

INFLUENCE OF WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN GROUP ACTIVITIES ON EMPOWERMENT OF COMMUNITIES: A CASE OF KAJIADO NORTH SUB COUNTY, KENYA.

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ABSTRACT

The activities that women participate in through their groups influence the empowerment of communities. Women participation refers to the act of women getting involved in the various entrepreneurial processes or activities through their groups that would either bring economic, social and political changes to their lives, their families and ultimately their communities. This paper aimed at examining the Influence of women participation in group activities in Kajiado North Sub County, Kajiado County in Kenya. The study objectives were; To establish the influence of women participation in financial activities on the economic empowerment of communities; to assess the influence of women participation in political activities on the empowerment of communities; to assess the influence of women groups participation in environmental conservation activities on the empowerment of communities and to establish the influence of women participation in trainings on the empowerment of communities. The target population consisted of women drawn from 378 groups registered in Kajiado North Sub County; 5 Uwezo fund coordinators; 6 ministry staff/government officials and 5 National Government Constituency Development Fund (CDF) and Women Enterprise Fund (WEF) officials. Data was gathered using questionnaire and interview guides and organized into themes according to study objectives. Findings indicated that; community empowerment is influenced by women group participation in income generating activities as indicated by 73.9% of the respondents, political activities as indicated by 60.8%, environmental conservation activities as indicated by 58.7% as well as training activities as indicated by 48.5% of the respondents. Given that women play a major role in the family and community development, this study recommends that the government should upscale women involvement in entrepreneurial activities as this has a direct effect on community empowerment and general development of the country.

Key Words: Women participation in group activities; Empowerment of communities; Income generating activities; Political activities; Environmental and Training activities

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1. Introduction

Women have been having challenges in fully participating in the development process because of their perceived role in society, cultural beliefs and literacy levels among others. Even though women form part of the marginalized population, they have strived to contribute immensely through their group activities to supplement the family income and in solving the pertinent problems affecting the community in general such as water shortage, starvation and disease burden thus contributing to the community wellbeing. The socio-economic challenges that women have been facing in their communities result in situations that have forced them to form women self-help groups (Chitere, 1988), through which they derived various interventions they would employ to help them come out of their suffering and isolation.

Continued marginalization of women in most societies has contributed to women lagging behind in almost all sectors and their activities being of little significant. Their access to education, employment, agricultural land, health care and democratic freedoms are curtailed. In countries like India, Nepal and Thailand, women farmers who own land are less than 10% of all farmers (FAO, 2011). Yet over the years governments and development agencies have tried to address these inequalities through women self-help groups (SHGs).

SHGs could help in development of social capital and mobilization of women (IFAD, 2003). All these were geared towards achieving economic empowerment among women.

It is interesting to note that most women have not fully overcome the financial, societal and structural barriers even with the support of government and other development agencies. It is in this relation that this study aimed at establishing the influence of women participation in group activities upon empowerment of communities of Kajiado North Sub County, in Kajiado County, Kenya.

In a study done by Njabani (2015) on “The role of Women Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Socio-economic Development of Chuka/Igamba Ng’ombe Constituency, Tharaka Nithi County” it was found that the percentage of women SHGs that are involved in socio-Economic development was high (78%) and therefore the study concluded that there existed linkage between participation of SHGs and socio-economic development.

Similarly, in a study by Korir (2013) on “Influence of women participation in groups on Socio Economic development of rural communities in Kenya: A case of Koibatek District, Baringo County,” it was reported that women groups are meant to empower women in the community but it fails since the investments are managed by husbands and sons.

The effect of women involvement in group activities on the empowerment of communities does not necessarily alter the societal norms and practices but brings out the fact that community empowerment is largely hindered because the very contribution of women are often overlooked or their influence unfelt due to their potential being under-utilized.

It is against this background that the study sought to establish the extent to which women participation in group activities influences empowerment of communities in Kajiado North Sub County, Kajiado County. The women group can be an alternative vehicle for achieving the objectives of rural development and encouraging entire community to get involved in participating in rural development projects. The group is an organized set up which can provide microcredit to the rural women on the basis of the group savings which can act as a collateral. (Gurumoorthy, 2000).

Puhazhendhi and Satyasai (2001) set out to find key elements for the successful formation and function of groups. These elements included a voluntary nature of the group, small size and homogeneity of membership. Also, women engaged in their activities in a transparent way and commonly employ participatory decision making process whereby they would regularly meet so as to foster sisterhood among the members. In a study which was done by Rappaport (1993), it was found out that Self-Help Groups offer the venue for learning from each other, emotional support and social learning which help to constitute a social identity among members of a group. Therefore through their group activities, they become enlightened psychologically and this help them stem out subordination. Participation of women in group activities has thrived, yet still their success in community development initiatives has been in reality a piped dream.

Women involvement in group activities within communities is not a recent phenomenon. Traditionally, they were

literally the community workers and were mostly involved in activities that are labour intensive such as farm work and building and it is for this reason that the community's well-being depends largely on women. They would break their back working the entire day whereas men would sometimes spend their day through entertainment forms such as drinking traditional beer and playing games. Despite all the women efforts, findings show that women continue to face challenges and the growing recognition of their contributions has not translated into significantly improved access to resources or increased decision-making powers (Murugangi and Dombosi, 2007)

In Kenya both in rural and urban settings, women participation in group activities have been flourishing in early 1990s, capitalizing on the new political dispensation that heralded multi-party system, the devolved government structures that recently came into existence and the government support through funding avenues such as Women Enterprise Fund (WEF) and Uwezo Fund that offers credit programmes to women through their groups. With the development in group formation it has now turned into a vehicle in which women voices are heard across several countries (Tiyas, 2007).

In Kenya, one of the key focus areas by the Government since independence has been achieving economic growth and poverty reduction. Therefore the agenda of empowering women and other marginalized population has been in the forefront especially after realization that the country is losing out on significant growth economically. Therefore the study sought to identify how best women efforts through

group activities can be channeled in order to realize an empowered community.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The general goal of the study was to examine the level to which women participation in group activities influences empowerment of communities in Kajiado North Sub county.

