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## VALIDATING WOMEN'S KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCES: A Case Study of Women's Experiences and Food Security in Kenya

*By Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira*

### **Abstract**

*This paper aims at demonstrating that women's experiences and knowledge about food security are critical in order to create all inclusive and more comprehensive policies not only in food security but also in other areas of importance as well. The paper is guided by a feminist theoretical framework that sees women as the starting point. It further argues that women's knowledge and experiences have remained invisible and underutilized by policy makers and development workers. The paper is also guided by an appreciation of the*

*fact that research methods have themselves been products of a male knowledge development process, and therefore, have enhanced exclusion and marginalization of women's perspectives. The desire, therefore, to identify research methods that allow researchers to access women's knowledge is a critical factor in this research which chose to use women friendly methodologies such as oral testimonies and focus group discussions that allow women to tell their story in the way they know best.*

**Key words:** *African feminism, Oral testimonies, validation, methodology, feminist pathways, women's reference group, women's knowledge, women's experiences*

### **4.1 Introduction**

The primary purpose of this paper is to examine what women know about food security and then create space for them to tell their stories and experiences on food security/insecurity. Moreover, the paper endorses the conceptual framework that guided the establishment of the African Women's Studies Centre (AWSC). The framework argues that the perspectives, knowledge and experiences of African women remain outside mainstream knowledge and are often not used to influence the direction taken by different societies. The study is also guided by a theory that argues that women's experiences and knowledge bring value to our

institutions and policies and that this knowledge and experiences can be transformative. However, the caveat to this statement is that for this transformation to happen, women need to have faith in themselves and accept the validity of their reality and legitimacy as women. In the words of a famous English poet and writer Vita Sackville West: "*One never believes other people's experiences and one is only very gradually convinced by one's own*" (p 145)<sup>1</sup>.

Men may not be convinced by women's experiences and often women themselves do not believe in their own experiences. The

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<sup>1</sup>W. Karen (2007)

conceptual framework used in this study supports the hypothesis behind the research on women's experiences with food security which is the basis of this paper. The research was guided by the desire to investigate women's experiences with food security and the knowledge that emerges from these experiences. Scholars have not fully extracted the knowledge generated by these experiences in order to utilize the same in shaping our societies. Male experiences have been considered to be the norm and the truth, while women's experiences have been considered to be "*the other*". Women often try to be "*the other*" for that is the way the society has perceived and treated them. It is, therefore, difficult for women to be convinced that their own experiences are worthy of consideration. This is in line with Paulo Freire's thinking that, *the thinking of those who are underdogs in society is greatly shaped by the ideology of those who oppress them<sup>2</sup> that is why often individual women in leadership tend to reflect the values of a patriarchal society.* The only knowledge they have about how institutions run is based on patriarchal ideology. That is why *often*, women do not acknowledge their own experiences as legitimate because the society itself does not affirm the same experiences. They do not recognize their own being as valid. It is for this reason that women's' personal experiences demand immediate attention and this process justifies the promotion of a new site of knowledge making.

The theoretical framework adopted in this paper acknowledges that patriarchy is a psychological and political system that values

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<sup>2</sup>F. Paulo (1996)

the male higher than the female and subsequently uses law, tradition, force, ritual, customs, education and language to keep women governed by men in both public and private life. This is why the implementation of policies such as allocating at least 30 percent of government contracts to women and youth becomes a major problem even for progressive institutions. Stereotypes exist about women and their role in society. For instance, men are said to be more "scientific" and "rational", whereas women are more "emotional" and "less rational". Our concern is not even whether this is true or not but the value that society ascribes to what is male and what is female. African feminists see that transforming patriarchy is beneficial to both men and women. This paper is also guided by Margaret Ogola's exposition of African women's struggle which she locates in the struggle for her right to break away from a tradition that oppresses and marginalizes her and creates norms and traditions that are oppressive. This theory is expounded in her novel *The River and the Source*<sup>3</sup>. Margaret Ogola's thesis argues that there are men in society who walk with the women in this struggle. She uses the symbol of a river that is always flowing, sometimes very powerfully as it breaks its banks and floods. During other seasons, it flows underground and moves slowly but still reaches its destination. For this author, and Elieshi Lema of Tanzania as reflected in her novel *Parched Earth*<sup>4</sup>, patriarchy has to be dismantled if women are to lead their struggle as they are doing and have often done.

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<sup>3</sup>M. Ogola. (2004). *The River and the Source*, Focus Books

<sup>4</sup>L. Elieshi. (2001). *Parched Earth*, E & D Ltd

The struggle for a life that is egalitarian where equal societies are created for the benefit of all has been the African women's struggle. The colonial definition of African women's roles and the assumption that the European private and public distinction in relation to the roles of men and women are the same in Africa, created African economists and political leaders who ensured that African women stayed at home doing domestic work. This led to the situation where men are respected as farmers, policy makers, traders, economists, amongst other significant careers. Policies that today relate to the economy and other sectors have marginalized the African women's experiences and knowledge.

