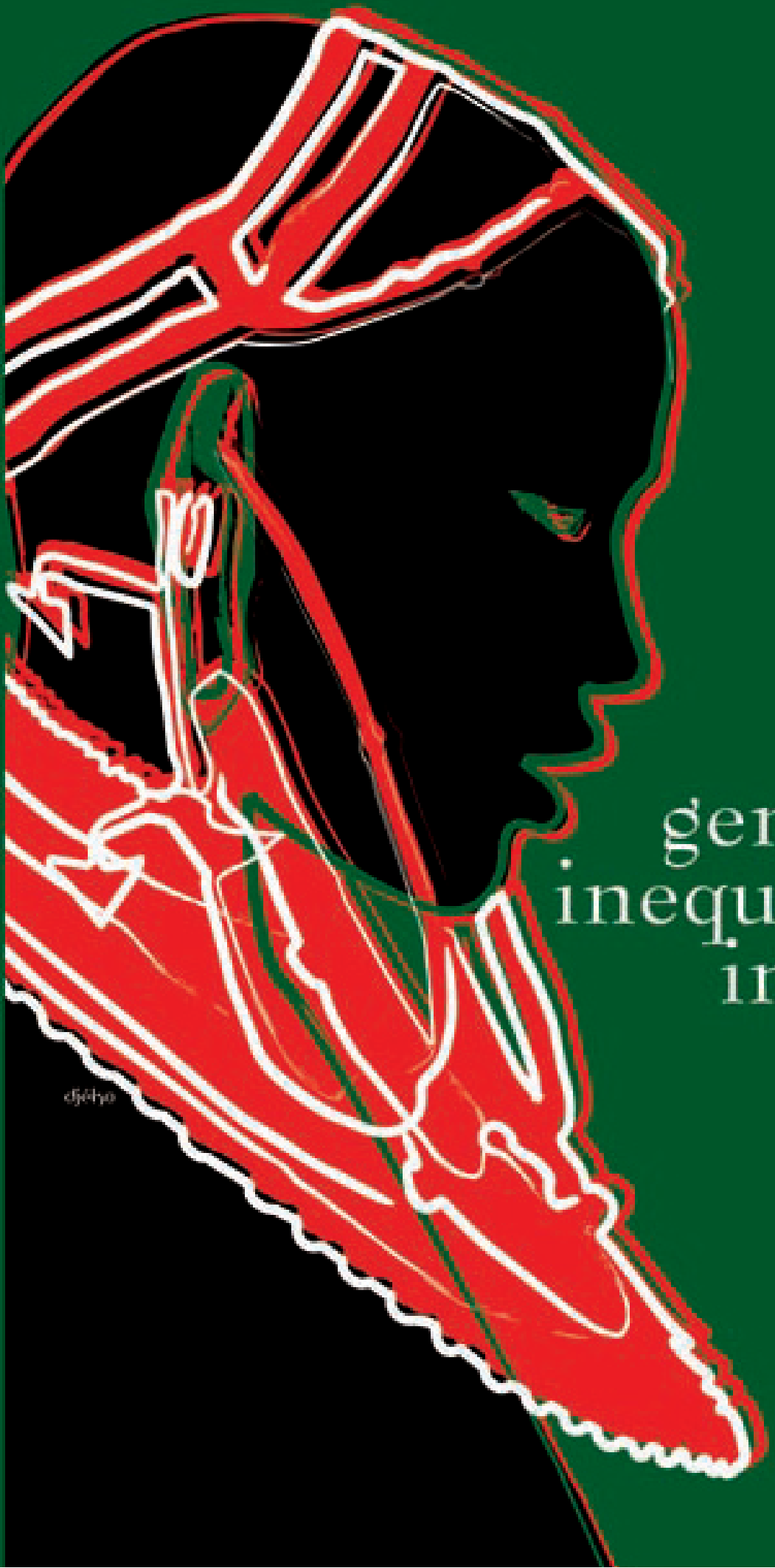

gender inequalities in kenya

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Gender Inequalities in Kenya

Edited by Colin Creighton and Felicia Yieke

with Judith Okely, Lydia Mareri
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General editing by Eunice Smith

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Foreword

During the recently concluded gender consultation on "Empowering women in the Great Lakes Region: Peace, violence and women's leadership"[1] in which representatives of the women's movement, gender academics and government officials met with UNESCO to help determine the organization's social and human sciences program for gender equality and development, it was highlighted that the dissemination of academic research and writings on issues of gender equality and the human rights of women were not sufficiently available either electronically nor in hard copy. It is also recognized that it is difficult to find current and widespread information on African women and gender experts based on the continent. These lacunae are significant for a continent ravaged by war for over the past 30 years as it implies that the input of African women experts are not being sufficiently integrated into current efforts to end and prevent violent conflicts, promote reconciliation, and foster peace building and reconstruction.

Objective research, academic or action, can help elucidate situations being faced by a community, nation or region. Research also allows for adding to the body of knowledge available and in so doing can provide possible solutions and alternatives to help address those issues. This function is particularly relevant for informing the development of policies and strategies, be it for conflict prevention or resolution, to promote sustainable national development, or promote gender equality and respect for the rights of women. Widely available context relevant information, and increased knowledge and understanding of the issues allows for more effective advocacy, changing public opinion, fostering positive cultural and behavioral practices, preventive action and protection of human rights.

It is essential that women as academics and members of civil society organizations should not only be subjects of this research; their voices, perceptions, understandings and writings must also form part of the discourse available to help influence policy, decision and opinion makers. Women constitute half of humanity and although their contribution to national development and

1 The gender consultation organized by UNESCO in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 30 May to 1 June 2005, sought to identify the strategic gender needs of women from the Great Lakes Region and to develop through consultation a plan of action for meeting those needs. Participants included representatives of the Ministries of Women's Affairs from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda, as well as representatives of the women's academic and non-governmental organizations. Participants also included Social Affairs Commissioner of the Africa Union, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region and other regional and international gender experts.

peace-building processes have been neglected or undervalued in the past, their equal participation in finding solutions and proposing alternatives is paramount to the establishment of durable peace and development. This position is endorsed in a number of documents such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Millennium Declaration, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights, and the Dar es Salaam Declaration on Peace, Security, Democracy and Development in the Great Lakes Region. All of these and many other international, regional and national instruments call for the full and equal participation of women in every aspect of development and respect for their rights.

UNESCO's support of women's full and equal participation in post conflict reconstruction and in development processes is what led the Social and Human Sciences sector to agree to support the establishment of an African Great Lakes center for gender research and documentation, as well as the strengthening or establishment of gender studies program at major universities in the sub-region. The Center will principally contribute to developing the body of knowledge available on issues related to the human rights of women and gender equality in the Great Lakes region, and making this knowledge available to policy, decision and opinion makers. Women studies programs will help build a cadre of gender sensitive African graduates who have the requisite competences to mainstream gender into their future work and in the development of their region. Additionally, a portal on the UNESCO website is being created to assist gender researchers from the region to, *inter alia*, publish and disseminate their research findings to the rest of the world, and will include a database of women and gender researchers from the region.

In light of our support of women and gender research in the Great Lakes Region, UNESCO is therefore pleased to be associated with the publication of this book which provides an opportunity for academics from the Great Lakes Region to share their research findings and work with the regional and international community. A wide range of topics are addressed in this publication and many of the recommendations touch upon issues which the Social and Human Sciences sector at UNESCO have identified as priority, including the impact of globalization on women's human rights, the impact of socio-cultural practices, norms, laws on gender equality and women's human rights and the gender dynamics of conflict, peace-building and reconstruction. We hope that readers of this publication will find the analyses useful and be inspired to implement the many recommendations.

Pierre Sané
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UNESCO

Introduction

Colin Creighton and Felicia Yieke

The papers in this volume are a selection of those presented at the Conference on Understanding Gender Inequalities in Kenya, held at Egerton University, Kenya, from 5th to 8th April 2004. Organised by the Centre (now Institute) for Women's Studies and Gender Analysis at Egerton, in conjunction with the Department of Comparative and Applied Sciences at the University of Hull, it brought together academics from inside and outside Kenya, practitioners and politicians to explore the many dimensions of women's subordination and to discuss ways of confronting the entrenched legacy of male domination.

Despite many years of academic analysis and practical feminist activity, despite prestigious international resolutions and declarations of intent, despite the increased prominence of women's issues in the discourses of governmental and non-governmental organisations alike, progress towards gender equality is still painfully slow. Moreover, just as advances seem to be made on particular fronts, new problems emerge. Economic restructuring, the crisis of the state, the explosion of ethnic conflicts and the toll of HIV/AIDS are all examples of issues which have had a profound impact on gender relations and perhaps nowhere have women felt their effects quite so sharply as in sub-Saharan Africa. Given the scope and speed of contemporary change it is thus essential to keep the changing patterns of gender relations under continual examination, to monitor the extent to which progress is being made towards women's emancipation and to interrogate the adequacy of prevailing strategies towards this goal.

Many of the issues which confront women in Africa have strong similarities with those in other parts of the world. Others, however, differ or, as with HIV/AIDS, vary in the severity of their impact. Ideologies, likewise, are not uniform as the contrasts between African and western feminisms demonstrate (Mikell, 1997). Furthermore, the same processes may have very different consequences in different parts of the world. Thus the impact of economic restructuring upon women varies considerably from country to country as well as between groups within individual countries (Beneria and Feldman, 1992). It is therefore vital to contextualise social processes carefully and to analyse the constraints upon and opportunities open to women within particular regional, national and local contexts if we are to avoid overgeneralization and if we are to devise effective solutions to the problems which women face. The papers in this volume provide precisely this contextualised analysis. They examine a selection of significant issues in Kenyan society, ranging from the obstacles facing women micro-entrepreneurs to the role of women in

conflicts amongst pastoralists, from the experiences of trying to incorporate a gender perspective into local urban planning to the potential of networking amongst self-help groups for empowering women.

A central theme of the conference was the empowerment of women in family, community, economic and political life. It is widely accepted that economic empowerment is crucial for women's advances in other spheres of activity. For this reason, increasing attention has been paid in recent years to the growth of women's involvement in small and micro-enterprises and to the possibilities that this fragile toehold may lead to greater economic independence and, consequently, allow women to exercise greater influence in both private and public life.

The potential for consolidating and expanding micro-enterprises is addressed in one paper and accompanying case study. Both contributions draw attention to the difficulties that women entrepreneurs face. Most of the women chose activities because of ease of entry, operated on small, insecure profit margins and invested fairly low amounts of capital, which came predominantly from personal savings, seldom from formal institutions.

Gitile Naituli, Francis Wegulo and Bertha Kaimenyi, studying enterprises in Meru North and Meru Central, found that, once established, significant problems included unrealistic pricing, collecting debts and managing employees. Family support was important for handling the conflicts between business needs and domestic responsibilities. They also show that we obtain a better understanding of the dynamics of these enterprises if we look not only at the individual characteristics of the entrepreneurs, but also at the character of the local economy in which they are situated and the opportunities and constraints which it provides. The paper by Milcah Mulu-Mutuku, Adijah Ali-Olubandwa and Dolphine Odero-Wanga, shows, too, the importance of the context of the specific industry, in this case dairy processing. Here, the greatest challenge was upgrading the low level of technology employed, and acquiring the finance, knowledge and training to be able to do this effectively.

Both studies agree that greater support must be given to these enterprises if they are to expand. The studies confirm, in particular, the inaccessibility of formal credit mechanisms and the marginal position and uncertain future of many of these enterprises.

The interest in micro-enterprise should not draw attention away from the task of improving the position of women in formal employment. Jane Onsongo's paper examines this issue within universities, institutions that should play a leading role in enhancing gender equality but often fail to do so. She shows that admissions are still gender unbalanced, that gender differentiation in the curriculum is still

entrenched and that there are continuing inequalities in staff recruitment, training and promotion across the higher education sector in Kenya. She demonstrates that the culture of universities is a major obstacle for female staff, characterised as it is by an unfriendly work environment, resistance to women's leadership, obstructive institutional practices and a lack of gender awareness among university managers, while sexual harassment remains shamefully rife.