Specifically, this paper focused on the following objectives:-

1. To establish the influence of women participation in income generating activities on the empowerment of communities.
2. To assess the influence of women participation in political activities on the empowerment of communities.
3. To assess the influence of women participation in environmental conservation activities on the empowerment of communities.
4. To establish the influence of women participation in trainings on the empowerment of communities.

1.3 Research Questions

The study research questions were as follows:-

1. What are the various income generation activities by women groups in Kajiado North Sub County that influence community empowerment?
2. What are the influences of political participation activities by women via their groups on community empowerment?
3. How does environmental conservation activities by women groups influence community empowerment?

4. What are the influences of training activities that women participate in through the groups on community empowerment in Kajiado North Sub County?

2. Literature Review

Women groups are common and likeable in developing countries and evidence exists on women groups' support of community empowerment initiatives that leads to improved standards of living and wellbeing of members in community.

Examples of Group activities can be regular meetings, contributions in monetary terms or otherwise, savings and loan, farming together and other income generating activities, prayer and other religious activities as well as various social support events (NRC, 2009).

In Kenya, government's interest in women groups grew in the 1970s to 1980s leading to the mushrooming of women groups countrywide (Oino P.G., Auya S. and Luvega C., 2014). The authors further argued that during this period the focus of majority women groups radically changed from welfare activities and home improvement to savings and income focused generating projects and moving beyond supporting group members themselves but also targeting the larger community.

According to Shivakumar (1995), women groups contribute significantly in development. At the same time, some studies indicate that the involvement of women in various economic chores in African continent is minimal only accounting for less than 30% (Parsons,

2011), compared to 80 % being men's engagement in such activities (Karl, 1995).

Globally, women have proved to be able to mobilize themselves, unlike their male counterparts. They are active through their groups in community due to their traditional roles; which are an extension of their daily activities in the home and the family.

The broad goals of women groups are to bring about personal and socio-economic change for its members and the society. It is women who can inspire confidence and offer stimulus for social change, especially among their sisters. Hence, effective leadership among women must come from the ranks of women themselves. Their qualitative involvement has been frequently succeeded through the formation of Self Help groups (SHGs) in Kenya (Mukasa, 2007).

Some of the basic characteristics of women groups, like the small size of the membership and the homogeneity of the composition, bring about cohesiveness and effective participation of members in the functioning of the group (Fernandez, 1994).

Abbot (2007) asserts that women have long been the key mainstay among communities and are heavily participating most of the community initiatives in various forms. For example, women are emerging as leaders in their community development matters and are also acquiring the skills that have positively brought changes to their communities through education and training. According to Sadan (1997), it is in the group that a consciousness awakens the skills and potentials that exist among the people who share a common problem. For example women group activities are as a result of

women coming together to realize their potential and strength and in the process change lives through increasing controls of factors affecting them.

In looking at the influence of women involvement in group activities on the empowerment of communities, the study sought to identify opportunities whereby incorporating women group activities into issues affecting a community has achieved a better community where people have ability to manage their lives.

The purpose of this paper was to find out the extent to which women participation in group activities influences empowerment of communities in the case of Kajiado North Sub County.

Empowerment as a construct is multifaceted. An empowering intervention is that which builds capacity of individuals to positively influence their wellbeing outcomes. Rappaport (1995) in support of this argument observes that the outcomes of empowerment are realised when people discover, or create and give voice to a collective narrative that sustains their own personal story in an appreciative way. Therefore empowerment is operative at various stages; personal or at individual level, interpersonal, organizational, community and collective (Hur, 2006).

For the purpose of this paper, the researcher identified four categories of Women participation in group activities (the independent variable) and their indicators. These were; participation in income generating activities, political participation activities, participation in environmental conservation activities and participation in trainings.

2.1 Women Groups Participation in Income Generating Activities and Empowerment of Community

The main thrust of women group activities is the establishment of sustainable income generating activities (IGAs) through better access to productive resources such as land and credit. Studies have shown that when women get more income, the more they spend on their children's education health and food. This is true as women's income mostly goes towards increasing the wellbeing of the family. Ideally, women group activities are goal oriented and thus would bring about change in livelihoods, equalize opportunities between social classes, reduce disparities in the distribution of income, increase education among women and thus prepare them for modern labour force (Kriefer, 1985).

For a long time, traditional beliefs has influenced the subordinate position of women in the household, something which excludes women from property ownership, income generation and involvement in financial decision making but leaves them with the bulk of house chores and other tasks which requires intensive labour in the home. Women are involved in many small chores that may not be regarded as development (Moser and Caroline, 2007). Women have established income generating activities using the financial resources availed through their groups as well as skills and training gotten through learning sessions they engage in. Micro – credit schemes targeting women has allowed women to guarantee one another through their groups in order to access financial resources via

credible financial institutions at affordable interest rates has helped to provide the much needed capital for business start-ups.

The various IGAs that women groups engage in Kajiado North Sub County include real estate, beadwork and cloth making, food processing, outside catering services, vending of small wares, selling cereals, vegetables and fruits in the market, retail shops and other various forms of small businesses; Farming activities which include subsistence farming and agribusiness such as small stock keeping such as poultry, rabbits, quail, fish farming as well as pig rearing, dairy farming, horticulture farming through green houses and traditional animal keeping by the Maasai community.

Women group activities often will take the dimension of savings and loan initiative for property acquisition or as source of capital for start-ups and expansion of established businesses. Entrepreneurship development in Kenya has grown as a result of wage employment being no longer a guarantee. According to Kenya Bureau of Statistics (KeBS), unemployment rate in Kenya reached an all-time high of 40% in 2011. Participation in income generation activities results in economic empowerment yet still when the women are economically and financially independent , their status in the context of the traditional beliefs and culture continues to be one of subordination (Kelly, 2007).