Our theoretical framework allows us to explore issues of methodology in research more intensively. We start with women and interrogate why research methods have allowed women's knowledge and experiences to stay invisible. This theoretical perspective allows us to challenge the notion of "value-free research" which is a traditional concept that has been challenged by many contemporary scholars including Kabira (2012) and Dale Spender (2007). This is in line with literary scholarships that for years now have acknowledged that western scholarship-though claiming to be objective in orientation-has traditionally misrepresented facts on Africa. Even the best of writers come from a specific society with certain values, traditions, hopes and expectations. These societies, through their social, cultural and historical beliefs have developed a worldview that influences their writers and researchers, similar to how societies in general influence the way men and women think. Each society has its unique myths about men and women

that do not necessarily rely on fact or truth, but instead deal with beliefs, fears and emotions. Such myths affect the way we think about women and men. Even what we hear them say and the value of what they say is affected by our biases. Often a woman will speak and not be heard, yet a man will repeat the same information and people will hear it. Women, therefore, have to speak many times and loudly for society to hear them. We are conditioned to certain expectations from men and women.

In the last thirty years in Kenya, women have collectively tried to be heard.<sup>5</sup> This "alternative voice" has been constructing a different interpretation of the male and female realities thereby creating new knowledge. This movement has created a collective authority that has influenced a new constitutional dispensation in Kenya which acknowledges women's significance and their capacity to move to the "centre". Women mobilized from different parts of the country put forward the shared meaning and vision of their lives and this is now engraved in the Constitution of Kenya (2010). This situation is not unique to Kenya. It happened in Uganda, 20 years before Kenya, South Africa, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Tanzania, South Sudan, and even in Somalia. This collective authority of women generating knowledge and validating their experiences is emerging in Africa and has begun to change the way we look at leadership, knowledge, interpretation of words in our different languages, ideas and thoughts. This collective women's leadership is what needs to

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UN women's conference in Mexico, <sup>5</sup>(1975);  
Nairobi Women's Decade Conference(1985) and  
Beijing (1995)

transform other sectors of our Nation and Africa as a whole.

## 4.2 Methodology

The methodology used for this research emanates from the theoretical framework previously highlighted. Documenting women's experiences by the African Women Studies Centre took into consideration the view that "women know" that they have the experience and that this knowledge extends to food security. The research aim was, therefore, to investigate the stories women have about their experiences and their struggle with food security. The research was carried out in 15 counties selected from different agro-ecological zones. The researcher's role was to listen to the respondents as they narrate their experiences with food security – sometimes through periods of time. This was conducted either individually (during the key informants' interviews) or collectively (during focus group discussions and debriefing sessions). The oral testimonies of individual women presented their struggles during erratic and drastic climatic conditions, when the weather patterns were no longer predictable or where the land had become dependent on the administering of external elements such as fertilizer and pesticides. On the other hand, focus group discussions captured the collective knowledge of women, where they weaved their story together similar to the weaving of a basket. Research shows that women often create knowledge collectively. Kabira (2012) explains how one African woman easily picks up the story of a previous woman and the process is continued- almost like they were relying on a previously agreed upon script! This demonstrates how women see themselves as

reference groups and validate their meanings, their knowledge, experiences and perspectives.

The task of the researchers was to analyse and explain these findings and in so doing, give validity to the women's knowledge and experiences. This methodology has been used by many feminist researchers in Kenya and other parts of the world. Oakley (1985)<sup>6</sup> challenged its fundamental structure of traditional research methods from a sociological perspective and suggested that in order to create feminist knowledge we need methodologies that can access that knowledge from the women themselves. In using this methodology, the objective of the research was to evaluate whether women's knowledge on food security can be made a core component of mainstream knowledge and also establish how this knowledge can influence policies that address food security in Kenya as a whole.

This methodology was both qualitative and quantitative in design. What was particularly unique was the use of oral testimonies and debriefing sessions. The debriefing sessions, in particular, were meant to form rapport and connect the researcher with the respondents and other women leaders in order to share the tentative findings and collectively build on the knowledge of the individual women. This method is often used in women groups to affirm women's experiences and their knowledge on issues that affect them, their families and their societies. On the other hand, oral testimonies generate the knowledge of individual women where individuals talked about the "we" approach and not the "I did this"

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<sup>6</sup> Oakley (1985)

approach. Oral testimonies gave women an opportunity to reflect on their lives and experiences over a period of time.

In her book *Beyond God the Father*, Mary Daley (p159)<sup>7</sup> refers to: “the great male fetish, method and its followers.” Her position is that methods traditionally decreed by men cannot articulate women’s experiences accurately and she refers to the traditional research methods as “*tyranny of methods*”. Dale Spender (p160)<sup>8</sup> argues that traditional methods prevent researchers from asking questions that have not been asked before or those that do not fit into “pre-established boxes”. She argues that women have to raise questions that have not been raised and see evidence that has previously been invisible. She argues that what we get is neither objective nor actual; but so is what we get when we use the traditional methods. Men, she says, have passed “half-truths as whole truths”. Women have to name the world for themselves.