Women with university education are in a relatively privileged section of the labour market. Women in paid employment more often occupy the least skilled and most poorly paid jobs, frequently in areas where trade union organisation is difficult, while problems are often intensified by sexual harassment and the fear of being sacked on becoming pregnant. Women's lack of power in such situations makes it difficult for them to even articulate their grievances, let alone struggle against them.

Felicia Yieke examines one widespread yet generally overlooked way of voicing dissatisfaction, viz., graffiti. Analysing samples of graffiti from factories in the Export Processing Zone of Kenya, she argues that these writings should be taken seriously for they are one way in which otherwise muted individuals can express their feelings and share their concerns with others in the same situation. In the factories under study, graffiti were a medium for voicing criticism of a various matters, including harsh working conditions, lack of maternity or sick leave, poor salaries, sexual harassment and lack of trade union representation.

For greater economic empowerment, women need to acquire the education and skills necessary to compete effectively in the labour market. For this reason, much attention has been paid to analysing the obstacles that girls face in trying to acquire a good education. Equally important is the need to address the learning needs of adult women. Since traditional methods of formal education are suitable for very few adults, new approaches must be found. Shirley Bennett examines the claims that have been made for the potential of e-learning, in both African and western contexts, especially for its apparent ability to provide the flexibility that women, especially, need. Focusing in particular on course design, she argues that while there are various problems connected with e-learning, many of these can be met if close attention is paid to them at the outset and solutions incorporated into the design and implementation of the programme of study.

Better opportunities for employment and education empower women primarily as individuals. The paper by Marion Mutugi on self-help groups studies the empowerment which comes from collective organisation. Women have considerable experience of organising self-help groups, but so far their impact has been limited. They are small, separated from each other and usually short-lived. The Ndia Integrated Women's Development Association provides one model for overcoming

these deficiencies. It links various groups together to share best practice, provide education and training and stimulate new activities. The resources of the network enable projects to be undertaken which would be too ambitious for individual groups alone. The results make a major contribution both to alleviating poverty and to raising the status, self-confidence and local influence of women.

Other papers address policy issues more directly. Charles Lugo's paper directs attention to an aspect of environmental health, viz. the domestic environment, which has been largely neglected by policies which have hitherto focused mainly on the public sphere. This area is of particular relevance to women, because of their responsibility for care of the home. Lugo shows that women who use wood or charcoal for cooking fuel are exposed to levels of respiratory particles far in excess of the safety limits suggested by the WHO and that charcoal users also have a high level of exposure to carbon monoxide. Poor women are especially affected as they more commonly use the cheaper, more polluting fuels. The problem may well have become worse in recent years as research in neighbouring Tanzania indicates that economic hardship has led many households to switch to these fuels (Campbell, 1995). Lugo argues that government policies need to pay more attention to the problem of cooking hazards and should take measures to relieve poor families of the necessity of relying on the more polluting fuels.

Samson Mwangi examines the gender dimension of efforts to develop more adequate urban management and to encourage greater civic engagement. His study of Nakuru town shows that women remain marginal to these efforts and that their needs and potential contribution are ignored, even by agencies that have formally adopted policies of gender equality. The consequences are serious both for women's lives and for urban planning itself, since the needs and priorities of women differ from those of men in transport, housing and a range of basic urban services.

One significant problem for policy-makers is the increase of violent conflict amongst pastoralists. Relating this to issues of gender and culture, Daudi Ekuam argues that women in pastoralist communities formerly played a significant role in what he refers to as 'adaptive' raiding with its controlled and limited objectives. They contributed to the settlement of conflict as much as in encouraging and rewarding warriors. In the more rapacious commercial or 'predatory' raiding of the present, women suffer more severely yet have less opportunity to help in conflict resolution. Ekuam argues that it is necessary to find new ways of bringing women more formally into the political process and utilising their negotiating skills in peace building.

The role of culture in gender domination is the subject of Elizabeth Orchardson-Mazrui's wide-ranging survey of the various ways in which women are denigrated, stereotyped and controlled by the images and language deployed against them.

Such representations have a twofold significance. As well as upholding structures of power, they have the ability to penetrate the consciousness of women and mould the very way women perceive themselves. She explores this theme in relation to its impact upon sexual relations, health and reproductive rights, education, career choices and political involvement and leadership. She emphasizes the pervasive use of inflammatory or derogatory sexual language and images in controlling women and the role of the media, in particular, in this regard. The struggle against negative cultural representations must be seen as an important part of the broader process of empowering women.

Most of the contributors suggest strategies for improving the position of women in the areas that they analyse in their papers. In the concluding chapter, Rose Odhiambo and Ruth Odhiambo take an overall view of the measures needed to improve the position of women in Kenya. Covering the law, property ownership, education and the media, they itemise those reforms which would do most to transform the lives of women in Kenya today.

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1

Entrepreneurial Characteristics among Micro and Small-Scale Women Owned Enterprises in North and Central Meru Districts, Kenya

Gitile Naituli, Francis N. Wegulo and Bertha Kaimenyi

Abstract

The role of the micro and small-scale enterprises (MSEs) sector in the development process has been at the centre of the development debate for the last three decades in Kenya and elsewhere in the developing world. Increasingly, the sector is perceived as a critical component in the creation of much needed skills, employment, and generation of livelihoods for a growing number of people within the urban as well as the rural sector. This paper examines entrepreneurial characteristics of women-owned enterprises in Meru North and Meru Central districts in Kenya, and how these impact on the growth of these enterprises. Findings from this study show that entrepreneurial characteristics such as age, education, attitudes and perception have a significant relationship with the growth of micro and small-scale enterprise. Other characteristics critical to the growth of MSEs include start up capital and a conducive environment, both business and regulatory. This paper is accompanied by a case-study of women-owned dairy-processing micro-enterprises which analyses five major obstacles to their business success. Both studies concur in suggesting that future development of MSEs, especially those owned by women, should be deliberately targeted and guided by clear policies, which are broad and holistic in their content and approach.

Introduction

Recent estimates of the number of self-employed men and women in Kenya shows an upward trend, especially in the 1990s. Between 1991 and 1999, for instance, male self- employment had increased by 30 per cent. The number of self-employed women, however, increased by a higher rate - 70 per cent (CBS, 1998, 1999). Women now account for nearly half of the self-employed in Kenya. Despite this rise, research has not kept pace with the growing importance of the issue and our knowledge of female entrepreneurship in Kenya is still fairly limited. Until now, the

work of ILO (1972), McCormick (1988), Livingstone (1991) and King (1996) have been the most influential studies in this area. This project and the accompanying case study were designed to build on previous work in documenting constraints which women face and also in emphasizing the methods by which such problems are overcome.

Research design

The researchers adopted a survey method of investigation to explore the ways in which businesses, especially those owned by women, develop. An inventory survey of 1,024 women-owned enterprises was supplemented by a further in-depth study of 257 women-owned enterprises (19 small scale enterprises and 238 micro-businesses). The sample was structured to reflect different business and industrial situations. As such, it is illustrative rather than representative of the variety of ways in which women participate in business. The businesses ranged from conventionally female activities such as catering and retailing, to non-traditional activities such as construction and transport (Matatu businesses).

Enterprises in the sample varied in age between one and ten years. Sole traders and partnerships were the most common type of enterprise, especially among the younger businesses. Limited liability enterprises were favoured by older, more established businesses. The 257 businesses surveyed provided employment for 198 proprietors, 146 family members, 179 labourers, 57 apprentices and 21 part time workers. This translates to a total of 601 people or approximately 2.34 positions per business.

The business owners came from a wide range of backgrounds. The majority were married, and a large percentage (75 per cent) had children. The number of dependants ranged from one to nine with the majority supporting one to six dependants including the entrepreneur's own children and other extended family members. The educational backgrounds of the women were generally low. Only 19.9 per cent had taken part in full- or part-time education and of these, none had attained any meaningful qualification. In general, business and technical training did not appear to be a high priority for Meru women entrepreneurs. About one entrepreneur in three had received some type of training in the past. Two thirds of the training offered was in the area of production and marketing. None had training in the all-important area of accounting and general record keeping. Previous work experience indicates that a majority of the sample was highly motivated towards a career of some kind and had spent a large proportion of their lives at work or looking for jobs. In addition, most had an exceptionally positive attitude towards working.

A very low proportion of the sample (18 per cent) had some family connection with self-employment. Eleven percent had husbands or close relatives who were

self-employed, and seven per cent came from families where either their mother or father were self-employed.

Social-cultural constraints

Researchers face certain methodological difficulties when relying upon verbal reports and individual explanations to investigate previous or even current experiences. Not only are there problems concerning the accuracy of retrospective recall, but also difficulties in distinguishing 'perceived problems' from 'real problems'. Gender-based research is no exception. The social and ethnic backgrounds of the interviewees often determine whether discrimination is perceived and recognized as such. In other instances, the interview itself may be a contributing factor. The process of probing and encouraging the interviewee to discuss experiences in terms of gender may raise the level of consciousness and recognition of gender discrimination aside from ethnic discrimination.

Many interviewees in this study stated that they were not feminists or tribalists and, moreover, appeared hostile to that philosophy. In contrast, a significant minority (38 per cent) did believe that some aspects of business ownership were harder for women entrepreneurs, despite their inability to identify broad areas in which discrimination exists. Societal attitudes to the ownership of business by women and the lack of any previous opportunity to develop business skills and knowledge were cited as the key socio-cultural constraints.

This awareness of gender differences among women entrepreneurs in Meru North and Meru Central may, in part, be a function of two particular factors. Firstly, the general awareness of the constraints on labour force participation for those women who had previous formal employment and secondly, direct experience of gender discrimination as a self-employed woman.

The issue of cultural constraints is central to many of the findings of the study, particularly in the attribution of certain business problems to gender-related barriers. In order to overcome this methodological difficulty, the research team took a pragmatic approach and without external evidence to support statements made, allowed the respondents to describe their own beliefs at length whenever possible.

Reasons for establishing enterprise

Respondents gave various reasons for establishing their business. Nearly half (42 per cent) chose their activities because they were easy to start and run (Table 1). Another 15 per cent gave the existence of demand for their commodities and services as the

reason for initiating their business venture. Twelve per cent chose their business activity because they had the required experience and skills. Very few entrepreneurs (2 per cent) inherited the business they were operating. Most of the respondents are therefore first generation entrepreneurs.

Table 1
Reasons for starting business enterprise (%)

Reasons for establishing business enterprise	Number of respondents	Percent
Experience and skill	30	11.7
Easy to start and run	109	42.4
Demand exists	39	15.2
Inherited	5	2.0
Had talent for it	3	1.1
High growth potential	17	6.6
High/stable return	25	9.7
No competition	29	11.3
Total	**257**	**100.0**

Source: Survey data, 2001

This is not surprising considering that most of the businesses are relatively young. In the sampled divisions - Igembe Central, Laare, Uringu, Tigania East, Timau, Mirigamieru East, Nknene and Buuri - the mean number of years that the businesses have been in operation is 5.2, 4.3, 4.6, 5.4, 5.0, 4.9, 5.1, and 4.7 respectively. The overall mean age is therefore 4.9 years, which corroborates findings obtained by Ndua and Ngethe in their 1984 study of Nakuru town.

Additionally, the data show that the entrepreneurs' choice of a particular business activity was based either on demand or supply factors. Fifty seven per cent of the entrepreneurs chose their activities because of supply factors. Almost half of the enterprises (42 per cent) are demand-driven, notably those started because of the existence of demand (15 per cent) plus those started for reasons such as lack of competition (11per cent), high or stable return (9 per cent) and high growth potential (7 per cent).

A critical examination of these reasons shows why retail trade dominates the MSE sector. Experience and skills are an important prerequisite for starting some kind of manufacturing or service business, yet only 12 per cent gave this as a reason for going into business. In the retail trade sub sector, experience and skills are much less relevant for starting and running a business than in manufacturing and services.

Motivation for starting business

The search for independence was the most cited reason for starting business. A single notion of independence, however, masks the complexities of the issue. Women at different stages of their lives defined independence differently. These interpretations usually depended upon the background, experience and aspirations of the entrepreneurs.