2.2 Participation in Political Activities and Empowerment of Communities

There exists a real gender gap in political participation. Reports indicate that women constitute a majority among activists in

many communities yet are a minority among the leadership in the same community, thus the paradoxical manner of their participation (Reinharz, 1984). Getting enlighten on political matters and participation in political activities essentially deals with decision making and handling responsibility, right from the smallest institution of the family to the national legislature of the country (Krueger and Neuman, 2006).

The government of Kenya adopted the affirmative action in 1998 so as to increase female representation in public life. Also, with the promulgation of the new constitution in 2010, there is increased representation of women in the national assembly and women are heading various sectors of the government. Despite this, little change can be seen and women are still underrepresented in decision making positions. According to Makuto (2007), culture and economics are important components that interplay with politics to place women position in a subordinate place to their male counterparts. For example, major decisions in the family are in the domain of the male members.

Numerous organizations started to engage the citizens by raising awareness on their responsibilities and obligations in the political system at the community levels. For example; Women who contested in the 1992 general elections came together to form an organization to help them strategize better for women participation in leadership and decision making processes (Nzomo, 2014). Therefore, women's organizations make it easier for the women to have a collective voice and to highlight some of the

injustices meted against women and forge corrective measures.

Secondly, women groups may as well be a grooming space for political leadership as activism develops before they wedge influence and gain political popularity. The prevailing socio-cultural attitudes continue to hinder women from being acknowledged as leaders in their own right even where civic education is conducted. These social and cultural attitudes are experienced more by women who take courage to seek party nominations and contest in the general elections. Political empowerment may vary as per the socio-political environment of a country (Zafarullah & Huque, 2012). Traditionally, ways of political involvement have included voter education, sensitization on rights and responsibilities of citizens, lobbying and advocacy, aimed at ensuring a more informed community who could hold elected representatives more accountable. Other means of participation include appointment as advisors on governing boards, councils or committees of public bodies and even local community organizations.

There are many challenges to women's political participation. These include, gender stereotypes, psychological and traditional barriers, inequalities in education, training and resources, gender-based violence among others. Therefore, if women groups can effectively plan, to demand for a more inclusive political framework, they can play a key function in ensuring increased political participation among women (UN, 2005).

2.3 Participation in Environmental Conservation Activities and Empowerment of Communities

The scale of environmental destruction is alarming with the poorest population, who are mostly women, being the hardest hit (IUCN, 2009). This is so because for example, in Kenya, many local communities are dependent on natural resources for their daily livelihoods. As a result, policy makers now put a lot of emphasis on sustainable use of the environment. Most environmental conservation projects are donor funded through international organizations and NGOs who mostly work with women groups by training them in the use of modern conservation techniques. Women have been perceived as efficient environmental managers and conservers of natural resources.

Women and especially those living in the rural areas are key to managing and conserving resources. Environmental resource management is directly linked to development and, this makes it crucial to examine the activities of women in community more closely (Tiondi, 2000). In addition, their tasks in agriculture and animal husbandry as well as in the household make them the daily managers of the living environment (Njabani, 2015). Miller (2007) asserts that women especially those who are living in the rural areas of underdeveloped countries, have substantial knowledge and experience of managing and conserving natural resources.

Environmental management is important for achieving sustainable development. Women worldwide have also contributed greatly to achieving and promoting Sustainable

Development (SD) and encouraging progress which have really helped in eliminating poverty by spelling out actions which would transform the lives of millions of poor people and make the planet a better and safer place for everybody through economic and environmental protection. (Chaney, 2009). Women have proven to be highly effective change agents in the environment. For example, in Kenya, the Green Belt Movement launched in 1977 as an environmental campaign mobilized women to plant indigenous trees (Maathai, 1997).

Other environmental conservation activities by women groups include; Women group participation in tree planting, soil conservation and construction of dams, women groups' participation in environmental awareness creation; and women groups employing environment friendly methods in farming and home environment.

The women groups are conversant with the importance tree growing such as soil conservation and water conservation and the fact that they need to conserve the environment for future generation however lack of proper training, lack of capital to enhance activities and lack of rain are constraints to their active involvement in environmental conservation activities (Tiondi, 2000).

2.4 Participation in Education and Training Activities and Empowerment of Communities

Education and training initiatives targeting women have a key role in ensuring development of a country and its people. International organizations like United

Nations (UN), UNESCO and world Bank have already taken up this issue and realized meaningful developmental outcomes (Kelly, 2007). Women have benefitted in trainings and learning sessions they engage in through their groups. Such trainings have helped women to rediscover themselves and result to them drifting from their traditional gender roles that make them unequal to men. As a result, their self-confidence has greatly increased and this has also made them understand their situations and be more confident to represent themselves.

Cultural values, economic realities with limited family resources and less employment opportunities for women inhibit girls' entry in primary and secondary education and later on tertiary education. Women have always been portrayed as people who are subordinate to others in society; those people who cannot express themselves as individuals, and silently accept other people's interpretations of their action and failures. The societal beliefs and their literacy levels further aggravate their situation.

Education and training are essential components in improving the living standards of the households. For example, learning about modern farming techniques and methods, discovering new markets and learning techniques of conflict management, can contribute to development. (ILO, 2008). Skills development is particularly important for the women who constitute majority of persons in the informal sector, performing low-paid, unskilled works (FAO-IFAD-ILO, 2009).

Education and training activities help people to improve their capabilities and functioning

hence their efforts can greatly impact in the community to improve the livelihoods and welfare of the people. Educated women are more likely to be healthier, have higher earnings and exercise greater decision making power within the household (ILO, 2009). They are also more likely to ensure that their children are educated thus breaking the cycle of poverty. Educational policies and educational plans have greatly served to limit the ability of women to fully utilize their intellectual energies in the management of their communities. Over two-thirds of the world's 796 million illiterate people are women (UNESCO, 2010), many of whom live in rural areas. For example, in Cambodia 48% of rural women and 14% of rural men are unable to read or write (UNESCO, 2005).