In deciding the methodology to adopt, researchers from AWSC carried out many discussions with respondents about the validity and acceptance of this research. These researchers consisted of economists, agriculturalists and experts from the social sciences and humanities who had previous exposure to mainly traditional research approaches. The AWSC researchers chose to have two projects, one would be a baseline survey and the other would document women’s experiences using feminist methods. For the survey, the researchers choose to use traditional methods and to work with the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) in order

to directly influence National policy on food security. The KNBS is the recognized government institution that deals with statistical information for the government. Nevertheless, the AWSC also included certain “*women-friendly*” approaches such as the use of oral testimonies and focus-group discussions.

For the methodology on women’s experiences, the researchers had discussions on issues of objectivity and decided to put them on the back burner and listen to the women’s voices. In concurrence with Dalep160<sup>9</sup> that: “... *what men know is neither objective nor eternal*. In fact, she argues that “*men have passed half-truths as the whole truth*”. (P160).The process of naming has been a male prerogative in most societies for thousands of years and women must reclaim this right.

### **4.3 Women’s Knowledge and Experiences in Food Security (Results and Discussions)**

In discussing the research findings, I deliberately focused on the oral testimonies of women from 15 counties as well as some key informant information. Sex disintegrated data from the AWSC Household Survey Project was also used for comparative purposes. The oral testimonies discussed here are from the women. The study highlighted several issues of interest to women that were raised in the oral testimony guide. The main focus was on changes in terms of food security over time; climate change; knowledge on food production; technology and farm inputs; among others.

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<sup>7</sup>Dale Spender (1985)

<sup>8</sup>Dale Spender (1985)

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<sup>9</sup>Dale Spender (1985)

### 4.3.1 Climate Change

Women explained that they could recall major climatic changes over their lifetimes. They looked nostalgically to the past when they had bumper harvests and produced abundant supplies of food without using pesticides. Irene from Mombasa County noted that there had been environmental changes; the land distribution had grown smaller and people could no longer practice shift cultivation. Drought was identified as a persistent problem.<sup>10</sup>

Women pointed out that climate change had affected food production, with granaries remaining empty. Climate change was a major hindrance to food security. According to Eugene Wangui from Laikipia: "... *soil here does not retain water any more so most crops fail during the dry spells. The crops experience frost and dry up*". Moraa also from Laikipia County says that they "*used to prevent floods but not anymore*". In Kibwezi it rains after three years says Ndito Muasya, they say they used to cultivate more frequently than they do now. There are times when they go for years without rain and drought destroys the crops, says Alice Mulmasai of Bomet. For them the climate in the past was better, rain was more reliable so they had two distinct seasons, says Waithima from Kirinyaga. They knew when the rains would come and would prepare for the planting and later for harvest. They knew when they would get short rains and would plant those crops that would be appropriate for the short rains. They knew when the long rains would come too and would prepare for it. This however as Waithima says, is not the case anymore. The women also noted that the soils

are now "infertile and unproductive". The soil used to be fertile and productive says Lucy Njoki of Nakuru "Women have knowledge about what is happening around them and they also have answers that are discussed later in this paper.

Women clearly see changes in climate that lead to dry spells and shortage of rainfall as well as its unpredictability as a major contribution to food insecurity in the country. Climate change has clearly impacted on the Kenyan small and big farmers. We pay tribute to the late Prof. Wangari Maathai and her establishment of the Green Belt Movement which responded to the needs of Kenyan rural women who reported that their streams were drying up, their food supply was less secure and they had to walk further and further to get wood for fuel and fencing. Women's groups became the centre of this movement and together grew seedlings and planted trees to bind the soil, store rain water, provide food and firewood. *The Green Belt Movement*<sup>11</sup> is the story of Prof. Wangari Maathai and her women's groups who have planted 51 million trees. It is the story of women's struggle with the environment to ensure food security and basic survival for ordinary Kenyans. The knowledge and experiences of this movement have contributed to the world debate on climate change in the many global and other UN meetings. African women's voices remain invisible.

Vandana Shiver in *Our Violent Economy is Hurting women*<sup>12</sup> says a model of capitalist patriarchy which excludes women's work and wealth creation in the mind, deepens the

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<sup>10</sup>Musili Trancesca from Makueni

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<sup>11</sup>Source: <http://www.greenbeltmovement.org/>.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.yesmagazine.org/peace-justice/violent-economic-reforms-and-women>

violence by displacing women from their livelihoods and alienates them from the natural resources on which their livelihoods begin. This includes their land, forests, water resources, seeds and bio diversity. This is done: “...by restricting itself to the value of the market economy as defined by capitalist patriarchy, the production boundary ignores economic value in the two vital economies which are necessary to ecological and human survival.”<sup>13</sup> There are areas of nature economy and sustenance economy. In nature’s economy and sustenance economy, economic value is a measure of how the earth’s life and human life are protected. Its currency is the life giving process not cash or market price (Vandana Shiver<sup>14</sup>). Women know what is happening in relation to climate change and they have been trying to deal with the situation both at individual and collective level.