For many of the younger women (under 20), the 'search for independence' was associated with freedom from the misery of unemployment and with recognition that self-employment offered the only way out. Self-employment was, therefore, seen as a long-term career option. These entrepreneurs believed they could create their own career path and liberate themselves from the indignity of poverty and unemployment. None of these 'young women' cited the profit motive as the primary motivation for starting business. They saw success in terms of personal integrity and survival. Profitability and growth were seen, initially at least, as an external confirmation of their ability to beat the odds against them rather than a primary goal.

Not all the younger women shared these motivations for business ownership and ambitions for bettering their lives. Some had 'drifted' into business. There was often an acknowledged reflection of the drudgery and hopelessness of formal employment in governmental institutions. This often stemmed from a fear that they lacked the motivation and courage necessary to fight ethnic discrimination in these institutions. All 'drifters' were government employees before starting their enterprises even though the 'push' of ethnic discrimination was not the sole determining factor in the self-employment decision. More positive 'pull' factors, such as a desire for autonomy, were also cited.

A paltry, about two per cent of the respondents, mainly older women operating small-scale enterprises (5 to 19 employees), had started their businesses after a successful managerial career, usually in a related area. Like many male entrepreneurs, these women often found employment confining and frustrating. They sought independence and autonomy in self-employment. These entrepreneurs sought independence through self-employment for several reasons. Many were frustrated because of career blocks, which they perceived as gender related. They described a 'glass ceiling' effect; they could see the top but not reach it. This produced feelings of lack of recognition and progression within the organization. Although nominally successful in their careers, many were disillusioned with formal employment. Self-employment gave them the freedom to fulfil their ambitions in work and at home.

The last group of women entrepreneurs, comprising a mere one per cent, came from families where self-employment was a traditional occupation. Their

perception of self-employment was unusual among the sample. Business ownership was the norm, and employment the exception. For some, their only experience of employment had been family-owned enterprises.

Although there are common threads and experiences to self-employment, the study emphasizes the heterogeneity of women entrepreneurs. They responded in diverse and individual ways and had varied reasons and motivations for starting their enterprises.

The study finds little support for a singular explanation of reasons and motivations for starting business. Respondents stated that the impetus came through a combination of factors. Only a small minority (five per cent) stated that although they had harboured a desire for self-employment for a long period, the specific stimulus was a single factor. Most of them cited factors such as retrenchment or ethnic discrimination as the impetus. Others cited a change in their personal circumstances, such as marriage, divorce or death of a spouse, as the factor that led them to re-evaluate their working lives. Few, however, felt that self-employment was a negative reaction. Rather, it was seen to be a positive step after a possibly negative experience. For many respondents, especially those with management experience, there was a close link between work before and after self-employment. For other women entrepreneurs, the move into self-employment was achieved by building the business from domestic skills where relevant experience could be effectively exploited.

Business choice

Data on education shows that 91 per cent of the women entrepreneurs surveyed have some education, 52 per cent having primary education and 40 per cent polytechnic, secondary school and above. Only four per cent are illiterate. Just over half (56 per cent) of the entrepreneurs did not have any kind of business training. From Table 2a, it is observed that 33.1 per cent of women entrepreneurs with and without business training had no difficulty in choosing a business activity, but 66.9 per cent had. On the other hand, 41.3 per cent of the educated and uneducated entrepreneurs had no difficulties in choosing a business activity, but the other 58.7 per cent had (Table 2c). Additionally, 85 per cent of the entrepreneurs had some other income-generating activities prior to starting their current enterprise (Table 2b). It was hypothesized that having some education, business training, and also having previously engaged in income-generating activities would make the choice of business activity easier than when one is illiterate, untrained and without previous business experience. The three hypotheses: namely business training, ownership of other income generating activities, and formal education were tested (Table 2a, 2b, and 2c).

Table 2a
Business training (%)

Business Training	Not Trained	Trained	Total	Overall Frequency
No difficulty	48	37	85	33.1
Had difficulty	98	74	172	66.9
Total	146	111	257	100.0
Chi- square				0.02102
D.F				1
Lambda				0.000000
Phi				0.01726
Contingency coefficient				0.01726
Significance				0.7868

Source: Survey Data, 2001

Table 2b
Previous income generating activities (%)

Previous income generating activity	No other income generating activity	With other income generating activities	Total	Overall frequency
No difficulty	17	78	95	37.0
Had difficulty	21	141	162	63.0
Total	38	219	257	100.0
Chi-square				3.86834
D.F				1
Lambda				0.01988
Phi				0.14497
Contingency coefficient				0.13185
Significance				0.0632

Source: Survey Data, 2001

Table 2c
Education (%)

Education	No education	With education	Total	Overall frequency
No difficulty	28	78	106	41.3
Had difficulty	20	131	151	58.7
Total	48	209	257	100.00
Chi-square				0.00000
D.F				1
Lambda				0.00000
Phi				0.1147
Contingency coefficient				0.01147
Significance				1.00000

Source: Survey Data, 2001

For the entire sample, the decision to engage in a particular business activity was not influenced by business training or education. Being educated or illiterate, trained or untrained does not make the choice of business any easier or more difficult. The third null hypothesis (no association between having other income generating activity and choice of business) could not be rejected even though the association found is weak: Phi = 0.14497 and contingency coefficient = 0.13185. Having previous income-generating activities can make the choice of current business somewhat easier.

These findings contradict Carr (1993), who found a strong relationship between education, business training and choice of a business venture in a study carried out in Southern Africa. One possible explanation for this apparent contradiction is that available business opportunities in the study area require no prior business training. The majority of women enterprises in North and Central Meru are in the retail trade sub-sector. They can therefore be run with little or no business training at all. Another explanation is that the opportunity cost of acquiring any business training is relatively high, given that initial capital is a major constraint (see sources of finance to start business). These results could also be explained by the fact that training opportunities are not only unavailable, but also limited. The results also support the researchers' observation that 'there was a general lack of appreciation for formal business training in the study area'.

Another plausible explanation is that the range of available business opportunities in North and Central Meru does not require much education to start and run. The marginal effect of an extra year of training on the difficulty of choosing a business activity is near to zero. It could also be that the nature and level of

aggregate demand for goods and services in the study area is low. This means that any slightly sophisticated supply driven business has limited demand for its goods and services. In other words, because of under-development in both districts, existing and potential entrepreneurs are forced to engage in activities not commensurate with their training. Given this situation, the non-existence of a relationship between education and the choice of a business activity should not be surprising.

Having previous income-generating activity, especially if that activity is a business, appears to make the choice of subsequent business activity easier. The most obvious reason for this is the experience gained over time. The advantage of having been on the ground and exposed can also enable the entrepreneur to know the general trend of business and determine where new business opportunities are. In addition, there is the advantage of having some investment funds or being able to easily raise the money from past savings. An entrepreneur entering the world of business for the first time may not have all these advantages.

Sources of finance to start business

An important aspect of the nature of women-owned enterprises in North and Central Meru is the small amounts of initial capital used to set them up. The average amount of initial capital investment was Kenya Shillings 5,690. While it is appreciated that this amount is not very small in relation to the general levels of incomes in Meru and especially among women, and given the socio-economic backgrounds of the entrepreneurs under study, it nevertheless underscores the 'ease of entry' into the MSE sector. This low figure also reflects the nature of women owned enterprises in the study area. In fact, when the modal values are considered, the smallness of women enterprises becomes further evident. In Igembe Central, the modal figure stood at KSH 6,000 per enterprise while the corresponding figures for Mirigamieru East, Laare, Nkuene, Tigania East, Uringu, Buuri and Timau were KSH 7000, 3000, 5000, 2000, 1500, and 1000 respectively.

Another important aspect, which can be deduced from these 'start up capital' figures, is that they seem to correspond to economic endowments within and among the divisions in which the study was conducted. Mirigamieru East, for example, which has a higher per capita income, had a higher mean initial capital invested followed by Igembe Central and Nkuene divisions, both of which also enjoy a higher per capita income than Tigania East, Timau and Buuri.

Money for starting operations came primarily from personal savings. Financial institutions, formal savings and lending organizations, and groups did not play a significant role in financing new women business ventures. In Igembe

Central, 86 per cent of the women surveyed stated that their initial capital was from personal savings with seven per cent (five respondents) citing loan advances from friends or relatives, as the source of initial capital (Table 3). In Mirigamieru East, 90 per cent of the women entrepreneurs stated that their initial capital came from personal savings, while loans from friends or relatives helped to set up eight per cent of the sampled business enterprises. As regards Nkuene, the other division with extensive and rich agricultural resources, it was observed that a somewhat smaller percentage - 60 per cent (19 respondents) - relied on their personal savings while 23 per cent (seven respondents) deployed funds raised from friends or relatives.

The data further reveal that in these agriculturally richer divisions of North and Central Meru - Igembe Central, Mirigamieru East (though not in Nkuene) - a larger proportion of women entrepreneurs were more able to finance their initial capital requirements. This suggests that whatever these entrepreneurs were doing before venturing into the MSE sector was above subsistence level. In Tigania East, Uringu, Laare, Timau and Buuri, the importance of relatives and friends as a source of initial capital is underlined by the percentage contribution of this category. The respective percentage values were 16, 19, 13, 22 and 30 (Table 3)

Table 3
Sources of "initial business capital" by division (%)

Division	Sample Size	Family and personal savings	Borrowed from an NGO	Borrowed from a Financial Institution	Borrowed from a friend or a relative	Received money from other sources
Igembe Central	77	86.0	1.0	5.0	7.0	1.0
Laare	18	69.6	6.0	5.9	13.1	5.4
Tigania East	10	72.4	-	-	15.8	11.8
Uringu	15	68.6	2.0	1.0	19.2	9.2
Mirigamieru East	85	89.7	-	1.0	8.3	1.0
Nkuene	32	59.6	-	3.0	23.4	14.0
Buuri	12	61.9	-	-	25.9	12.2
Timau	8	71.3	-	-	21.5	7.2

Source: Survey Data, 2001

The fact that so many women entrepreneurs borrowed from relatives and friends, suggests that they are not likely to be significantly better off financially than their lenders. This in a sense explains the low levels of initial capital investment and confirms findings by Scott (1995:190) that women enterprises are over-reliant on very limited sources of funds, 'usually coming from the family unit'.

Those women entrepreneurs who did not cite any of the above sources of initial capital cited 'others'. These include sources such as retirement and terminal benefits for those retrenched or retiring from formal employment. Some enterprises were set up after the owner disposed of an asset or farm produce, and she would therefore not view the income resulting from such a sale as personal savings.

The claim by the majority of women entrepreneurs in all the divisions that they initiated their businesses out of personal savings seems somehow inaccurate given that very few claimed to have had wage employment prior to starting their businesses. The study therefore sought to clarify this issue by seeking further information on the sources of personal savings. The results are tabulated on Table 4.

Sources of personal savings. What is surprising when one looks at the responses on sources of personal savings is that only a very small minority (13 per cent) (Table 4) in Uringu division had some form of employment. In fact, of the entire sample in Meru North district, only 49 of the 120 respondents reported that they had some wage employment prior to starting their enterprises. So where did the personal savings come from? A plausible explanation is that the money must have come from wage employment in agriculture. A majority of workers in North and Central Meru in general do not consider wage employment in agriculture as earnings arising out of employment. So when this question was put to them, they most probably understood it as seeking information on employment from private companies or the civil service. However, of all those who cited personal savings as the source of initial capital in Mirigamieru East and Nkuene division, the majority - 58 per cent in the former and 53 per cent in the latter - had some form of employment. When probed further, they revealed that most of the employment was in agricultural co-operatives. This raises quite considerably the contribution of agriculture to the financing of rural women's enterprises.