Studies done in Asia indicate rural workers who are educated find high-paying jobs, whereas a lack of education tends to limit their choices to agricultural and low-wage non-farm employment (ILO, 2008). Over the years, women have risen to counter the stereotyped educational systems and are able to compete with their male counterparts. The education levels of women have greatly changed with a higher number of women pursuing higher education. Women who receive the same levels of education, experience and farm inputs as men, have the same productivity as their male counterparts (Quisumbing, 1996). It is important for development agencies and governments to incorporate training aspects in their activities. This would influence their self-esteem and confidence and encourage them to participate more actively in wider community events (Tiondi, 2000).

2.5 Theoretical framework

The theory of empowerment as advanced by Paulo Freire and Feminist theory were applied to provide grounding for women group involvement in empowerment of communities through participation in their various activities.

The source of empowerment as a theory can be linked to the Brazilian philosopher and educator, Paulo Freire (Hur, 2006). Freire points out that the process of empowerment of communities starts with empowerment of individuals. In his piece “The Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970)”, Freire gave the conceptual base for the debates on empowerment. That empowerment as a construct is multi-faceted. In this regard, empowerment is therefore viewed to be operative at various levels: personal/individual, interpersonal, organizational, community and collective (Hur, 2006). He observed that these levels are closely linked. In Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970), Freire differentiates between the positions in an unjust society: the oppressor and the oppressed. According to him, education should allow the oppressed to regain their sense of humanity, while in turn overcoming their condition. Nevertheless, he affirms that for this to occur, the oppressed individuals must play a role in their liberation. Paulo Freire’s theory is based on the belief that liberation is possible.

Since 1970s, the term empowerment has continually been used in the case of marginalized groups such as African Americans, women, gays and even people living with disabilities.

According to Freire, in every society, a small number of people dominate the majority resulting in “dominated consciousness”. He therefore advocates for an active teaching method that would help the individual become aware of his own situation, so that he acquire instruments that would allow him to make choices and become politically conscious (Freire,1974). Therefore the role of an educator is not only to transmit knowledge to his students but, also to seek the means that would transform the world around him. This he referred to as “developing critical consciousness”, which according to him is what makes it possible for the oppressed to move from understanding to acting.

Theories of empowerment were formulated based on the assumptions that access to financial services empowers women by putting capital in their hands so that they are able to be producers contributing to households and communities well-being. Therefore the theories hold that women with economic power often gain control over their lives. Empowerment theories are not only concern with the empowerment process but also, with its results of giving the disadvantaged power and greater access to resources (Hur, 2006). In this regard, the theory of empowerment as applied in the context of this study outlines the contribution of women through participation in group activities to the benefit of community. Abbot (2007) asserts that women have long been the mainstay among communities. They are involved in most of the initiatives in their communities where they participate actively.

Women group activities are as a result of women coming together to realize their potential and in the process change lives by increasing controls of factors affecting them. According to Sadan (1997), it is in the group that consciousness is awakened and abilities and potentials that exist among the people sharing a common problem is aroused.

Arguments against the empowerment theory are: First, that the theoretical concept of empowerment does not have a clear definition (Bodja, 2006). Bhodja attributes this 'vagueness' in empowerment theory to the non-academic origin of the concept. The concept of empowering communities is mostly common among development practitioners.

The other argument against empowerment theory is that empowerment often results to relative rather than absolute changes in states of being (Brook and Holland, 2009). For example, an observable move towards empowerment by one person or group cannot be assumed to apply to other groups or individuals in a community.

The other theories that supported this study are feminist theories developed through a chain of waves emerging in the late 19th century. Its primary concern at that time was white middle class women and their right to vote (Kemp and Brandwein, 2010). For this study, Marxist Feminism was applied. Contemporary Marxist Feminists argue that the subordination of women is further enforced by the capitalist system where women are economically dependent on the men.

Marxist Feminist is the perspective of feminism which adapts the principles of Marxism in explaining how family

oppresses women thus affecting quality of their lives as well as the community at large. According to Marxist feminism theorists, class and gender inequalities are the dual systems of oppression. Therefore their primary concern is with the division of labour that keeps women in the domestic sphere and men in the work place.

The feminist perspective was developed on the assumptions that women and men experience life differently hence the gendered approach was necessary.

3. Methodology

The descriptive research design was adopted for this study in seeking to find out the influence of women participation in group activities on the empowerment of communities; A case of Kajiado North Sub County. Specific information was therefore sought about women participation in group activities in Kajiado North Sub County and how these activities have influenced community empowerment.

The study population was made up of 4 different sub-populations and this necessitated both probability and non-probability sampling to be applied. Therefore the researcher employed stratified, purposive and simple random sampling procedures. The sample size of 210 was arrived at after the researcher employed successive sampling techniques on the sub-populations available for the study. In the case of the women groups Yamane's (2007) formula was used to determine the sample size. This was worked out to be 194 women as shown below.

$$n = N / (1 + N (e)^2)$$

Where n - is sample size required

N - is the size of population

E - is the error margin

Where $N = 378$

$E = 0.05$

Hence $n = 378 / (1 + 378(.05)^2) = 194$ women members

The formula when applied assumed a 95% confidence level; $p = 0.5$ (being the estimated variability or distribution of attributes in the population) and the margin of error e of +5% or -5%.

Therefore 194 women group members as one of the sub-sample of study were to be gotten from the 378 women groups as stipulated by Yamane's (2007) formula. The formula is ideal for a population size that is smaller than 500.

The researcher initially used stratified sampling to divide the entire population (378 women groups) in accordance to the administrative ward (strata) they fall in. Kajiado North Sub County is made up of 5 administrative wards namely: - Ngong; Olkeri; Nkaimurunya; Oloolua and Ongata Rongai wards. Simple random sampling technique was then used to draw a probability sample from each stratum (ward) to constitute the 194 women groups, which is the sample representative for the women groups. The simple random sample is drawn from each stratum, where each stratum would have the same sampling fraction

proportionate to the population size of the stratum.