#### **4.3.2 Food Storage and Preservation**

According to Syombua Nditto Muasya of Mombasa, “...traditionally, perishable foods such as kales, cabbages and peas could be dried” She adds that “fruits such as mangoes could be sliced and then dried and preserved, when you want to eat them, you just soak them in water and eat.” Women note that “in the past, they used to put cooked food in the pots in traditional baskets made of cow dung. Priscah from Baringo notes that, “they used to heat meat on open fire and store after drying completely, in storing perishable vegetables, they shredded and dried them. I learnt that from my grandmother who used to dry vegetables too but they have stopped storing

*for the future – if they don’t keep for the future what will they eat when drought comes – if they have nothing in store what will they do if traders do not bring anything – it will be a tragedy”* she says. One can feel the urgency from Priscah of the need to utilize technology for storing food, the desire to think of the future, to plan for it and not to wait for famine. She knows as she says how devastating it can be to wait for a harvest that may not come.

Women discussed issues of value addition for milk, making fat, butter and yeast. Peninnah of Kisumu in telling her story says that they used ash for the preservation of non-perishable foods. This concept was discussed by many participants; food preservation and value addition were major concerns for women. They have the knowledge. They talk about milk processing factories where they have daily cattle. Evelyn Webukhulu of Bungoma says they need juice processing factories in areas where fruits are grown to avoid wastage and facilities for harvesting the grains before they are infected with pests. Evelyn again says that they could “make juices from kale and other traditional vegetables or dry them under shade and store them in clean bags for future use. Then when one wants to cook they just need to soak them in water to soften them. She also says they could keep cooked food by making it dry first. Clearly, women have the knowledge on food preservation and food storage, among other issues.

Clearly, women’s knowledge on traditional technology for food preservation has not been tapped. Nothing prevents them from using knowledge and basic technology that is familiar to them in order to deal with food security. The argument in this paper is that women are knowledgeable on issues such as

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.yesmagazine.org/peace-justice/violent-economic-reforms-and-women>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.yesmagazine.org/peace-justice/violent-economic-reforms-and-women>

environmental change, food preservation and storage. However, they need to focus beyond today's needs to technology that can be utilized to store the food for longer. However, this knowledge remains outside the debate of policy makers and planners. This study argues that it is important for us to harness women's experiences in developing our policies.

In order to address the problem of aflatoxin, Syombua Ndito of Mombasa notes that the Government should "...put in place a food drier so that if you want to dry your food you pay a little money to sustain the service instead of allowing food to have aflatoxin and cause deadly diseases among people." This is a creative way of addressing the issue of food preservation. As Ndito pointed out, there is need to create the opportunity for women to have a common place where they can dry their cereals such as maize and even pay for it. This is not rocket science and does not require a lot of investment and yet it is a very crucial process that can protect people from cancer and other diseases. Moreover, it will enhance both food security and food safety.

Irene Randu of Mombasa was among many women that recommended that the Government should build modern silos that are home based for "*there is no use of farming so hard then losing produce due to lack of storage space*". "If you apply ash and the store room is damp it won't help" she adds.

### **4.3.3 Growing Crops**

Women have acquired knowledge on what drought resistance crops are. Trancenca of Makueni talks about the maize "*DLC, 02, 01 and HBC that can grow in areas with low rainfall*". She says a few years ago, people were going to her for seeds. She noted that

they also benefited from low peas seedlings K80 M66 and green grains that can grow where there is low rainfall. Selina from Laikipia states that: "*I practice my crop rotation for soil improvement and increased production*".

It is clear that women have knowledge about soil preservation and farming methods that researchers and policy makers can build on. The question is whether policy makers take into consideration this knowledge in their policy formulation and implementation processes. If we keep searching for the knowledge that women have, we shall find it. It is the American journalist Judith Viorst (p240)<sup>15</sup> who said "*There comes a time when we aren't allowed not to know*" we cannot not know what women's knowledge about critical issues such as food crops, climate change, food security, food preservation, biodiversity, environment, etc are and again the American philosopher of art Susanne Langer (P241) says, "*If we women have new knowledge, we must get a whole world of new questions.*" If we use the correct method such as letting the women tell their story the way they know how to, we shall access the knowledge they have. We have to ask new questions, we have to explore areas we have not explored if we are to map out feminist pathways to Africa's development.

This paper argues that the answers presented here produce the knowledge and wisdom needed in order to move towards a more comprehensive development that will improve the lives of the African people. This knowledge from the women needs to be validated. In addition, women need to believe in themselves and their capacity to transform their

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<sup>15</sup>Karen Weekes (2007)



economies, cultures and world. Recent research by the KNBS and SID (2014) shows that the gap between the rich and the poor is growing bigger in Kenya despite the fact that Kenya's economy is growing.<sup>16</sup> This is in line with the food security research conducted by the AWSC and the KNBS which shows that 18% of Kenyans go to bed hungry. In the Report by the KNBS and SID, 45.2% of the population in Kenya live below the poverty line. This is in spite of the fact that Kenya is joining the league of the top 10 biggest economies in Africa out of 54. It is now the fourth largest economy in sub-Saharan Africa after Nigeria, South Africa and Ghana (Daily Nation, 16<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2014, p12). Clearly, then it is not for lack of resources that we have such a gap between the rich and the poor. Could it be that if we increased the numbers of women in leadership positions and validated their knowledge our situation could change? We have nothing to lose except our biases and ignorance. Research shows that women in Parliament are more likely to initiate and fight for bills that champion social justice, protect the environment and are more likely to invest in projects that others dismiss. They bring their own experiences which are different from those of men. Women are also credited with bringing to the table values of empathy, inclusion across line of authority relational skills and community focus. They are also more likely to bring others in the process because of their experiences at the household level. The Social sector (education, health, food security) that focuses on disadvantaged groups is more likely to be prioritized if women are in leadership.