Table 4
Sources of personal savings by division (%)

Division	Sample size	Previous employ-ment	Sale of farm produce	Sale of assets and or livestock	Cash gifts from friends and relatives	Other sources
Igembe Central	77	50.7	20.8	11.7	7.8	9
Laare	18	38.9	16.7	16.7	5.5	22.2
Tigania East	10	10.0	20.0	60.0	10.0	-
Uringu	15	13.3	13.4	53.3	6.7	13.3
Mirigam-ieru East	85	57.7	22.4	4.7	7.0	8.2
Nkuene	32	53.0	18.8	9.4	6.3	12.5
Buuri	12	-	17.0	58.0	17.0	8.0
Timau	8	12.5	25	62.5	-	-

Source: Survey data, 2001

Another possible explanation is that some women entrepreneurs have temporarily withdrawn from the agricultural sector to join the MSE sector. Even though they consider their enterprises to be a different operation from their farms, they nevertheless considered themselves both businesswomen and farmers. It is this group, comprising 23 per cent of respondents in Mirigamieru East, who claimed that the savings came from the sale of farm produce. This strong interdependence between rural women's enterprises and agriculture has some very important economic implications for rural development. For instance, it can act as a remedy in alleviating unemployment of women in rural areas by providing non-farm employment. On the other hand, it could easily lead to labour shortages in agricultural areas, especially for planting, weeding and harvesting, since these are tasks which are mainly carried out by women in Meru North and Meru Central.

In Igembe Central, the percentage contribution of farm produce to personal savings is similar to that observed in Mirigamieru East and Nkuene. In Laare division, the contribution stood at 19.7 per cent, which is not statistically different from the percentage contribution of this category in Igembe Central, Mirigamieru East, and Nkuene divisions, which stood at 21.8, 22.6, and 20.5 per cent respectively. This clearly indicates the importance of agriculture as a source of income for rural inhabitants. In Tigania East, Buuri and Timau, however, the percentages are lower at 15, 14, and 13, respectively. However, these relatively low amounts are more than compensated for by the sale of livestock, such as cows, which raised 60 per cent in Tigania East, 58 per cent in Buuri, and 63 per cent in Timau. In these three divisions, raising livestock is more widespread than it is in Igembe Central, Mirigamieru East and Nkuene. Laare division is an interesting case because here, agriculture and the raising of livestock are equally important. It follows therefore that in these divisions, most entrepreneurs would sell off some livestock and set up businesses. This finding is consistent with findings (Schragg et al., 1992; Carter and Cannon, 1998; Miner, 1999) that concluded among other things that successful women entrepreneurs came from close and supportive families. This conclusion is suggested by the fact that in North and Central Meru, culture dictates that women do not own livestock. That their husbands allow them to sell livestock to set up enterprises more than proves the reality of family support.

Reasons for choosing initial source of finance. A majority (69 per cent) of women owning small scale enterprises, and 56 per cent of those operating micro enterprises, were compelled to use personal and family finance due to lack of the collateral required by financial institutions. The implication here is that women entrepreneurs in rural areas know of the existence of formal financial institutions, but do not take advantage of them. This finding corroborates Carr (1993), who found that very few women in Southern Africa apply for loans because they fear discrimination and also fear taking risks, and the high interest charged on loans. They also lack both collateral and business and managerial skills. Taking out a loan

to buy equipment or rent premises is often too much of a risk for a woman who is ill equipped with technical and managerial skills. Consequently, women tend to start small businesses requiring small amounts of capital. This suggests that the problem of finance needs to be addressed if women are to engage in growth-oriented businesses with prospects for employment creation and income generation.

Operational characteristics

Broadly speaking, the same operational problems - finding clients, marketing, finance and so on - are faced by all business owners. It was difficult to establish the extent to which these problems were exacerbated by gender. Certain generic problems of running a small business - late payment of bills, a tendency to underprice to accommodate the members of the extended family, finding and keeping clients and sourcing for inputs - were harder for the women interviewed to resolve because of their poor access to conventional business networks and support services. The effect of running the enterprise upon the entrepreneur was especially hard to deal with because of role expectations and poor family support. The effects of these operational constraints and the strategies used to overcome them varied between enterprises.

Younger women running businesses with only a small capital base were less able to cope with late payments. Lack of assertiveness in collecting debts was perceived by some women as having a gender dimension. Many women entrepreneurs used price cutting as a market entry strategy. For many respondents, persistent undercharging reflected a lack of confidence in their business skills and poor access to male dominated business networks.

Difficulties in accessing initial capital, coupled with delayed payments and under pricing had a direct impact on many enterprises. The majority of the entrepreneurs were unable to achieve desired results within the first two years. Small-scale enterprises (employing 5-19 employees), most of which invested heavily at start-up, demonstrated an ability to access ongoing and growth capital and subsequently a greater rate of growth as measured by the number of employees. It would seem, therefore, that once obstacles regarding finance have been overcome, usually at start-up, women entrepreneurs have few problems with operating capital. The barriers for women occur at certain key transitional stages: the move from part to full time working, the start-up and the move to a new market requiring large capital inputs.

Delegation as a constraint

Employee relations were seen as posing the most difficult and intractable of all problems, even for those with managerial experience in larger organizations. Older women often successfully used an overtly matriarchal style, characterized by a family view of employee relations. Young entrepreneurs, inexperienced in management and lacking the skills to develop a credible management style, struggled the most. Some suggested that male employees were unwilling to accept female employers and channelled requests through the husband or other male relative. Three respondents referred to an assumed 'competence', which tends to be attributed to most men, but not to most women.

Many stated that an important feature of their success lay in earning credibility, not just with their business associates and customers, but also with their employees. Most women felt strongly that many of the problems of credibility were culturally and gender related.

Constraints arising from lack of family support

Family reaction to plans for self-employment varied substantially. Family support was of crucial importance to the decision to start an enterprise. Doubts and disapproval were common. When this occurred, role conflicts were unresolved and disheartening. Family support, when forthcoming, contributed greatly to self-confidence.

Attempts to overcome the conflicts between traditional female roles and the needs of businesses sometimes led to deterioration in family relationships. Studies (Ngau and Keino, 1996; Still and Timms, 2000) suggest that male business owners can expect a great deal of domestic and business support from 'contributing wife or wives'. However, women cannot rely on their spouses for the same support, and consequently they have to carry the full burden of business and domestic commitments.

The effects of self-employment upon relationships with husbands were varied. A surprisingly small minority (nine per cent) stated that relationships had deteriorated since they had become business owners. The majority (78 per cent) felt that their relationships had improved. Married women were the least likely to have suffered in terms of personal circumstances since becoming business owners. In the light of previous studies, this result was unexpected, but may be explained by a number of factors. As emphasized by Tellegen (1997), micro and small-scale enterprises are important for women since they provide an important means of earning an income. Poor people without any other source of income

cannot afford to be unemployed. For many African women belonging to the poorest segment of society, a small business becomes an essential and important part of their lives. The moral support provided by spouses therefore becomes a major asset.

Criteria for measuring success

The respondents were asked to outline the various criteria by which they measured success and to assess the relative performance of their enterprises. An overwhelming majority (86 per cent) measured success in terms of how well the enterprise satisfied individual needs rather than in conventional terms of profitability and growth prospects. After individual financial needs were met, women saw continuing or excess profitability as an external measure of success rather than a primary goal. Gender-related differences could be discerned in the particular motivations that led to business ownership, the problems faced by women entrepreneurs and in the needs which the enterprises were designed to meet.

Strategies employed by women entrepreneurs

Strategies to overcome these constraints varied according to individual experience and attitude. Young women, mainly those with some secondary education, adopted a deliberate strategy of training as an apprentice, sometimes for no pay, to compensate for their youth and lack of relevant business and career experience. Older and more established women tended towards a strategy of 'de-personalization' to overcome gender related problems: sublimating their gender and personal position to gain external credibility and confidence. Conversely, several women thought that they were at an advantage over the competition by refusing to 'play men'. Using this strategy, many respondents (46 per cent) stated that they were willing to exploit their femininity in certain types of negotiations to gain competitive advantage.

The most common strategy, used by over 90 per cent of women at various times, was that of networking. Not only was this an effective management strategy, it was also used as a mechanism to drum up support at start-up, gather advice and research the market. Many, particularly those operating small-scale enterprises, used networking as a means of establishing themselves in business. The strategy was also used to help redress the isolation of business ownership. Established business owners recognized the need for networking as a tool to help other women in business. Consequently, many women acted as role models and 'mentors' to other women starting a business in North and Central Meru.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that women owners of small and micro enterprises in North and Central Meru face specific constraints. The extent to which these are either caused or exacerbated by gender is difficult to quantify. While many self-employed women perceive gender related problems, others either have differing experiences or do not recognize constraints as having a gender dimension.

The study concludes that there are certain strategies that Meru women adopt to counter either direct or indirect discrimination. These vary from enterprise to enterprise and are often dependent upon the age and experience of the owner/manager. When successful, they are undoubtedly influential in the transformation of a micro-enterprise (0-4 employees) into a small-scale enterprise (5 to 19 workers).

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Case study: Challenges to the Advancement of Women-Owned Dairy Processing Micro-Enterprises in Kenya

Milcah Mulu-Mutuku, Adijah Ali-Olubandwa and Dolphine Odero-Wanga

Introduction

The following case study, based on research conducted in 2001 in Nairobi, Nakuru and Kiambu on 108 women micro-entrepreneurs in one specific economic sector, the dairy processing industry, examines the problems confronting these women in the conduct of their businesses. The study was funded by the Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA).

Dairy processing would appear to provide a good avenue for women micro-entrepreneurs to enter the business world, not only because it shares the general advantages of micro-enterprises (Child, 1977; World Bank, 1991; Parker et al., 1995), but more specifically because there are growing market opportunities for value-added milk products as a result of the increased trend towards urbanisation and market liberalisation (Thapa, 2000; Staal et al., 1998). The demand for milk and milk products in developing countries is expected to grow by almost 60 per cent by the year 2020 (Dugdill, 2000).

Most of the respondents in the study had many years of formal education: 75 per cent had secondary school education and above, with 14.8 per cent having post-secondary school education. Only two per cent had no formal education at all. Women in this sector thus seem to be better-educated than the wider sample of women micro-entrepreneurs in the study by Naituli, Wegulo and Kaimenyi. This may be because dairy-processing is a technology-oriented sector and having some formal education is advantageous. However, only half of those who had post-secondary school education were trained in fields related to their businesses.

The women used five sources of start-up capital for their enterprises. As with Naituli et al.'s respondents, the majority (41.8 per cent) used personal and family savings or sold existing personal or family property (16.5 per cent). Others used loans from co-operative societies and commercial banks (18.5 per cent), mostly obtained for them by their husbands, a noticeably higher figure than among Naituli et al.'s

sample. Other sources included contributions from friends and relatives (21.3 per cent) and informal rotating savings and credit associations (1.9 per cent).

Obstacles to the advancement of women-owned dairy processing micro-enterprises

The study revealed five main challenges to the advancement of women-owned dairy micro-enterprises: legislative barriers, access to adequate financial resources, technological barriers, access to appropriate training, and marketing.

Legislative barriers. Legislative requirements constitute a heavy financial burden. To operate a dairy enterprise, one is required to register with the Kenya Dairy Board through payment of a cess fee and is also expected to obtain an operating licence from the local authority, renewable yearly, and to possess a public health certificate. Further, any signpost advertising the enterprise must be authorised and paid for at the Local Authority office. These financial outlays make it difficult for women micro-entrepreneurs to compete with milk hawkers who do not pay any of these fees and with large-scale milk processors who benefit from economies of scale. A large number of micro-entrepreneurs therefore operate outside the law.

Access to adequate financial resources. Once the business has become operational, further finance is required for upgrading technology. However, the profits generated by most women micro-entrepreneurs are only just enough to maintain their families with little left for reinvestment. Existing sources of business finance are not always readily available to women micro-entrepreneurs because many lack information about them, while others lack collateral. Only 24.1 per cent of the sample had acquired credit, mostly from NGOs. They referred to various problems with borrowing. High interest rates were the greatest worry, being mentioned by 56.5 per cent. Lack of collateral or fear of losing their business assets if they failed to repay loans was mentioned by 34.9 per cent. Unfavourable credit conditions, such as long meeting hours, short repayment periods, smallness of loans and length of time taken to obtain credit were cited by 30.4 per cent

Technological barriers. Technology was characterised broadly in this study to include both the equipment and the processing methods used in the enterprises. Though various types of equipment were readily available in the market, women micro-entrepreneurs had limited access to them. They were therefore inclined to use very simple technologies and this is reflected in the type of dairy products that they produced. The majority produced only fresh milk (99.1 per cent) and fermented milk (88.0 per cent). Some 36.1 per cent produced yoghurt. Very few produced any other product such as ice-cream (3.7 per cent), ghee (2.8 per cent) or butter (0.9 per cent).