The study targeted women groups (their members and leaders). The leaders include: Chairperson, Treasurer and Secretary and are commonly referred to as officials. They are in charge of the day to day running the group activities. The criterion used to include women group in the study is that they must be duly registered under the Ministry of Labour, Security and Social Services in Ngong; must have been in existence for over 3 years and lastly, to be largely constituted by women members.

In each of the 194 women groups, a leader was selected as a respondent, while the ordinary members excluded as the researcher believed that the leaders were the ones who could have history and knowledge of the group activities. In several instances, the members participated in the questionnaire because the research assistants mostly administered to the selected leader during the official chama meeting time. This in essence was a form of purposive sampling and therefore non-probability. It meant that it could be subject to bias and error.

Therefore, 194 women leaders were the sample representative derived from the 378 women groups to roughly constituted 51% of the women group population. In addition, 5 Uwezo fund coordinators, 6 ministry staff/government officials and 5 CDF and WEF officials were also included in the sample size to represent other population categories. Therefore, a sample size of 210 with sub-samples (194 women, 5 Uwezo

coordinators, 6 ministry officials and 5 CDF/WEF officials) were used in the study.

The researcher also employed purposive sampling techniques to select key informants for the study.

The study employed sampling because the total population was large and not all units would be available for purpose of the study.

Table 1: Population Category and Sample size

| Population Category | Total Population | Sample Size |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|-------------|
| CDF and WEF Officials | 5 | 5 |
| Uwezo Fund Coordinators | 5 | 5 |
| Ministry staff/Government Officials | 6 | 6 |
| Women groups members | 378 | 194 |
| Total | 394 | 210 |

The main instruments for collection of data was a structured questionnaire targeting women group members and an interview schedule for the other category of population that included Uwezo fund officials, CDF and WEF officials as well as government/Ministry staff.

Reliability in research refers to a measure of the degree or level to which an instrument produces consistent results or data after repeated trials (Mugenda and Mugenda (2003). To enhance reliability the research instruments were pilot tested in Oloolua ward, Kajiado North Sub County in September 2016. Six members were drawn from four women groups who were not part of the sample. Through employing the test-retest approach, the researcher managed to have the right instrument to collect the

information that was used to successfully complete the study.

To ensure validity of instruments, the researcher sought the opinion of the supervisor who being a research expert adjusted the instruments guided by the themes as per the paper objectives.

The researcher employed two assistants to help in the collection of data from members of the women groups. This was necessary considering the limited time available and also the expanse of the area under study. A total of 200 questionnaires were printed and issued to two research assistants who traversed the five administrative wards in Kajiado North Sub County for a period of one month. At the end of the period the research assistants submitted 144 well completed questionnaires. 56 were either not

completed or incomplete. These were omitted from the study, thus the interview return rate for women group members was 71%. The return rate for the other population categories were as follows; Constituency Development Fund (CDF) and WEF Officials (60%), Uwezo Fund staff (100%), and Ministry staff/Government Officials (66.7%). Therefore the average return rate was well above 70%, which according to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) is an acceptable proportion and can be termed adequate for analysis.

The key informant interviews were personally conducted by the researcher. Some of the problems encountered during the study included respondents being hesitant to answer some of the questions listed in the questionnaire or the interview schedule but on assurance of confidentiality, the researcher was able to get the information required.

Data analysis was done using descriptive statistics and SPSS version 17 was employed. For qualitative data, content analysis was done to identify patterns, themes and biases.

4. Findings

The study investigated the influence of women participation in group activities on the empowerment of communities: A case of Kajiado North Sub County.

Respondents were asked to state their age, and the findings showed that majority of the group members 25.3% were aged between 31-35 years. This shows that the women within this age group were robust and trying to seek ways of earning an extra income to

support their young families and hence understands the importance of group activities.

Respondents were also asked to state their level of education. And the findings showed that 56.5% of the women had attained a bachelors' degree, 26.1% had attained college level and lastly 17.4% had secondary level of education qualifications. This showed that the women were well educated to understand the impacts of the group activities in the community.

Respondents were also asked the period they have been as group member. Whereas 45% of the respondents had been members for the period ranging between 1 to 3 years, It was also evident that beyond 3 years group membership declined.

To establish further who constituted the groups, the study sought to find out whether the women who came together to form a group had a commonality. The study findings indicated that the majority of the women groups 81.2% constituted of friends. This implies that as friends the group members are able to harmonize their differences and be able to agree on the goals and objectives for their groups therefore dictating the activities to adopt.

Respondents were also asked the group period of existence with 43.2% of responses indicating 1 to 3 years as the period their group had lasted. . This implied that majority of the groups had existed long enough and could therefore establish whether their activities had impacted on the community.

The researcher also sought to find out whether the women groups were registered with 60.1% of the respondents saying that their group was registered. This implies that most of women’s groups in Kajiado North Sub county are recognized by the government

4.1 Income generating activities and the empowerment of communities

The first objective to investigate was to establish the influence of women groups’ participation in income generating activities on the empowerment of communities. Respondents were asked to state the income generating activities that they are actively involved in. The activities included; farming activities, small scale industries, retail businesses and tailoring and beadwork.

The findings showed that 50.7% of the women were involved in retail business. The respondents identified other activities that generated income for the women group members. These included; buying and selling of land and hire of hearse services. Other members participated in table banking and welfare (No income generating activities) as indicated by 32.6%. Findings from the interview guide also show that

women groups involvement in farming activities included; rabbit keeping, mushroom farming and fish farming. These findings showed that the women groups largely empowered women to startup businesses which generate income or revamp their businesses.