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<sup>16</sup>Daily Nation, 16<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2014, p12

#### **4.3.4 Seeds**

Women also have knowledge on seeds. Julian from Kirinyaga County notes, "*We now use a lot of fertilizer and have problems with seeds because we cannot now grow the maize the way we used to. Seeds must be certified*" she says. Julian also agrees that "*the main challenges in farming are lack of farm input, lack of fertilizers, pesticides and seeds*" and Gladys from Mwea notes that the seeds they used to get from the National Irrigation Board are the ones they continue to replant. They know that is why the harvest is bad but they have no financial resources to access the inputs or certified seeds.

#### **4.3.5 On Diseases that Affect Crops and Animals**

Evelyn Mebukhulu of Bungoma says: "*There are persistent pests called Osama, a kind of weevil that is difficult to get rid of*". The name is symbolic as we can guess, the illusive nature of Osama Bin Laden is well known. It took the most powerful nation in the world to get to Osama Bin Laden and even for that to happen it took them years to plan. That is how difficult it is to get rid of the pest called Osama. The women call this pest which is very difficult to get rid of, Osama. Waithima from Kirinyaga adds, "*The shambas have turned yellow a symbol of dryness and non-productivity instead of green. Even coffee needs pesticides because lack of it encourages attack by weevils which make the yield go down*". Clearly the women have the knowledge they need to use in growing their crops and protecting them if they have the resources. We need to stop going to the women and telling them what to do, or even giving them knowledge. Instead, we should go to them and

ask what support policy makers and other Government institutions can give them because they know what they need. Extension services providers should go to learn from the women. Let's begin from the position of "they know" rather than they need to be taught. What they know is good for them, if they are assisted to use the knowledge and this will contribute to ensuring food security.

#### **4.3.6 Animals**

Women say that there are many challenges facing poultry farming. They talk about infectious diseases and cats which eat chicken. Redempta from Bungoma says, *"Livestock have various diseases. These diseases include ticks, multi fevers, diarrhoea and coughing"*. Selina of Bungoma adds, *"Elephants, warthogs and monkeys make t our lives difficult."* *"They even visit us in broad daylight when we really don't expect them"*, says Fatuma from Kwale County.

In different words, women are telling the researchers that if provided for with fertilizer, quality seeds, subsidized inputs, farm tools and machines, they can produce more.

In addition, *"women are not looking for free but subsidized inputs so that many people can afford it and hunger will reduce"*, says Julian of Kirinyaga. Women propose cold rooms for storage of milk, particularly for those who are livestock keepers and for cattle dips to be brought nearer the homes so that they do not spend long hours taking the cattle to the dip and then fail to do their work. Women want veterinary officers to visit their farms and give necessary support (Evelyn N. Wabukhulu, Bungoma). Clearly these recommendations are based on their experiences and knowledge. These proposals are in line with

the AWSC/KNBS Report on the Status of Food Security in Kenya. *"If people are given land and water, no one would go to bed hungry"* says Ndito Muasya from Mombasa. But as other women have said climate has been changing. Sometimes it is unpredictable, quality seeds are not available, etc. so you need land and water, yes and more. In making these statements, the desire to revert the deteriorating climate change is inherent. They would like to have regular rainfall, the short and long term rains. Further research on how women think can be reversed.

As indicated earlier in this paper, Wangari Maathai found in women willing and able partners in afforestation. They are in touch with the land; they need the rain and the shade as they work the firewood and the rivers. They would be the perfect partners in environmental protection. Many of the women talk about irrigation as an answer to their problems, *"The rain is not enough anymore, and we have poor rainfall. If we get fertilizer and seeds to plant we should be in a better place than we are currently."* *"If the farmers get seeds it would be important. They need to plant diverse crops such as Irish potatoes and pumpkins that do well and take a shorter time to grow in order to curb food insecurity"* Julian says. "It is clear that women have a lot of knowledge that can be used by policy makers to improve agriculture and change the lives of their families. Priscah Kipchilat from Baringo has a message for us too. She says;

"I learnt a lesson from the drought of 1965 in Tenges. You cannot learn a lesson before experiencing something. I learnt that you cannot wait for something to come. What if it does not

come? The 1965 famine taught me that “

#### 4.3.7 Infrastructure

Regarding infrastructure the women shared their experiences, too. *“I went to Timboroa in 1987 when my daughter was in school. I tell you for two hundred shillings we bought a lot of foodstuffs such as carrots, cabbages and the poor woman who was selling to us was looking sick”*. This is an experience Eugene Wangui of Laikipia had and she cannot forget it after almost thirty years. Where roads are bad, people cannot transport their food to the market for better prices. This makes the farmers either to sell their produce at a throw away price or go to waste because they have no storage facilities. Women propose that the Government should ensure improvement of infrastructure so that farmers can transport their food to the markets and in addition improve on storage and food processing.

