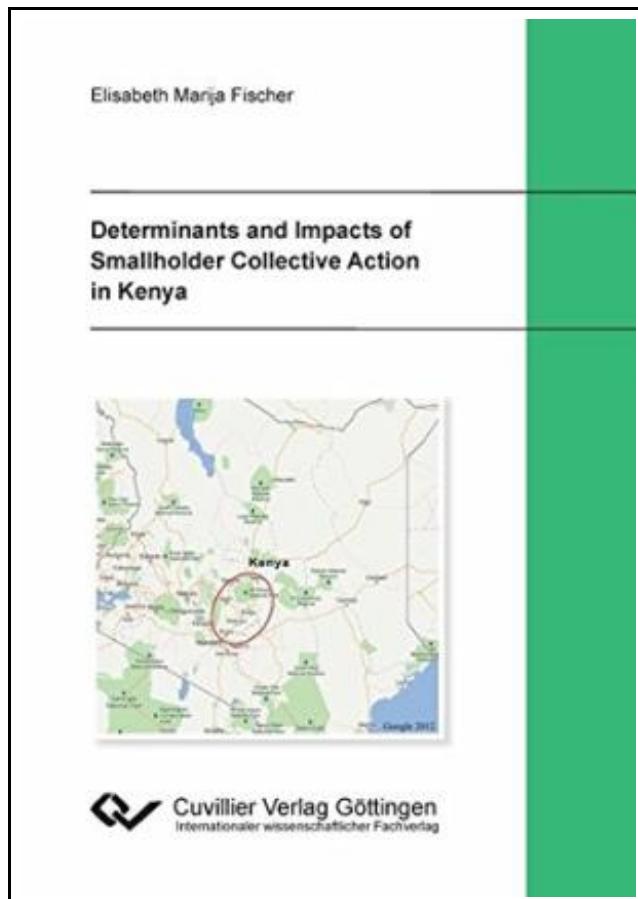


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Smallholders face numerous constraints that keep them from taking advantage of market opportunities. Because they often live in poverty and remoteness, on less than a hectare of land with poor road and market infrastructure, they face high costs of market exchange. In order for smallholders to compete with large-scale farms and benefit from the observed and ongoing transformation of the agri-food sector, institutional solutions are necessary that address the small scale problem. One potential option is through farmer collective action. However, the existing literature has not yet sufficiently identified the explicit mechanisms and dynamics by which collective action generates benefits for men and women. In three related articles, this research investigates how farmer groups facilitate access to input and output markets by reducing transaction costs, thereby promoting intensification and commercialization of small farms. It addresses the existing research gap by analyzing determinants, participation dynamics and impacts of farmer groups, using the case of small-scale banana producers in Kenya. For the analysis cross-sectional data from 444 farm households was collected in the central highlands region of Kenya, where bananas provide an important source of food and income. Recently established farmer groups initiated by two local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), TechnoServe and Africa Harvest, introduced institutional change in the national banana market chain. Within such groups, farmers can more easily access clean tissue culture (TC) banana planting material, get agronomic and market information, negotiate better prices and gain access to urban, high-value markets through collective selling. However, the marketing performance of these groups is unclear, and commitment varies greatly between members. Gender issues are partly left unaddressed by NGOs and group leadership. These issues pose serious threats to the groups' viability in the long run. The first chapter focuses...



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