The majority of the women tended to use simple equipment such as kerosene cooking stoves, cooking pans, plastic cups and containers, wooden cooking sticks and small kitchen sieves. Thus, 96 per cent of the micro-entrepreneurs heated milk directly during processing, though this practice is not recommended because it interferes with the structure of milk protein. Only 1.9 per cent used high technology equipment such as pasteurisers, compressors and commercial butter churns. 42.2 per cent did not know of superior processing equipment while 36.1 per cent lacked enough money to buy it.

Though milk is a highly perishable product, 27.8 per cent of the micro-entrepreneurs did not have any cooling or preservation equipment. This presented problems with the preservation of raw milk and finished products, thus affecting the quality of these products and the profitability of the enterprises.

With the liberalisation of the dairy industry, it is imperative that enterprises be able to upgrade their technologies if they are to compete effectively (Haan, 1994). This entails knowledge of customers' needs and of available technologies, training in new production methods and access to appropriate sources of finance.

Access to appropriate training. Only 18.6 per cent of the micro-entrepreneurs had formal training in dairy enterprise operations before starting their businesses. The rest (63.9 per cent) learnt skills from friends and relatives or from previous employment (17.6 per cent).

The ability to build properly upon competencies already acquired is critical to technological development. While the majority made an effort to upgrade their skills and knowledge, 35.8 per cent took no steps at all. More than one method of improving skills was employed by many of the women. Family and friends were the most common source of advice, being used by 38.9 per cent. A further 8.3 per cent drew on customers and competitors. More formal channels were used by 44.5 per cent with seminars and workshops cited most often. A further 4.6 per cent relied on reading and the internet. Upgrading was not without its difficulties. Problems were mentioned by 91.3 per cent and covered lack of knowledge of sources (50.0 per cent), lack of time to look for information (28.3 per cent), and the high costs of acquiring this information (13.0 per cent).

Marketing problems. Marketing and low demand were cited as problems by 49.1 per cent of the women micro-entrepreneurs, who felt that customers tended to prefer products from larger enterprises. Another problem, which may account for customers' preferences, was the fluctuation in quality standards. Some micro-entrepreneurs (28.7 per cent) did not do anything to ensure constant product quality, 42.6 per cent used medium technology methods, such as lactometers, to determine the quality of raw milk before processing, while 16.5 per cent used simple

methods, such as matchsticks, or relied on smell, sight and taste. The remaining 12.2 per cent combined the two methods.

For controlling the quality of processed products, 13.2 per cent used no measures at all, while 48.7 per cent indicated the strict use of right procedures in processing which meant that no other deliberate practice was followed to maintain or improve standards. Organoleptic measures were used by 19.5 per cent and feedback from customers by 18.6 per cent.

A further marketing problem was the inability to estimate customer numbers, thus affecting the ability to develop strategic market plans and resulting in a high incidence of unsold products.

Conclusion

As Kenyan women continue to create new strategic locations and spaces for themselves within the micro-enterprise sector, there are challenges regarding access to appropriate technology and technical assistance, capital, markets and networks. Unfavourable legislation also hampers the efforts of micro-entrepreneurs. Poor access to technology was found to be a major problem. In this respect there is an interesting difference from the conclusions of Naituli, Wegulo and Kaimenyi as the women in this study found expansion to be more difficult than the micro-entrepreneurs that they examined. This is probably because growth in dairy-processing requires technological upgrading, which in turn relies on knowledge, training and a higher level of finance than can be met from the reinvestment of profits. The difference between the two studies indicates the importance of examining differences between women micro-entrepreneurs as well as their commonalities. Problems can vary in important ways between economic sectors.

To overcome these obstacles, women micro-entrepreneurs need to be provided with information and training on appropriate technologies and on marketing and financial management. This training should be conducted close to the women's enterprises to overcome the constraints of their multiple roles as entrepreneurs, mothers and wives. Finally, since women micro-entrepreneurs may not be able to pay for such training themselves, the government and other relevant organisations could provide funds and other resources.

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Gender Inequalities in Universities in Kenya

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Abstract

Gendered change in higher education has been implemented in many countries. The conditions that have driven this change have differed from one country to another. Some of the attempts to enhance gender equality have been linked to national strategies to include certain groups previously marginalized. Others have been linked to attempts to increase the quantity and quality of high level human resources and yet others have been associated with expanded programmes for social development. The paper seeks to explore efforts to implement gender equality policies in universities in Kenya. Examples of gender inequalities in Kenyan universities and some of the interventions to counter these are discussed. The challenges facing the implementation of gender equality policies are explored. The paper ends with some suggestions of possible strategies for better implemention of these policies in universities.

Introduction

International concerns about the situation of the world's women have enhanced campaigns for more equitable distribution of the world's resources between men and women. It has been noted, all over the world, that women are underrepresented and generally face discrimination and marginalisation on the basis of their gender (Karim, 1995). According to the World Education Report (1995: 18), research has shown a long-standing imbalance in participation in formal education by women. One consequence is that the literacy rate of the world's women (71.2 per cent) is significantly lower than that of men (83.6 per cent). Nearly two thirds of the world's illiterate adults are women (565 million), most of whom live in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. It is against this background that international campaigns to widen women's access to education have been mounted.

Various international conventions have been passed concerning women's access to education. They include: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education (1962), and the 1981 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). However, these conventions have seldom been implemented at national levels. Moreover, in spite of laws banning discrimination, it has often been difficult to distinguish discrimination on the grounds of sex from discrimination on other grounds, such as social class, regional difference, race, language or disability. These forms of discrimination exacerbate gender discrimination and cannot be ignored.

Role of universities in enhancing gender equality

The World Conference on Higher Education (1998) underlined, as a key function of higher education, the enhancement of participation and role of women in higher education. The conference recognised various socio-economic, cultural and political obstacles that continue to impede women's full access to and effective integration in higher education. Article 4 of the World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21st Century (UNESCO, 1998) is very explicit in its demand for the elimination of all gender stereotyping in higher education and places particular emphasis on the need to eliminate political and social barriers to women's effective participation in policy and decision-making, both in higher education and in society generally. Besides their traditional roles of generating knowledge through research, and providing leadership in the development of high level human resources through education and training, universities are expected to assume responsibility for, and leadership in the transformation of society with regard to gender roles generally, and women's participation in particular. The areas in which universities can play a role in enhancing gender equality include:

- ***Access***: Universities can develop new regulations or initiatives aimed at increasing the percentage of women students and staff.
- ***Inclusion***: Universities can ensure that the content of teaching, learning materials and language used is gender sensitive. They can incorporate gender issues into various disciplines and expand research on gender issues.
- ***Climate***: The university climate has often been described as being 'chilly' for women. Universities can introduce initiatives that create an environment friendly to women employees and students. They can also develop legal mechanisms for dealing with issues such as sexual harassment.
- ***Promotion***: Universities need to promote women to the higher academic and administrative positions which give access to decision-making.

These four issues have been used in this paper to try and understand gender inequalities in Kenyan universities.

Aspects of gender inequalities in Kenyan universities

Gender equality is to ensure that all people (men and women alike) are treated as equals in dignity and rights. For the purposes of this paper, the term gender equality will be used to imply social justice, fairness in the distribution of resources and opportunities among men and women (both staff and students) in universities in Kenya. Equality of opportunity in Kenya's education system is implied in various official documents. For example, the National Development Plan (1997-2001) clearly states in the introduction on education that, 'Every Kenyan has the inalienable right, no matter his or her social-economic status, to basic education' (Government of Kenya, 1997). However, there are no guidelines as to how such statements of principle are to be implemented at the various levels of education. Moreover, the emphasis seems to be on basic education. There is a need to address inequalities at every level of education. In universities in Kenya, gender inequalities are experienced in relation to access, the curriculum and staff recruitment, training and promotion. Each of these issues is discussed below.

Admission/access to university education

Access has been identified by UNESCO and other United Nations agencies as one way of reducing gender inequality in society. Access in education has to do with questions of equality of opportunity in three senses :

- Equal access for individuals regardless of social circumstances
- Equal chances to take part or share in the system
- Equal educational results: equal gains

The increased demand for higher education in Kenya has made it difficult for all students who qualify for university education to be admitted and this has led to variations in the minimum entry grade from year to year. Just a small fraction of the eligible age cohort is enrolled in Kenyan universities. For example in the year 2002, of the total of 198,356 students who sat for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary School Examination (KCSE), the university qualifying examination, 42,721 students attained the minimum university entry requirement. But because of the limited facilities in the public universities, only 10,872 students (25 per cent) were selected for university courses. And because of high performance, the cut off points were increased from 62 to 64 for males and from 61 to 63 for females. Students who do not get admission to public universities then apply to private

universities if they are able to pay. The figures thus show that some well-qualified students are denied the opportunity for university education.

Admissions figures for universities show a difference between the numbers of women and men admitted. Statistics from the Ministry of Education reveal that female students comprised 30.5 per cent of the total enrolment of 40,613 students at the five public universities in the 1998/99 academic year (Government of Kenya, 2000). Kenyatta University, with 38.9 per cent, had the highest percentage of female students, while Jomo Kenyatta University had the lowest percentage (20.1 per cent). The Ministry observed that the gender gap in public university student enrolment is an issue that needs urgent attention.

Student enrolment in the four accredited private universities rose significantly in the same period with female students constituting 46.7 per cent overall. Daystar University led with 48.1 per cent, while Scott Theological College registered the lowest proportion at 16.7 per cent. A summary of student enrolment in these universities is given in Table 1.

The figures in Table 1 indicate that private universities take quite a substantial proportion of female students. This could be explained by the facts that the programmes are mainly arts based, and that the private universities include flexible courses and provide a conducive learning environment.

The issue of the number of women who access university education has far reaching implications when it comes to acquiring positions of leadership at policy making level. Since fewer women are available for upward mobility, they tend to be poorly represented in the senior academic and management positions in universities.

Table 1
Student enrolment in some of the private universities
1995/96 to 1998/99

University	1995/96			1996/97		
	M	F	T	M	F	T
Baraton	472	411	883	489	433	922
Catholic	365	392	757	569	638	1207
Daystar*	552	676	1228	559	691	1250
Scott**	48	10	58	65	13	78

University	1997/98			1998/99		
	M	F	T	M	F	T
Baraton	470	372	842	498	444	942
Catholic	668	657	1325	742	660	1402
Daystar*	607	790	1397	752	696	1448
Scott**	68	14	82	80	16	96

* Enrolment at Daystar includes pre-university students
** Scott Theological College was accredited in 1997
Source: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology

Curriculum and gender equality

The inequity in admissions also presents itself in the courses on which women are enrolled. Analysis of students' enrolment in public universities by selected courses by the Ministry of Education confirmed that relatively few women are enrolled in science courses and especially in engineering (Government of Kenya, 2000). Table 2 summarises student enrolment by selected courses.

The fact that women and men follow different courses serves to reinforce inequality in terms of the kinds of occupations women enter, and this impacts their position in society. It is worth noting that most of the subjects that women are enrolled in, lead to jobs that do not have attractive remuneration. This implies that women stand to lose in terms of economic empowerment because they will earn lower salaries than men.

Table 2
Student enrolment in public universities by selected courses and sex, 1998/99

Course	Male	Female	Total	% Female
Education	8,749	5,289	14,038	37.7
Arts	3,568	1,910	5,478	34.9
Commerce	1,162	506	1,668	30.3
Agriculture	2,530	833	3,363	24.8
Engineering	2,435	244	2,679	9.1
Medicine	729	237	966	24.5
Science	3,677	1,000	4,677	21.4
Total	**22,850**	**10,019**	**32,869**	**30.5**

Source: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology

Once enrolled in universities, female students encounter more difficulties than males in other ways such as inadequate accommodation, poor sanitary facilities, inadequate security and sexual harassment. Moreover, inadequate funding to pay for tuition fees and subsistence has meant that women devise survival tactics which may not be acceptable to society. Some students have turned to prostitution, or to relationships with men who are working, to meet their day-to-day needs. These relationships make them vulnerable to HIV/AIDS infections. Society is quick to condemn their behaviour without understanding the root cause of their problems. All these features indicate that universities do not have a conducive atmosphere for women students.