#### 4.4 Gender Perspective on some of the Issues

The research on women’s experiences focused on women only as indicated in the discussion in this paper so far. However, the research team had also carried out a baseline survey on food security around the same time. This research team considered sharing some of the findings from male and female key informants of women’s perspectives. In doing this, the researcher chose to look at male and female perspectives on challenges emerging in livelihood activities and options that could be considered to make sure they have adequate food. Table 1 illustrates the findings.

**Table1: Challenges in engaging in livelihood activities.**

Challenges	Sex		Total
	Female (%)	Male (%)	
Unreliable rainfall/drought	38.8	61.2	100.0
Lack of finances	44.8	55.2	100.0
Lack of inputs/high cost of inputs	45.0	55.0	100.0
Small/uneconomical pieces of land	20.0	80.0	100.0
Insecurity	40.0	60.0	100.0
Lack of market	55.6	44.4	100.0
Unemployment	57.1	42.9	100.0
Poor soils	75.0	25.0	100.0
Pests and diseases	41.7	58.3	100.0
Floods	33.3	66.7	100.0
Corruption	0.0	100.0	100.0
Disability	100.0	0.0	100.0
Poor farming methods	0.0	100.0	100.0
Poor infrastructure	57.1	42.9	100.0
Lack of storage facilities	0.0	100.0	100.0
Human- Wildlife Conflict	50.0	50.0	100.0
Drug and alcohol abuse	0.0	100.0	100.0
<b>Average</b>	<b>43.8</b>	<b>56.2</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: AWSC/KNBS Baseline Survey on Food Security, June 2013

As seen from Table 1 there is a considerable difference in the responses of men and women respondents to all of the questions. Note that small uneconomical pieces of land are seen as a problem by 80 per cent of the male respondents while this presents a problem to only 20 per cent of the women. This is a significant difference between men and women. Further research on this may explain that the women are the ones working on these small pieces of land, and therefore, what they see is how to enhance the productivity of this piece of land. The men, on the other hand, may not be working on the pieces of land. This may be too small for them. Note also that 100 per cent of the men see alcohol and drug abuse as a major problem while no woman sees this as a problem. Corruption as a problem also demonstrates the differences between what women and men see as

problems. There were no women who saw corruption as a problem while 100 per cent men think it is a problem. Again, on poor farming methods, no women saw this as a problem while a 100 per cent of the men saw this as a problem. Men and women read from the same page on issues such as unemployment, lack of markets, human and wildlife conflict, among others. However, it is critical to know the different perspectives of men and women.

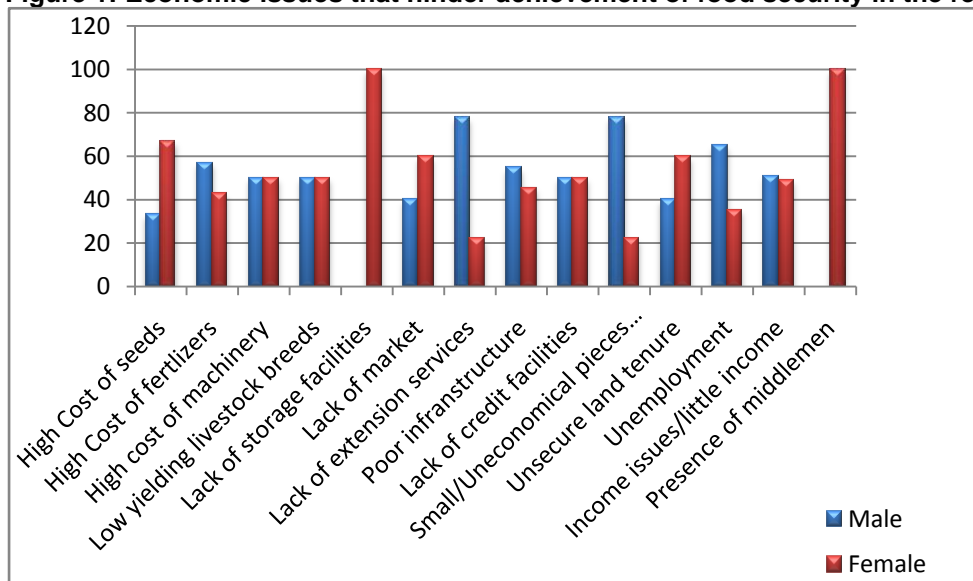
Clearly, men and women have very different challenges in their livelihood activities. These experiences determine policies that we formulate depending on whose perspectives have been sought. For many of these poor women who have to work on small pieces of

land to earn their living, this piece of land is an asset that helps her, no matter how little It may be.

