sales. Similarly, in Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines, Akter et al. [52] reported that women had greater influence over household income and more equal access to resources such as land and inputs. The differences in household decision-making on avocado income between Tanzania and other countries stem mainly from entrenched patriarchal norms, weak enforcement of gender-equity laws, and limited access to resources for women in Tanzania. In contrast, countries like South Africa, the Philippines, and Thailand show more gender-inclusive practices due to stronger legal implementation, better education and resource access for women, and cultural norms that allow greater female participation. These factors collectively contribute to women's greater economic empowerment and decision-making power in those contexts compared to Tanzania.

5.4. Conflicts Arising from Household Decision-Making

The findings of the current study revealed that, although decisions regarding the sale and allocation of land for avocado production, as well as the use of income generated from it, were predominantly made by men, most respondents reported that there were no conflicts that arose within the household. Women or wives typically remained silent and accepted their husbands' decisions as a sign of respect. This finding aligns with that of Lusasi and Mwaseba [53], who noted that some women in the Southern Highlands accept male-imposed restrictions in order to preserve family harmony, a dynamic that contributes to their subjugation. Silence emerges as a strategy employed by women

to express acquiescence in potentially coercive situations. Similarly, research by Thapar-Björkert et al.^[54] found that women often submit to male dominance to protect themselves from abuse by violent spouses. Furthermore, Shibata et al.^[42] reported that even economically empowered married women may fear divorce if they do not comply with their husbands' decisions regarding farming practices. This was exemplified in a participant's statement: *"If I don't follow his advice, he might divorce me. I need to seek permission from my husband before introducing new practices. He simply informs me of his plans when he proposes changes without requiring my approval."*

6. Conclusion and Policy Implications

This study's key findings reveal a gender discrepancy in decision-making regarding land sale and allocation for avocado farming, as well as income use within households. The findings showed that more than half of the interviewed respondents (69.5%) showed that the decision on land sale or allocating it for avocado farming was solely made by men in most households. Similarly, the majority of respondents (70.2%) stated that men in the households made the most decisions regarding the use of income accrued from avocado production. The results also showed that the main obstacle facing women in Tanzania's Southern Highlands was the predominant patriarchal culture and social standards in a society that was primarily governed by traditional authority. Additionally, the presence of customary laws, which frequently clash with legal requirements, played a major role in denying women the ability to make decisions regarding the use of property and the management of profits from the avocado industry. These results confirm the existing literature's findings that women in Tanzanian and African countries in general are disadvantaged when it comes to making decisions for the home because of male domination. Due to their poor ownership and control of assets, especially land, women are also given less decision-making authority in the house because they have less negotiating strength.

This study recommends creating opportunities for

women to improve their decision-making regarding land use and avocado income in their households. The government, in collaboration with other relevant stakeholders, should develop and support well-coordinated and integrated awareness-raising strategies and interventions, like gender training, to lessen or eliminate the sociocultural elements affecting women's involvement in agricultural income and land use decision-making. In this sense, any intervention that empowers women, whether through awareness-raising or education, is likely to result in more egalitarian decision-making and more diverse and sustainable land-use decisions at the household level. The existing legal frameworks should be strengthened to ensure that women participate in decision-making when family land is sold or allocated for other agricultural activities.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement

Before commencing fieldwork for data collection, the researcher sought permission from the Vice Chancellor of the University of Dar es Salaam, who is authorized to issue research clearance letters to staff, students, and research associates and researchers on behalf of the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology. The researcher was granted the clearance with reference number AB3/12(B) dated 6th June, 2023, addressed to the Regional Administrative Secretary of Njombe Region, the District Administrative Secretary of Njombe District and to Whom It May Concern respectively. These letters authorized the researcher to collect study information from the targeted communities. Because the study involved human participants and the

researcher did not wish to force anyone to participate, an informed consent statement was developed and incorporated into the interview schedule (the survey instrument). During data collection, the researcher and his assistant introduced themselves to each selected respondent and explained the purpose of the study. Respondents were informed of the total time required to complete the survey, and their consent was requested. They were also clearly informed that participation was entirely voluntary.

Data Availability Statement

The data is not publicly available but can be provided by the author upon request.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author discloses no conflict of interest.

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