The responses on the impacts of income generating activities on community were as follows; 73.9% of the respondents said that the women group income generating activities have improved the living standards of community and the small retail businesses and industries have created jobs for community members as indicated by 52.1%. Findings from the interview guide show that farming activities have ensured supply of vegetables, milk and fruits in the markets and the hearse hiring services has help the community in Ngong to cut funeral expenses as initially the services were sought as far as Nairobi county. This implies that women groups participation in income generating activities have an influence on the empowerment of communities in Kajiado North sub county. Table 2 summarizes the link between income generating activities and the empowerment of communities.

Table 2: Relationship between income generating activities and the empowerment of communities

| Model | | Coefficients ^a | | | | |
|-------|--|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|
| | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 1.399 | .149 | .398 | 9.407 | .000 |
| | Increased purchasing power among women | .497 | .104 | | 4.790 | .000 |

a. Dependent Variable: think your activities as women group also bring benefits to the community you live in?

As shown in table 2, the income generating activities had significant ($p < 0.05$) influence on community empowerment.

4.2 Participation in political activities and the empowerment of communities

The second objective was to investigate the influence of women groups' participation in political activities on the empowerment of communities. Respondents were asked to state the political activities that they are actively involved in. Whereas some women groups participated in political activities, majorities (71%) do not get involved in political activities. Those vying for political seats were a paltry 4.3%. Respondents were

asked to state the impacts of participation on political activities on the community. Findings showed that 60.8% of the respondents said that the women group political activities have enabled more people to have the will to vote. Also findings from the interview guide show that; women are the majority voters and the politicians many times work with women groups to bring developments to the community through projects such as purchase of water tanks for members. This implies that involvement of women groups in political activities have an influence on the empowerment of the community.

Table 3: Relationship between political activities and the empowerment of communities

| Coefficients ^a | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|-------|------|
| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. | |
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 2.008 | .324 | | 6.204 | .000 |
| | political participation | -.004 | .082 | -.004 | -.050 | .960 |

a. Dependent Variable: think your activities as women group also bring benefits to the community you live in?

The results in table 3 indicate that political activities had no significant effect ($p > 0.05$) on empowerment of the community.

4.3 Environmental conservation and the empowerment of communities

Respondents were asked to state the environmental conservation tasks that they are actively involved in. 22.5% indicated they are actively involved in environmental awareness creation as an activity under environmental conservation activities.

The researcher also investigated the impacts of participation on environmental conservation activities on the community. Findings showed that 56.4% of the respondents said that the women group environmental conservation activities have resulted to reduction of diseases in the community; 38.9% of the respondents said the involvement of women groups in environmental conservation activities has led to clean environment. Finally, 4.7% mentioned the use of energy saving technology has an impact of women groups being involved

in environmental conservation activities. Findings from the interview guide show that; women fight for a cleaner environment free of garbage and they go out to collect garbage themselves, women have expressed concern on lack of rain, for example they believe the wind mills on Ngong hills have contributed to reduced rainfall and so these need to be removed. This

implies that involvement of women groups in environmental conservation have influence on the empowerment of the community.

Table 4 summarizes the relationship between environmental conservation activities and the empowerment of communities

Table 4: Relationship between environmental conservation activities and the empowerment of communities

| Coefficients ^a | | | | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|
| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 2.012 | .093 | 21.534 | .000 |
| | environmental conservation | -.006 | .028 | -.020 | .820 |

a. Dependent Variable: think your activities as women group also bring benefits to the community you live in? The results in table 4 indicate that environmental conservation activities had no significant effect ($p > 0.05$) on empowerment of the community.

4.4 Training and the empowerment of communities

The fourth objective of the study was to establish the influence of women groups’ participation in training on the empowerment of communities. Respondents were asked to indicate the training activities that their group members are actively involved in. Entrepreneurial training emerged as the training activity with the highest rating with 44.9% of the respondents. 14.5% of respondents reported health education, 5.1% reported higher education while 35.5% indicated no participation in training activities.

The government officials interviewed also indicated involved in adult learning activities where most learners were women. This implies that the women groups are actively involved in training activities.

The study also sought to find out the impacts of participation on training activities on the community. Majority of respondents cited acquisition of good financial management skills as indicated by 58.7% and knowledge in investment as indicated by 48.5% of the respondents.

Table 5 summarizes the relationship between women participation in training activities and the empowerment of communities

Table 5: Relationship between training activities and the empowerment of communities

| Model | | Coefficients ^a | | | | |
|-------|---------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|
| | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 1.801 | .052 | | 34.919 | .000 |
| | training activities | .088 | .020 | .361 | 4.321 | .000 |

a. Dependent Variable: think your activities as women group also bring benefits to the community you live in?

The results in table 5 indicate that training activities had significant ($p < 0.05$) influence on community empowerment.

4.5 Discussion of Findings

This section of the paper gives the discussion of findings based on inferential analysis.

4.5.1 Coefficient of Correlation

In order to show the relationship between the study variables and their findings the study used the Karl Pearson’s coefficient of correlation (r). According to the findings as indicated in table 6, it was evident that there was a positive correlation between income generating activities and empowerment of communities as depicted by a correlation

value of 0.521. The study also depicted that there is a positive correlation between political participation activities and empowerment of communities with a correlation value of 0.618. The study also noted that there was positive correlation was between environmental conservation activities and empowerment of communities with a correlation value of 0.587 and a positive correlation between women groups Participation in trainings and empowerment of communities with a correlation value of 0.553. This indicates that there was a positive correlation between income generating activities, political participation activities, environmental conservation activities and women groups’ participation in trainings.