#### 4.5 Economic Activities that Hinder the Achievement of Food Security

One hundred per cent of the women respondents saw the presence of middlemen and the lack of storage facilities, as major hindrances to food security. The other major challenges cited by women included high costs of seeds at 66.7 per cent and insecure land tenure at over 60 per cent and lack of market at 60 per cent each. On the other hand, men cited small/uneconomical pieces of land and lack of extension services at about 78 per cent each. Figure 1 presents these findings.

**Figure 1: Economic issues that hinder achievement of food security in the region**



Source: AWSC/KNBS Baseline Survey on Food Security, June 2013

An equal proportion of men and women cited lack of credit facilities, low yielding breeds of livestock and high cost of farm machinery as hindrances to food security. Clearly, there are different perceptions even on the problems that hinder food security. Given these different perceptions the policy proposals should take into consideration the different perspectives.

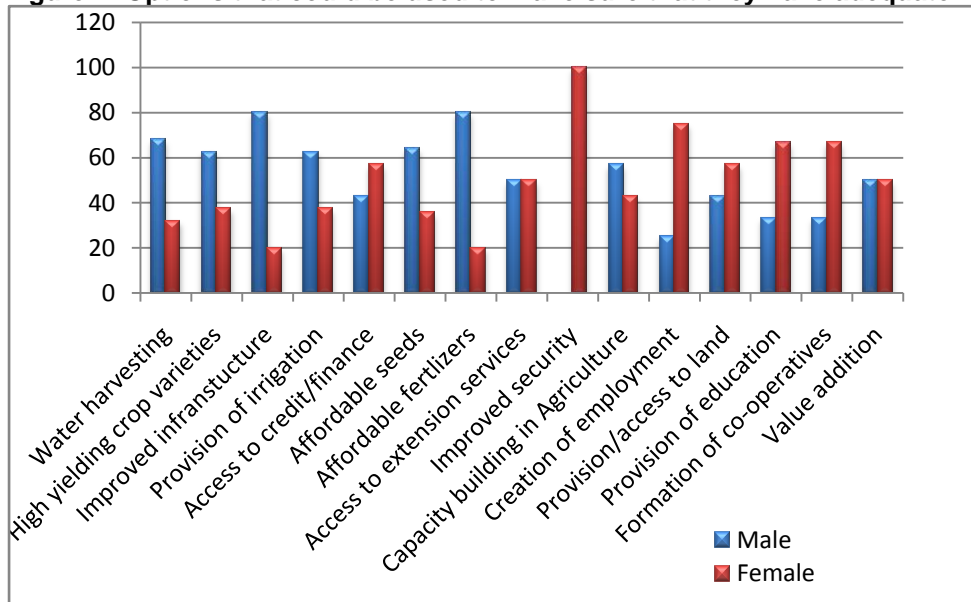
What policy makers and researchers have traditionally done as argued in the theoretical framework is to assume that the male perspective is universal. Clearly, it is not.

## 4.6 Options to Ensure Attainment of Food Security

In an effort to gauge whether there were different recommendations from the male and

female informants' the study gathered their views on how food security can be ensured. The findings are presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Options that could be used to make sure that they have adequate food**



Source: AWSC/KNBS Baseline Survey on Food Security, June 2013

All women saw improvement of security as priority. Men did not consider this a priority at all. Researchers found that insecurity in the rural areas and even in urban areas was a major problem. Stories of people sleeping in the same house with cows, goats and chicken are told, crops harvested at night, shops closed early due to insecurity. It is surprising that male respondents do not refer to this. Maybe it depends on their role in ensuring security for crops, domestic animal and birds, etc. Seventy five per cent of the women respondents want creation of employment, while 66.7 per cent suggest the formation of cooperatives. This is not surprising; women have organized themselves in groups for years. Women groups, Mabati groups, women's land buying companies, have been prevalent in Kenya for decades. Working together has been almost second nature them.

Provision of land is also a major recommendation from women. They work on the land whether they own it or not. It has been the source of their livelihood.

Eighty percent of the male respondents cited improvement of infrastructure and provision of affordable fertilizers while only 20 percent of the women highlighted this issue. Further work needs to be done in this area because in the women only study, affordable fertilizer was a major concern. Sixty eight per cent of the men want rain water harvesting while only 30 per cent of the women want the same. Again, clearly the proposals for both men and women differ. They are important and in fact enrich each other. Without the women's perspectives on insecurity, cooperatives, access to land, the policies would only deal with seeds and fertilizers and rain water harvesting. There is need to deal with security, if not, the crops will