Staff recruitment, training and promotion

The fact that fewer women than men are enrolled in universities is one reason why there are few women staff. A study by Kanake (1997) revealed that women form a minority of university teachers. At the University of Nairobi in 1995, only 18 per cent of the academic staff were women, while at Kenyatta University, 28.8 per cent were women. Women were concentrated in the faculties of Education and Environmental Education. They were heavily under-represented at the University of Nairobi's faculties of Engineering (2.3 per cent), Architecture Design and Development (9.7 per cent), Veterinary Medicine (10.2 per cent), Pharmacy (11.1 per cent) and Science (12.1 per cent). Women were also found to be missing from senior university management positions. A survey I conducted on women's participation in university management (Onsongo 2002) revealed that women were a minority in university management. The findings are summarised in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3
Status of women in management in 6 Kenyan public universities as at July 2002

Position	M	F	T	%
VC	6	0	6	0
DVC	13	2	15	13.3
Registrar	14	0	14	0
Principal	7	2	9	22.2
Director	42	18	60	30
Dean of students	3	2	5	40
Dean of Faculty	38	5	43	11.6
Finance Officer	6	0	6	0
Librarian	6	0	6	0
HOD	208	35	243	14.4
Council members	119	18	137	13.1

Source: University calendar and staff lists

Table 4
Status of women in management in 4 Kenyan private universities

Position	M	F	T	%
VC	3	1	4	10
DVC	8	1	9	11.1
Registrar	2	3	5	5
Human resource manager	2	1	3	33.3
Director	2	1	3	33.3
Dean of students	2	1	3	33.3
Dean of Faculty	11	1	12	8.3
Finance Officer	4	0	4	0
Librarian	2	2	4	50
HOD	35	17	52	32.7
Total	**71**	**28**	**99**	**100**

Source: University calendars and staff lists

These statistics reveal that women do not occupy positions that enable them to influence the policies and direction of their institutions, at either departmental or institutional level. There is also evidence to suggest that the few women who do become academics and administrators face a number of challenges. Some of these arise from the policies and practices of the institutions. They include discriminatory appointment and promotion criteria, lack of opportunities for further training, resistance from men, hostile work environment, sexual harassment and sex role stereotyping. Some of these are discussed below.

Discriminatory appointment and promotion policies and practices

There is no open discrimination in universities in terms of recruitment. However, there is subtle discrimination disguised in the requirements for promotion and appointments. Apart from the academic and professional qualifications that are used in appointments and promotions, research has shown that other factors are also used, which have the effect of discriminating against women (Kanake, 1997; Onsongo, 2000; Onsongo, 2002).

Kanake, (1997: 43) in her study of gender disparities in Kenyan public universities, found that:

> … a non-merit set of factors exists in Kenyan public Universities and sometimes they affect the rate of promotion, the range of responsibilities allocated and the opportunities for future success. Tribalism, nepotism

> and favouritism, closeness to the chancellor, political loyalties and how one gets along with his/ her superior, seem to play a significant role in allocating various members of academic staff into status positions.

Job advertisements for positions of senior university academics and management, contain elaborate descriptions of the qualifications required, work experience and publications. Sometimes the advert will state that the person should have worked in the same position elsewhere for a period of not less than five years. This requirement disadvantages women because most are not PhD holders and are concentrated in the junior ranks of lecturer and below. Women have fewer opportunities to do a PhD, and have only limited access to management positions that can enable them to gain necessary experience. One woman, whom I interviewed, describes her experience of studying for a PhD locally:

> And of course doing a PhD is very challenging especially for women who have multiple roles to play. You become a student, you continue to be a staff member in your department, you are a mother, you are a wife and all the other social commitments in life. So it actually took a bit of time, six years to complete my PhD and for that whole period I was actually stagnating on the same job group. And the unfortunate part about it was that although you were expected to move up the ladder there was no financial support. You were expected to look for your own sponsorship to do those further studies and many times women are disadvantaged especially in terms of the kind of scholarship you can take (woman manager, March 2004).

The composition of interview panels has been identified as a formal barrier to women's participation in higher education both as faculty members and managers. The interviewing panels are usually male dominated and women candidates are frequently subjected to gender-biased questions, which in most cases are irrelevant to the positions they are applying for (Manya, 2000; Gachukia, 2002).

Unfriendly work environment

The majority of women find the work environment hostile to their participation in university management. Some women say they encounter male biases in their day to day work. Hostility is experienced in the form of male intrusion in areas of responsibility, interruption at meetings and futile sexual harassment.

Resistance to women's leadership

Some women have experienced resistance from junior and senior male colleagues who gang up against them and refuse to cooperate or do duties assigned to them.

Through this resistance they try to intimidate women and make them feel incompetent. Some junior male staff find it hard to take instructions from women managers. One woman manager describes her experience as follows:

> My challenge is that when I am relating to my colleagues they … don't take it in well. It is like they would rather they are the ones, or something like that, and many times they don't perform their duties as expected, I mean I have to push them a lot (woman manager, March 2004).

Another woman shared this experience:

> I had a male boss with whom we could not agree at all. He would belittle me, shout at me even when the students are there. This is a man who never recognised my title. I am a doctor (PhD) and a senior lecturer. We were at the same level at that time … only that I was his deputy but academically we were at the same position. But he would throw words at me and call me by my first name, 'So and so come here', and in that meeting we are with other junior people, the students are there. He would tell me, if I wanted to say something he would say, 'no, not you, keep quiet' (woman manager, May 2004).

Institutional practices

Some women managers have identified the timing of meetings as the most insensitive practice in universities. Meetings are arranged at odd hours, while some end very late at night and others are fixed at weekends because management is still viewed from a masculine perspective. Women with young families find this too demanding. The timing of meetings has cost some women their marriages, as their husbands do not accept them coming home late or attending meetings at weekends. While it may be true that the timing of meetings and long hours of work in universities are not caused by gender bias but rather by organisational overload, and are seen as ways of solving management problems, they affect men and women differently. In most cases, women are supposed to adapt to these practices irrespective of their private responsibilities.

Sexual harassment

This is rife in Kenyan universities and is sometimes used to block women's career advancement. The experience of one woman manager serves to illustrate this.

> When I was working for my PhD, I was being supervised by some two males of which one of them thought that he could take sexual advantage of me. He started dating me and when I declined his dates he became very hostile to my work. He started frustrating me and perhaps that is one of

> the reasons I took too long (it took about 10 years). Too long not only to get the certificate but also for promotion because he is a very senior person within the university. Actually he is the university itself, he is the voice of this university. He became very, very hostile and any time I could go to his office for supervision he would close his door and start telling me anything, frustrating me, abusing me, telling me that I think I am one of the best girls he has ever seen (woman manager, March 2004).

The foregoing barriers have led to many competent women being blocked out of the very top positions. Whereas women who possess the required academic qualifications, professional experience and administrative skills should be able to compete with men on an equal basis for these positions, the majority of highly qualified women have not been appointed to, or have not applied for, senior management positions due to these obstacles.

Attempts to enhance gender equality in universities in Kenya

There have been attempts by individual universities to incorporate women's issues in their programmes. Most of these attempts have been financed by donor funding or NGOs such as the African Forum for Women Educationists (FAWE) and the Association of African Universities (AAU). The latter, for example, has launched a gender equity programme, which all member universities are supposed to follow. Some of the initiatives include establishing gender centres, taking affirmative action and enhancing women's participation in science-related subjects.

Establishment of gender institutes/centres

In response to the AAU requirement, three public universities in Kenya have established gender centres. These are Kenyatta University (2002), Maseno University (2001) and Egerton University (1992). The other three run programmes related to gender issues. The University of Nairobi, for example, offers a post-graduate diploma in Gender and Development Studies. Information is lacking on what the private universities are doing to enhance equal opportunities.

It is important to note that apart from offering diploma courses in gender studies and advising female students on campus, these centres do not seek to promote gender equality in the various universities. Moreover, the centres operate in isolation from other departments and from the mainstream activities of the universities. They lack adequate staff and resources to run gender sensitisation programmes on campus and the staff employed sometimes lack knowledge and interest in gender issues (Keino, 2002). It may be too early to judge the effectiveness of these gender centres/units, since most of them are newly established, but it is unlikely that they

will contribute greatly to the implementation of gender equality policies in Kenyan universities. Molestone (2004) warns that so long as approaches to gender issues remain the domain of individual academics, departments and optional courses, not much is going to be achieved in terms of gender equality.

Affirmative action

Although there is no legislation requiring universities to implement affirmative action, temporary measures have been used by the Kenyan public universities to increase the access of women to university education. The Joint Admissions Board (JAB), the body that oversees all student admissions to public universities, has lowered the cut-off point for university entry for girls by one point. The board has used its own discretion, depending on overall performance in the national university entrance examinations. This action has sometimes increased the number of women admitted to university. Affirmative action has been limited to student admission to undergraduate programmes. Nothing is being done with regard to, for example, the appointment of women into academic and administrative positions.

Curriculum

With regard to programmes of study, attempts have been made by universities to enhance women's participation in traditional male subjects such as science, mathematics, information technology and engineering. Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology runs programmes such as the Female Education in Mathematics and Science in Africa Project (FEMSA) and the African Women in Science and Engineering Project. There is a three year project at Kenyatta University, funded by the FORD foundation, geared towards enhancing women's participation in science, mathematics, and information technology. Activities include organising seminars on careers, inviting women and men scientists to give talks about career possibilities in the sciences and taking women students to research organisations to expose them to career possibilities in science. However most of these projects target women students who are already enrolled in science-related subjects.

Some have argued that the approach of enhancing women's participation in traditional male subjects or careers may reinforce rather than reduce gender stereotyped ideas about women. This approach is based on the incorrect assumption that women's poor performance in these subjects is the result of a lack of interest, motivation, abilities, or self-confidence. It ignores the bad teaching methodologies and the socialisation which women go through in relation to these subjects. Elsewhere, it has been found that just encouraging women into male dominated subjects and jobs without changing the way those jobs are done, or making them women friendly, does not enhance gender equality. Women feel out of place and get frustrated once in these jobs and some may even quit (Bagihole, 2003).

In general, one can argue that there are few deliberate efforts in Kenyan universities to implement gender equality policies. In the next section, I explore some of the possible challenges facing the implementation of these policies.

Challenges facing implementation of gender equality interventions and policies

There are many possible reasons why universities in Kenya have been reluctant to implement gender equality policies. Some of these stem from the very purpose for which universities were established or from the perceived role of universities in society. Others have to do with the negative attitudes towards women prevalent in society. However, the reasons influencing the situation that have come out in my fieldwork and library research have mostly to do with lack of gender awareness among university managers, staff and students, absence of legislation requiring the implementation of these policies and inadequate resources. Each of these is discussed below.

Lack of gender awareness among managers

The lack of gender awareness among decision-makers in universities seems to be a major problem. In my interviews with senior university managers on the factors affecting women's participation in university management (Onsongo, 2002), all the male managers interviewed emphasised that gender was not an issue they considered in the recruitment, promotion and appointment of both academic and administrative staff. One vice-chancellor interviewed understood gender equality very narrowly indeed. He said:

> When and wherever I participate in the meetings of Vice-Chancellors, locally or abroad, the problem of 'gender balance' among staff and students always crops up and the debate becomes heated. When asked as to whether the problem of 'gender balance' also exists at my university, I tell them that it does not feature because we deal with human beings or intelligent beings, "homo sapiens", and not with gender.

He continued to support his argument by saying that:

> In fact at my university, 52 per cent of the student population are women. And in reference to staff recruitment and promotion, we are making efforts to give women a chance. Women are appointed Heads or Deputy Heads of Departments and about 98 per cent of the secretaries (my emphasis) are women. With such attitude towards women, I am sure that more women will have the opportunity to ascend gradually to senior management positions (Vice-chancellor, June 2002).

