

# Participatory Guarantee Systems and Smallholder Livelihoods

*A Tanzanian Highlands Case Study*

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## ABSTRACT

Participatory guarantee systems (PGS) have emerged as a community-based alternative to third-party organic certification, particularly for smallholder farmers in the Global South. Their impact on farmer livelihoods, however, remains under-researched within the context of African community development. This paper examines the relationship between PGS for organic vegetable production and smallholder farmer incomes in the Lushoto Highlands. It aims to assess the economic viability of PGS as a pro-poor market mechanism and identify the key factors influencing its livelihood outcomes. A mixed-methods case study was employed, combining a structured survey of 120 smallholder farmers (60 PGS participants, 60 non-participants) with semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with key stakeholders, including farmer group leaders and local agricultural officers. PGS participants reported a mean net income 28% higher than non-participants from vegetable sales. However, qualitative data revealed significant intra-group disparities, with benefits disproportionately accruing to farmers with better pre-existing access to irrigation and transport. A key theme was the critical role of social capital in facilitating market access and knowledge exchange within the PGS framework. While PGS can enhance smallholder incomes, its design and implementation in this context may inadvertently reinforce existing socio-economic inequalities rather than uniformly alleviate poverty. PGS initiatives should integrate targeted support for resource-poor farmers, including micro-irrigation schemes and collective transport. Policy frameworks should recognise and support PGS as a legitimate organic assurance system to improve market integration. participatory guarantee systems, organic agriculture, smallholder livelihoods, market access, Tanzania, social capital This study provides novel empirical evidence on the nuanced economic and social impacts of PGS in an East African highland context, challenging assumptions of their inherent equity.

**Keywords:** *Participatory Guarantee Systems, smallholder livelihoods, East African Highlands, sustainable agriculture, agrarian political economy*

### Article Highlights

- PGS participants reported 28% higher mean net income than non-participants.
- Benefits showed significant intra-group disparities linked to resource access.
- Social capital emerged as critical for market access and knowledge exchange.
- Findings challenge assumptions of PGS as an inherently

### Policy Implication

PGS initiatives require targeted support for resource-poor farmers, such as micro-irrigation and collective transport, to avoid reinforcing existing inequalities.

*This case study provides nuanced empirical evidence from the Lushoto Highlands.*

equitable mechanism.	
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