Table 6: Correlation among variables

| Variables | Empowerment of Communities | Income generating activities | Political participation activities | Environmental conservation activities | Women groups Participation in trainings |
|---|----------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Empowerment of Communities | 1 | | | | |
| Income generating activities | | 0.521 | | | |
| Political participation activities | | | 0.618 | | |
| Environmental conservation activities | | | | 0.587 | |
| Women groups Participation in trainings | | | | | 0.553 |

| | | | | | | |
|--|---------------------|----------|-------|-------|-------|---|
| Empowerment of Communities | Pearson Correlation | 1 | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | | | | |
| Income generating activities | Pearson Correlation | .5210 | 1 | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .0032 | | | | |
| Political participation activities | Pearson Correlation | .6180 | .3421 | 1 | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .0021 | .0014 | | | |
| Environmental conservation activities | Pearson Correlation | .5870 | .1240 | .0621 | 1 | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .0043 | .0120 | .0043 | | |
| Women groups Participation in trainings | Pearson Correlation | .5530 | .3420 | .0000 | .1660 | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .0172 | .0031 | 1.000 | .0031 | |

4.5.2 Analysis of variance

An analysis was performed on the relationship between the women participation in group activities and empowerment of communities. From the table above, the model was significant (p-value = 0.000) at 0.05 level in explaining the linear relationship between women

participation in group activities and empowerment of communities. Additionally, the F-statistic is significantly greater than 1 thus indicating the appropriateness of the model in testing the link between independent and dependent variable. This means that the model is appropriate for use running a factor analysis as shown below.

Table 7: Summary of ANOVA results

| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|-------|------------|----------------|----|-------------|-------|-------------------|
| 1 | Regression | 45.153 | 4 | 11.288 | 7.407 | .000 ^b |
| | Residual | 138.680 | 67 | 1.524 | | |
| | Total | 183.833 | 71 | | | |

.5.3 Coefficient of Determination

The coefficient of determination was done to measure how the statistical model was likely to predict future outcomes. The coefficient of determination, (r^2) is the square of the sample correlation coefficient between outcomes and predicted values. As such it explains the contribution of the four independent variables (income generating

activities, political participation activities and environmental conservation activities) to the dependent variable. Of the four independent variables that were under investigation, they contribute 55.1% of empowerment in community as represented by the adjusted (r^2) as shown on table 8. This means that other factors that this study did not focus on contribute to 44.9% of the empowerment of communities.

Table 8: Model Summary

| Model | r | r ² | Adjusted r ² | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------|----------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | 0.742 | 0.551 | 0.641 | 0.0438 |

4.5.4 Multiple Regression

In addition, the authors further carried out a multiple regression analysis so as to identify influence of women participation in group activities on the empowerment of communities. The main purpose of multiple regressions is to learn more about the relationship between several independent or predictor variables and a dependent or criterion variable. The researcher used SPSS to enter, and code response from the respondents to assist in computing the extent to which a unit changes in a given independent variable to dependent variable. As per the SPSS generated values in table 9, the equation

($Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \beta_4X_4 + \epsilon$) becomes:

$$Y = 1.279 + 0.510 X_1 + 0.613 X_2 + 0.525 X_3 + 0.531 X_4$$

The regression equation above shows that taking all factors into account (income generating activities, political participation activities and environmental conservation activities) constant at zero, access rate of traditional birth attendants will be 1.279. The findings revealed that assuming other variables are at zero a unit change (increase) in income generating activities will lead to a 0.510 increase in community empowerment; a unit increase in political participation activities will lead to a 0.613 decrease in community empowerment; a unit increase in environmental conservation activities will lead to a 0.525 increase in community empowerment and a unit increase in women groups Participation in trainings will lead to a 0.531 increase in community empowerment as shown in table 4.15. This infers that political participation activities influence community empowerment to a

great extent followed by women groups' participation in trainings then income generating while environmental

conservation activities influence to a little extent on community development.

Table 9: Regression Model for activities women groups participate in and empowerment of communities.

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | | |
|---|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|--------|
| | β | Std. Error | Beta | t | Sig. |
| Constant/Y Intercept | 1.279 | 1.316 | | 1.451 | 0.357 |
| Income generating activities | 0.531 | 0.310 | 0.172 | 4.242 | 0.0276 |
| Political participation activities | 0.613 | 0.322 | 0.067 | 3.452 | 0.0202 |
| Environmental conservation activities | 0.510 | 0.156 | 0.210 | 3.382 | 0.0285 |
| Women groups Participation in trainings | 0.531 | 0.245 | 0.148 | 3.358 | 0.0249 |

Findings as shown by 84.1% of respondents indicated that the women group activities have increased purchasing power among women, 69.6% of respondents agreed that belonging to groups created women awareness of their rights and laws affecting them directly and also helped to improve relations between men and women as indicated by 64.5% of the respondents. Findings from the interview guide show that; the Kajiado North communities are embracing women political leaders,

husbands allow their women to go out to market their bead works through trade fairs and exhibition, women send their representative to political decision making forums, women are currently aware of their rights such as property rights, men are quickly embracing the fact that women can also chip in financially and women are now being encouraged by their husbands and community leaders to form groups so as to benefit from the numerous funds available. This implies that women group activities

have impacted on economic, political and social empowerment of the community.

The respondents interviewed indicated that financial constraints pose a challenge to realizing group objectives. Findings from the interview guide show that; women are not very focused to venture into bigger projects which may help them to be economically stable and also lack of education among the majority members in the group deters proper use of funds. Also, most group members lack trust for one another resulting to disagreements and disintegration of groups. In other instances women lack moral support at home especially when the husband would rather take the loaned money and use it for his own personal benefit. Lastly, women lack a domestic market for their products such as bead work as their products are mainly valued in the tourism industry. This implies that finances are the major challenges to achieving group objectives.

These findings concur with the literature reviewed. As revealed in the literature, women groups' activities are geared to empower the individual women and this benefits the whole community. This concurs with Kelly (2007) report that women group activities would bring about change in livelihoods, make opportunities to be equal between social classes, reduce disparities in the distribution of income, increase education among women and thus prepare them for modern labour force.