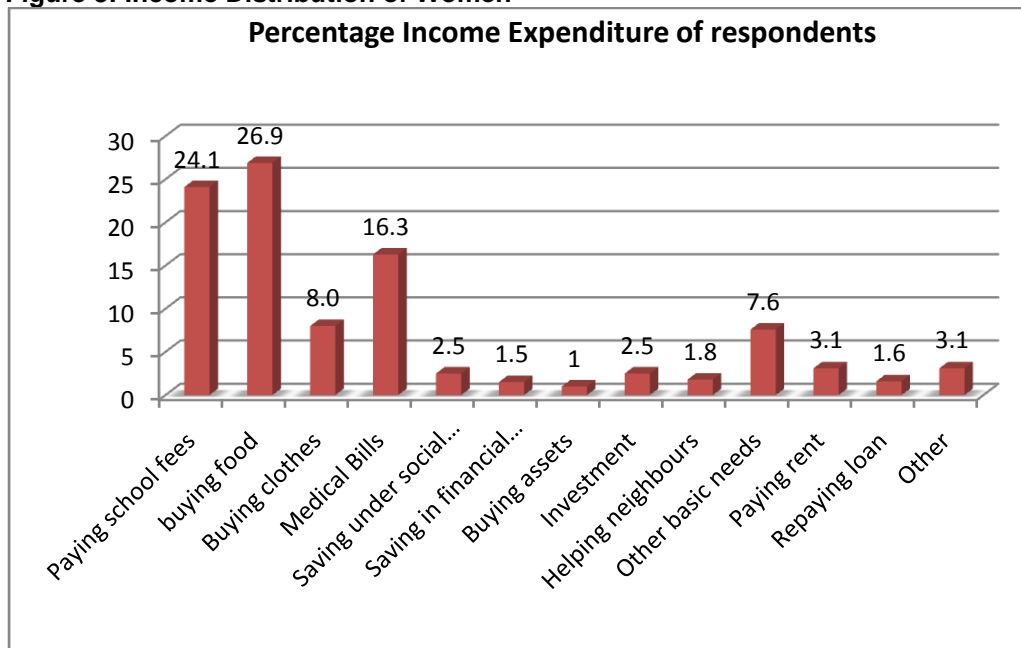
be harvested by those who harvest where they did not sow, as it is happening in many parts of the country where thieves come by night and harvest the crops or even take the animals. Clearly, it is critical to get information from both men and women if we have to move the development agenda to the next level.

I have chosen to address a number of issues. One of the issues is the way women use their

income because it helps one see what women priorities at the household level are. Figure 3 illustrates how women use their income.

This figure is not a comparative one. The writer has chosen to use it as she reflects on the findings presented and concludes the paper.

**Figure 3: Income Distribution of Women**



We note that the major items women use their income on are: buying food (26.9 percent), school fees (24.1 percent), medical bills (16.3 percent), buying clothes (8.0 percent), total for basic needs is 75.4 percent. These are their priorities when they get an income. This study shows that the priorities at the household level focus on the social welfare of the family and by extension would be easily transferred to the national level and local levels when women get into leadership. Research has also shown that women law makers bring to public policy profound and distinct contribution. Figure 3 also shows that 7.6 percent of the income is used to help a neighbour which is much higher

than paying rent. Women's empathy is translated into helping neighbours who have no food. Clearly, if women have more income, those who are disadvantaged are more likely to benefit.

#### **4.7 Reflections and Conclusions**

This paper argues that, women's experiences and knowledge exist and will transform our world if we engage in capturing and utilizing their knowledge for the progress of this country and this continent. Pathways to development must indeed take on the female perspectives and adopt the feminist methodology in creating

new knowledge that brings to the fore women's views, perspectives and knowledge.

The research on women's experiences takes women as the starting point in discussing the issues of food security. The study has highlighted their views on various aspects and there are important elements that they introduce that would not otherwise be visible to the policy makers, development workers and knowledge making research institutions and academicians. The researcher sought women's views and their knowledge on a critical issue that is a daily pre-occupation for African women. The desire to transform the existing knowledge and meanings is important because as Mary Daly states,

*"Our consciousness as women is also confined to what we know, to the language we have available; we may simply reproduce the patterns of oppression in reverse (pg. 165)<sup>17</sup>.*

We need research to help us bring to the fore this transformative knowledge. It is necessary as we study women's knowledge and experiences in the different sectors, to keep in mind this caution that in creating African feminist knowledge, the danger of reproducing the patterns of oppression exists but African feminism is about transforming our societies, breaking the barriers of oppression and not about appropriating an oppressive system for that is what patriarchy in Africa is all about. The search for women's knowledge is to help us create new knowledge and create pathways to Africa's development that will transform our lives, our societies and our continent. This research shows that women know and we can bring this knowledge to visibility and ensure it

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<sup>17</sup> Mary Daly, p165

influences our development policies. This research challenges the often ignored fact that women's views on critical issues should not be left out and we ask with Dales Spender in the article *Necessary Diversity: Variety and Omission* "What does it mean to be a scholar when the methods of scholarship have often ignored women's world view? What does it mean to be objective when objectivity has been exposed as a male name for unquestioned male autocracy (181)<sup>18</sup>. This is the reason why feminist pathways to development at the very heart of feminist knowledge will continue to challenge existing knowledge as we know it and seek to develop alternative knowledge through bringing to focus African women's knowledge. Research needs to validate, proclaim, and share women's knowledge in all spheres of our lives. In recreating African Women's knowledge, we shall be creating knowledge that is more inclusive and more comprehensive and will lead to transformative development in Africa. For this to happen, African women must speak for themselves and about themselves. They must name the world for themselves. This research demonstrates it can happen and the results are very significant as women talk about the realities of their daily lives.

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<sup>18</sup> Dales Spender: 1985

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