It is interesting to see how this Vice Chancellor understands gender issues. For him and many others, having 52 per cent of undergraduate students enrolled at the university and the appointment of a few women into management position is enough to solve gender disparities in the institution and in society at large. Another man manager said:

> There should be no problem, and as far as I am concerned there is no problem. Women have the capacity to play their role. But there is, I think, if we go in this direction … men are going to be the endangered species. To me it has never made any difference whether you are female or male. I mean there should really be no gender discrimination. And I believe it is really not there, that is why I am not concerned, it is only that they are magnified (man manager, March 2004).

The lack of awareness or denial by most university managers has negative implications. The managers fail to support programmes aimed at enhancing the participation of women and men in universities. They fail to allocate the necessary resources and personnel for the effective implementation of the programmes. Again, new developments, like the gender centres, are given to women to manage, making other university staff see them as women's programmes only, hence the male staff keep away from them. Gender awareness is necessary to enable people in universities to look at things with new eyes, in a way which is constantly open to learning more. Creating awareness among the university community will make people realise that there is a problem and accept that something needs to be done about it.

Absence of gender desegregated data

Another challenge facing the implementation of gender equality is the absence of gender specific data to show the magnitude of gender disparities in universities. FAWE (2001) observes that there is little systematically documented gender-desegregated data and insufficient publications on the areas women find problematic at the university level and on the impact those problematic areas have on their levels of participation and performance. This has hampered the implementation of programmes to correct gender disparities in most African universities. Also missing is data on the factors that militate against women's career advancement such as involvement in research, finances, workload and staff development processes.

Difficulty in adapting imported models of gender-sensitive education to local contexts

The importance of international conventions and declarations in enhancing the implementation of gender equality policies in society cannot be overemphasised. However, these declarations have often been poorly implemented. In many

countries, they function merely as a backdrop to different concerns. This raises important questions about the nature of international or regional concerns with gender equality. Mama (2002) observes that international conventions are difficult to implement in those countries where authoritarian, anti-democratic regimes, and illegitimate and discredited governments, have used the woman question as a public relations exercise. They may sign and ratify United Nations conventions to get donor funding, but do not implement them.

In addition to opposition originating from cultural differences, there are also economic concerns which lead governments not to value gender equality in universities. Poverty in most developing countries makes it impossible for the majority of the population to pay for basic education. National budgets and donor funding are thus geared towards making basic education accessible to the poor. Even when donor agencies provide financial assistance and international conventions are signed regarding gender equality, the emphasis tends to be on basic education.

Lack of legislation

Legislation is helpful in ensuring that gender equality policies will meet with success. Gender equality policies and legislation need to be supported by the establishment of mechanisms and support structures, which ensure appropriate implementation. A supportive government and legislation is of great assistance in implementing gender equality policies. There are no articulate policies on gender equality in Kenya's education system. It is assumed that equal opportunities will be practised on the basis of the constitution of Kenya and international conventions.

Academic freedom and autonomy of Kenyan universities

In Africa, the university is seen as the pinnacle of the educational pyramid, promoting regional and international understanding, producing high-level human power, stimulating economic growth, and preserving and developing culture and heritage. Because of this view of universities, they have been entrusted with academic freedom and autonomy, which gives a university the right to teach freely and to make its own staff appointments without dictation from any other authority. This right is clearly spelt out in various university acts. So whether a university adheres to the practice of equal opportunity or not, there is no system of monitoring in place. Most leaders in African universities are male and do not see gender equality, as opposed to say national development, as an issue. University structures, organisation and practices have remained masculine and tend to be very rigid. Gender-blind and discriminative policies still exist. One woman manager describes the nature of Kenyan universities as follows:

> The management of universities I would say has been a bit conservative. They have had very rigid structures, very rigid ways of handling things. And I think that sometimes is the undoing of the university management (woman manager, March 2004).

Strategies for implementing gender equity policies in Kenyan universities

Some of the suggestions made by respondents to enhance implementation of gender equality policies include the following:

- ***Gender mainstreaming***: This is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies and programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences, an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes, in all political, economic and social spheres (UNESCO, 1999). This is necessary because some women-specific interventions, which on paper sound appropriate, have been proved to marginalise women further. It is also easier to neglect such programmes, when they are tackled separately from mainstream plans and activities. The gender centres/institutes should be mainstreamed into university plans and activities, in order to have greater impact.
- ***Development of equal opportunities policies***: At the time of writing this paper there were no equal opportunity policies in operation in universities except those stipulated in the Kenyan constitution. Such policies should be developed and mechanisms for implementation, monitoring and evaluation established. Structures have to be put in place to support long-term achievement. Universities should allocate resources to this effort. Efforts should be made to provide gender-disaggregated data for planning, implementation and evaluation of university programmes.
- ***Research, publication and documentation***: Most male decision makers in universities use the excuse that there are no suitable or qualified women to appoint to decision-making positions. This may be due to ignorance. Sometimes, policy makers demand evidence of gender-related discrimination before they will begin thinking of remedies. Research is a strong tool to counteract this trend of 'reasoned' discrimination. The publication of research findings and experiences will keep policy makers informed and enhance advocacy. More empirical evidence is needed to show areas of disparity and areas that women find problematic, if we are to get to action instead of lip service, and eliminate the various excuses for the lack of it.

- ***Involving women in management***: Inadequate representation at management level limits the extent to which women are able to make policy and take decisions about female education as head teachers, college principals, vice-chancellor and registrars. Managers are influenced by the society around them, by existing ideologies, customs and practices; hence the predominance of male policy makers slows down the pace of change.
- ***Increasing gender awareness***: This should be developed at the work place through meetings, workshops and seminars for decision makers. All women must be involved in devising solutions, by providing their own views, to ensure that there are workable solutions. This may involve undertaking gender sensitisation and social mobilisation in support of the concerns of women. It is often assumed that by appointing one woman on a panel, gender issues will be addressed automatically and solved.
- ***Changing existing structural, organisational and institutional practices***: This is necessary in order to accommodate the needs of women with multiple roles. One issue is the need to give young mothers flexible working hours. Another is the need to review appointment and promotion procedures to accommodate women. Some of the questions that need to be asked include: Do spouses of male and female appointees receive the same consideration? Is there discrimination in the provision of housing/housing allowances, etc.?
- ***Challenging or preventing behaviour that is discriminatory and offensive***: This can be done by adopting, as official policy, a statement that explicitly condemns acts or threats based on gender; making effective provision for students and staff to report violations; and widely advertising the policy on campus.

Conclusion

International campaigns for gender equality have contributed to creating awareness of the injustices committed against women in society in general and in the education sector in particular. Whereas attempts are being made to achieve gender equality in universities in Kenya in terms of access for women, there is still no legislation requiring universities to promote equality in their practices. Without legislation and good will from the university managers and central government, it may not be easy to realise the good intentions spelt out in international conventions such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21st Century (1998). Again, emphasising access as is the case now, without making efforts for inclusion, changing the climate and promoting women to decision-making positions may only reinforce the gender stereotypes.

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3

Graffiti: Communication Avenues for Women at the Workplace?

Felicia Yieke

Abstract

Women in the workplace experience many problems and forms of discrimination. In this paper we look at women in the workplace as an example of a minority group who feel oppressed by both their employers and the wider social community. Data was collected from workplaces in Kenya that employ women in largely unskilled positions. There is a specific focus on the graffiti found in secluded places such as toilets and narrow corridors. These graffiti are subjected to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and analysed against the backdrop of the information available on the trials and tribulations of working women in the world today and in Kenya in particular. Interviews were conducted to gather supportive data. This paper suggests that graffiti can be one way of women expressing themselves, and sensitising the general public to their plight.

Introduction

Archaeological and anthropological works have shown that wall writings have been used for a long time in human history to record and preserve the activities of humankind (Nwoye, 1993: 419). Although still used in the field of advertising and such related domains, wall writing is no longer a recognised method of preserving records by mainstream society. Despite this, we still encounter writings on walls and other public places. This paper refers to these as graffiti.

Graffiti have been used for a long time by human beings as a means of expression in public institutions all over the world. Most times, sensitive graffiti will be found in toilets and along narrow corridors. We may thus ask the following questions: What are graffiti? What roles do graffiti serve in human institutions? Why would they normally be found in hidden places such as toilets? What message may

a graffiti writer be sending across? What can we learn from graffiti messages concerning issues in areas where women work? Do graffiti constitute an avenue of communication for women at the workplace, given that they are generally oppressed there?

The thesis of this paper is that although graffiti may appear deplorable, and although they may be perceived as a mediocre way of writing, they undoubtedly are a form of communication. Graffiti can be regarded as discourse for a section of the population who feel marginalized, and who also feel that they lack the ways and means of expressing themselves. The question that might be asked is: how does this kind of discourse work in graffiti? We show that while the use of graffiti may be viewed negatively in some quarters, it has something positive to offer to particular sections of society. In this case, we look at women in the workplace as an example of a category of people who have been marginalized, brutalised and oppressed.

In the context of language and gender, why would we study the workplace? Kendall and Tannen (1997:81) say that the workplace is characterised by many constraints. The workplace is an institutional structure, in which individuals are hierarchically ranked. There is a history of greater male participation in most work settings, and this is especially so at the higher ranking levels, while at the lower levels, where this study focuses, the majority are women. Despite recent modifications, the workplace is still organised along gender lines.

This paper looks at workplaces with special reference to Kenya's Export Processing Zones (EPZ). EPZ companies are situated in Kenya near the capital city of Nairobi, in Ruaraka, Athi River and also at Changamwe in the port city of Mombasa. The author chose the EPZ because workers here face serious violations of their basic human rights and as usual women, who form the bulk of the semi-skilled workforce, bear the brunt of this suffering. Of late, there has been a lot of information spilling over to the public through the mass media about the intense suffering of these workers, and it has been quite disheartening, disturbing and touching. This motivated the researcher to make further enquiries as to what really happens in the EPZ firms.

We therefore looked at the ordinary women at the workplace who are an example of an oppressed minority group. Data was collected from the various EPZ companies in Kenya and drew specifically on those graffiti found in toilets and other secluded places. About one hundred examples of such discourses were collected from these companies. The graffiti were then analysed against the backdrop of the information available on the trials and tribulations of women in Kenya today. Short interviews were conducted to provide additional data and to assist in the interpretation of the graffiti. Critical Discourse Analysis (hereafter CDA) served as an interpretative framework for an in-depth analysis of these discourses. CDA is

also a useful tool for examining discourses which are taken for granted at surface level. The results provide testimony of the plight of the Kenyan woman worker at the hands of the EPZ companies.

Graffiti as expression of social issues at workplaces in Kenya

At a superficial level, graffiti may look like harmless writings by mischievous idle people who might generally be perceived as destructive. On closer examination, graffiti take on a different dimension. This is because of the dynamics of language. Language can be used as a tool by powerful people to oppress and suppress the less powerful. At the same time, the oppressed can use language to try and gain their freedom, in terms of social, political, economic and intellectual development. Graffiti are useful weapons for this group of people. Graffiti act as an avenue through which a minority group, most often in an oppressive situation, can express its opinions. In most cases, such groups are denied other legitimate ways of expressing their opinions on matters that they feel affect them, and faced with such limitations, the use of graffiti on public walls becomes a favoured option. Nwoye (1993: 419) cites the case of Nigerian university students who have been seen as agents of destabilisation by successive governments in Nigeria. Similar practices occur in most African countries, and especially where governments have been perceived to be oppressive and repressive by a majority of the citizens.

Women at the workplace experience many problems and forms of discrimination. These range from sexual harassment, denial of leave to nurse a sick baby and dismissals when the women become pregnant, to low pay that is not commensurate with the kind of work that the women do, and very long hours of working in situations injurious to their health and well being. The situation is compounded by the lack of ways of channelling complaints about these problems and by the fact that the workplace is an area that has traditionally been male dominated, especially at the higher managerial levels where policy issues are discussed. This paper suggests that graffiti can be one way of women expressing themselves, and at least sensitising others to their plight. For a long time, most cultures have prohibited or discouraged women from talking in public places such as legislatures, pulpits, courtrooms and academic institutions. Since these are places that have commonly been associated with public discourse, women's exclusion enables public talk to be equated with men. Furthermore, since public discourse can be credited with creating, promoting and reinforcing society's main[male]stream ideas, women's rhetoric has been trivialised, whereas men's has been valorised (Cole, 1991: 401).