The findings revealed that women group political activities which included vying for political positions, representation in political forums and participation in voting empowered the community. Findings also

established that those women groups working with politicians have brought development to the community through purchasing of water tanks for members which has ensured availability of clean water to their families and neighbors as well as organizing fundraising which help them to raise school fees for bright students. This is in agreement with UN, (2005) report that if women groups can effectively organize themselves, to demand for a more inclusive political framework, they can play a major role in facilitating and sustaining increased political participation among women and the community would benefit from their increased political activities.

Findings also established that women group environmental conservation activities like tree planting, soil conservation and construction of dam, environmental awareness creation and use of environment friendly methods in farming and home environment empowered the community positively whereby they have resulted to reduction of diseases in the community as indicated by 58.7% of the respondents. This concurs with Miller (2007) findings that women especially those who are living in the rural areas of underdeveloped countries, have substantial knowledge and experience of managing and conserving natural resources.

Finally, the findings revealed that women group training activities which included entrepreneurial, health education trainings and higher education trainings have an impact on community empowerment through acquisition of good financial management skills as indicated by 58.7% and knowledge in investment as indicated by

48.5% of the respondents. This is in agreement with Browne (2001) findings that education and training initiatives targeting women can contribute to playing a much more meaningful role in development as realized by international organizations such as United Nations (UN), United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and World Bank (WB).

Women are an integral part of every economy. All round development and harmonious growth of a nation would be possible only when women are considered as co-partners in progress with men. Empowerment of women is essential to harness the women labour into the main stream of economic development. Therefore government and development agencies can consider funding women SHG members in order to stimulate economic, social and political empowerment of community through women.

The funding of women SHGs would help eliminate poverty in community as in normal circumstance; the poor ones are financially and socially constrained to join the SHGs by their wealthier or well-connected counterpart. Therefore such financial services would help to reduce such barriers and enable them to belong.

Women participation through their groups has proved to be a major for a where women and communities can be uplifted. Therefore, in order for women contribution to be much felt, productive resources and finances should be made available to all women, young women should be mentored in business and money management and;

development of markets for selling produce resulting from the activities of women.

It was concluded that women groups participation in income generating activities have a positive effect upon the economic empowerment of women. Women groups provided women with loans and skills required to start up any economic activity and thus reduced their dependence upon husbands for economic resources. Women were also capable of buying small assets with their savings. Their awareness level increased due to experience from other members and these enabled women to ably participate in household economic decisions. Also by contributing to household incomes, they won the confidence of their families to make household decisions.

The impact of women group participation was considerable on political empowerment. Through group activities like representation in political forums, women developed increased awareness towards self and society. They became more aware of their rights. They developed decision making ability and participated on other household decisions too. Democratic practices like voting the leader and other positions within the women group also increased the member's political knowledge and awareness.

The study also established that involvement of women groups in environmental conservation activities had an impact on community empowerment. Women indigenous skills, knowledge and insight help in sustainable use of environmental resources (Tiondi, 2000). Women through

their groups are effective in natural resource management, hence their activities help realize sustainable environment for the community. Some women groups were involved in construction of drainage systems which reduced swamps that harbor mosquitoes hence preventing malaria. Others were involved in garbage collection which ensured a clean environment and encouraging community members to embrace the use of clean cooking energy like biogas and energy saving techniques such as use of jikokoa for cooking. Other groups were instrumental in the construction of roads to their community hence promoting accessibility.

Women group involvement in training activities promoted social interactions among members. For example; when attending the trainings or programs, they travel would to various locations which show that women groups provide women with greater mobility and a means of unwinding from the effects of everyday monotony. Also the entrepreneurial and health trainings contribute to a healthier community and families are able to manage their finances the best way.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Several conclusions may be drawn from the findings presented. The main concern of the study was to demonstrate women group involvement in process of community empowerment.

Women are an integral part of every economy. All round development and harmonious growth of a nation would be possible only when women are considered

as co-partners in progress with men. Empowerment of women is essential to harness the women labour into the main stream of economic development. Therefore government and development agencies can consider funding women SHG members in order to stimulate economic, social and political empowerment of community through women.

The funding of women SHGs would help eliminate poverty in community as in normal circumstance; the poor ones are financially and socially constrained to join the SHGs by their wealthier or well-connected counterpart. Therefore such financial services would help to reduce such barriers and enable them to belong.

Therefore, in order for women contribution through their organized groups to be much felt, productive resources and finances should be made available to all women, young women should be mentored in business and money management and; development of markets for selling produce resulting from the activities of women.

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher makes the following recommendations aimed at helping Kajiado North Sub County women groups to help improve community livelihood.

- i. There should be efforts in enhancing strategies of empowering women through regular supervision of the group's activities by the concerned ministry.
- ii. To empower more women in the sub-county, there should be

sensitization of women in the sub-county on the significance of participating in women group activities in order for them to benefit as members from financing opportunities in place and new ones to be introduced.

- iii. The government should intervene in the granting of UWEZO Fund and other loans at a relatively lower interest rate to women's groups so as to increase the uptake of the funds. Also the fact that such funds like Uwezo fund are revolving should be well explained to the women groups so that they realize the benefit of paying their loans on time. Also, special grants should be available to all women through their groups as long as they have shown tendency of proper utilization of funds availed to them. This can be monitored through the performance of groups that have benefitted from Uwezo fund and WEF.

5.5. Suggestions for Further Study

The conceptualization of empowerment of communities as dependent variable for the study could have presented difficulties in measuring because empowerment as a construct can either be a process or outcome. Given the scope and limitations of this study, the researcher recommends the following as areas for further studies:

- i. A rigorous research to correct bias and difficulties of measuring empowerment of community.
- ii. Studies need to be done to examine that which mediate or moderate the

impacts of SHGs on women empowerment so as to further understand empowerment of community.

- iii. A study on the influences of the devolved government structures and sustainable training programmes upon women groups and empowerment of communities.
- iv. A study on the influence of women participation in group activities on the empowerment of communities in other counties in Kenya for comparison purposes.
- v. A replica of the study should be carried out incorporating other variables that possibly influence women participation in group activities. Such variables include table banking and welfare activities.

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