According to Cole (1991), who carried out research at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, the toilet wall is one public forum which women use to share thoughts. The choice of semi-public places and toilets for expression might

have been made because these areas offered the writers a sense of anonymity and the security that their identities would not be revealed, since most of the graffiti dealt with issues that were considered to be highly inflammatory and potentially explosive. The consequences of being associated with the writings are often dire. No writer thus wants to be identified as the 'author', although the important thing in this case is the sensitisation of the general public to the social issues going on within the workplace at the time. Graffiti thus thrive in such places as lavatories because they afford the 'authors' relative privacy in which to express their views without fear (Nwoye, 1993: 421).

The choice of the toilets might at the same time be motivated by the fact that most toilets are not painted for years, since the more open areas in these institutions are the ones employers now concentrate on because of their public and corporate image, while the hidden areas are neglected and promises to paint them when 'funds are available' become the catchword. This gives a kind of relative permanence to the 'works' of these authors for a fairly long period of time, however nasty the graffiti may sound or however offensive.

Bruner and Kelso (1980: 241) note that because individuals write graffiti where others can see them, they are a form of (public) communication, and numerous studies of washroom graffiti reveal that the writers often follow socially conditioned, gender oriented communication strategies for communicating with others. Thus men perform as the 'dominant' ones in their graffiti, asserting or reaffirming their power over those they consider inferior whereas women, who are often considered the 'muted' ones in communication, may use graffiti to rethink their oppressed positions in a patriarchal society.

CDA as theory and method for the analysis of discourse within social science research

The recent emergence of CDA has provided researchers with 'an important diagnostic tool for the assessment of social and political dominance' (van Dijk, 1996: 90). According to van Leeuwen (1993), the main concerns of CDA are 'with the discourse as the instrument of power and control as well as with discourse as the instrument of social construction of reality'. The work that goes on within CDA is very diverse, ranging from engagements with a wide range of scientific and social theory (Lemke, 1995; Scollon, 1998; Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999), through direct political interventions (Wodak, 1996; Wodak and Reisigl, 2001), to detailed analysis of texts and interactions. Issues discussed includes race and racism (van Dijk, 1993; Wodak, 1996), gender and sexism (Wodak, 1997; Talbot, 1998; Yieke, 2001, 2002), media representations (Fairclough, 1995; Scollon, 1998; Chouliaraki, 1999), bureaucracy and control (Sarangi and Slembrouck, 1998), language in

relation to education (van Leeuwen 1993), the restructuring of capitalism and neo-liberalism (Fairclough, 1993, 1995b,) and the use of graffiti at universities (Yieke, 2003).

CDA applies to language certain types of critical analysis which have developed within 'Western Marxism'. Significant currents within Western Marxism have come to give considerably more emphasis than other forms of Marxism to the cultural rather than the economic dimensions of societies, emphasising that capitalist social relations are established and maintained (reproduced) in large part through culture (and hence through ideology) and not just (or mainly) through the economic base. Key figures and movements in twentieth century Western Marxism include luminaries such as Antonio Gramsci (1971), the Frankfurt school (especially Jürgen Habermas, 1989, 1994), and Louis Althusser (1971). CDA analysts do not always explicitly place themselves within this legacy, but it frames their work nevertheless.

CDA analyses texts and interaction, but it does not start from these. It starts instead from social issues and problems; problems which face people in their social lives. These are issues which are taken up within sociology, political science and/or cultural studies. CDA looks at these issues and problems in terms of their semiotic dimensions. CDA would thus look at graffiti, not from the premise that these writings are merely texts and interactions, but from the fact that these texts reflect the social issues and problems that face the people who use them.

CDA also analyses semiosis as 'discourse' and it sees semiosis as just one element of the social, but one that is dialectically interconnected with the others. This stems from the premise that CDA sees discourse as a form of social practice. Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s), and social structure(s) which frame it. A dialectical relationship is a two-way relationship, i.e. the discourse event is shaped by situations, institutions and social structures, but it also shapes them (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 256). This means that discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially shaped; it is constitutive in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the status quo, and also in the sense that it contributes to transforming it.

CDA sees itself not as a dispassionate and objective social science, but as engaged and committed. It is thus an intervention in social science practice and social relationships. CDA is 'critical' in the sense that it is a form of research and analysis which is committed to changing people's lives for the better, although there are usually no simple answers as to what is 'better'; rather, this is a matter of on-going debate and assessment (Fairclough, 2001: 26). The commitment to change means that CDA is concerned not only with a 'negative' critique of semiosis

in social life, analysing for instance how it upholds processes of domination, but also with a more 'positive' analysis and an exploration of new and resistant forms of semiosis, with semiosis taken as one element in social struggles.

CDA studies have generally examined the construction, reproduction and mental appropriation of 'top-down' discourses of domination (Chilton, 1985; Fairclough, 1989, 1995; Fowler, 1991; van Dijk, 1993, 1996, 1997). Little attention has hitherto been afforded to the 'bottom-up' analyses of texts such as popular graffiti or to the 'bottom-up' processes of resistance to dominant constructions of reality. This paper, therefore, focuses on the 'bottom-up' discourses of a relatively powerless social group.

Analysis of the discursive construction of graffiti at workplaces in Kenya

A hundred samples of graffiti were collected for this research. They were drawn from the textile factories in Nairobi's Ruaraka area. Of these, I analysed those graffiti that were related to the problems women went through at the workplace. This made up 30 per cent of the total graffiti collected.

This research started from the premise that graffiti have been used since time immemorial to articulate the grievances of people who feel oppressed. Indeed, when we carried out research, we found graffiti all over the walls. In Yieke's research (2003) in Kenyan universities, 40 per cent of her sample of 200 graffiti dealt with social, economic and academic issues that affected students directly in their lives on the campus. The paper argued that if you wanted to be sensitised to and informed about the social issues that affected students, then reading graffiti was one way to do so. It concluded that far from being acts of vandalism and mischief, as often perceived, they were useful communication avenues in a bottom-up process and as a kind of resistance to the status quo.

Having examined what women workers went through in the EPZ companies, it was felt, in the current study, that graffiti (if any) would be one way of corroborating what actually went on in these factories. And indeed this study did find graffiti, although fewer than in number than in the universities. Most of the graffiti on most walls at the various workplaces were lone utterances or sentences, each written by a single author. However, quite a few were also dialogue related and on occasion you would have a continuous dialogue being written by 'writers' at different times (the evidence for this is the use of different kinds of writing materials, for instance, one line would be written in a red felt pen, the next in black felt pen and the subsequent one in pencil, and of course the handwritings would be different to indicate different authors).

Those matters that directly affected the women's lives at the workplace were divided into different subtopics. Issues that were discussed included:

- Harsh working conditions, which included the following:
  - lack of maternity leave
  - denial of sick leave
  - working overtime with no extra pay
  - working without protective clothing
  - poor salaries which are not commensurate with the work done
- Sexual harassment at the workplace
- Lack of trade union representation

Harsh working conditions

Lack of maternity leave/denial of sick leave. This is a concern of the workers at the EPZ companies. From the literature I have read, and also from the interviews that I conducted, it was found that pregnant women were not allowed to continue in work. For the employers, granting maternity was wastage of 'valuable time' and the minute it was discovered that a woman was pregnant, she was dismissed. If such sacked women were ever readmitted to work, then it was as new employees having lost the few entitlements that they had accrued. The latest sackings came in the month of February 2004 when 15 women were dismissed because they were found to be pregnant. This is a gross violation of human rights since every woman has a right to be pregnant when she chooses to and when she is ready. The following graffiti corroborated this account:

Example One

1. We have right to be pregnant and give birth!
2. Really?
3. Try it loose job

From my own assessment and analysis, three different 'authors' wrote these sentences. Writer 1 states a fact that as women workers they have a right to be pregnant. Writer 2 expresses astonishment that this actually happens. Most likely, she is being sarcastic, and is well aware that this is the order of events at this workplace. Writer 3 dares writer two to just try to be pregnant and she will bear the consequences of losing her job, which is actually what happens whenever one becomes pregnant. I deduced that these were different writers because the writings were all in different styles and in different colour inks.

Poor salaries, lack of overtime and long hours of work. The three excerpts below were found next to one another, apparently written by different 'authors' since both the handwritings and the ink colours were different:

Example Two

4. How can *Nyapara* time you in toilet? (*Nyapara* is Swahili for an overseer/ supervisor).
5. Nonsense
6. Ameze wembe. (Swahili direct translation meaning that he/she can swallow a razor blade. The implication is that s/he can do what s/he likes because we do not care).

If we place the three writings in context, they are saying that the EPZ employers are interested in the poor worker putting in all her/his hours while at work. It is even difficult for a worker to excuse herself or himself to go to the bathroom. Employers assume that the worker is malingering, and that this will affect production. If you are the kind of worker who is seen to, frequent the bathroom too much, then you risk either having deductions made from your salary for fewer hours worked or being sacked altogether. To corroborate this, the following was found on one wall:

Example Three

7. Do your thing quickly, or else you will be clocked out!

Sentence 7 also implies that the workers live in constant fear of being fired for very minor offences, as minor as going for a long or even a short call of nature. It has often been suggested, jokingly, that the EPZ companies all over the third world are factories for the manufacture of poverty, which is contrary to their initial objective of empowerment. But evidence suggests that this is not a joke but actually the truth. Workers at EPZ companies put in extra long hours just to earn enough to get by, and nobody is allowed to leave the workplace before fulfilling their quotas. This is regardless of whether or not you are sick, and without any form of leave. One worker said to me that one works around the clock, with only short breaks, and if one does not meet his or her target, then you are detained inside the factory even if it means working until morning. They said that under normal circumstances, the worker puts in between eight and twelve hours on the job with usually only a forty-five minute break. Their daily pay is nominally about two dollars a day, but this is usually reduced since a percentage is normally deducted for the social security or hospital insurance fund, which ironically never benefits the worker since many times it was never even remitted to the designated places.

The 'meeting the target' issue was found to be a very contentious one at the workplace, and most of the workers were very unhappy about it. The following sentences give an insight of what it means to work too hard for too little:

Example Four

8. Beast of burden
9. Yeah, but with poor salary
10. *Mi, nataka pesa* (Swahili for: Me, I want money).
11. *Pesa ya kazi jinga* (Swahili for: Money for stupid work).

Sexual harassment at the workplace

Graffiti suggest that sexual harassment, both verbal and physical, was rampant at these workplaces. This was corroborated in the interviews and by media reports that women are indeed harassed sexually and that whenever a woman worker refuses the sexual advancement of the bosses, then she is fired without her side of the story even being listened to. The following were some of the relevant writings found on the walls:

Example Five

12. We are tired of sexual harassment by nyaparas (*Nyapara* is Swahili word for overseer or supervisor)
13. Say no to harassment and sex discrimination.
14. Some men are better off without their--.They use them to harass poor women in sexual...
15. *Mungu wa huruma atuhurumia sisi wamama*. (Swahili meaning; God of Mercy should have mercy on us women/mothers).

In interviews with some of the workers, they intimated that it was a curse to be brown, beautiful and work at the EPZ. This is because some of the managers and supervisors will ask you for sex, and should you refuse you are fired. If, however, you accept, then you are treated favourably for a while, unlike the rest of the women, but as soon as the supervisor finds a new girl, then you are dropped very fast. If you are not pregnant you are lucky, because your risk of being fired becomes less. If you do not get Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) or even HIV/AIDS, then you are even luckier because these are now prevalent problems at the EPZ companies. The workers claimed that many women, especially young girls, have died from HIV/AIDS because of sleeping with the supervisors, many of whom are infected.

Some women alleged that the kind of sexual harassment that goes on here at the EPZ has strained marital relationships at home, and has also led to a high divorce rate, especially between spouses who work for the same employers. Some of the spouses of the women (regardless of whether the men worked there or not) claim that the women put in too many hours at the workplace, ignoring them and their children. Some of these men said that they could not really be sure whether

their women were actually at work or were involved in other indecent practices that kept them away from home. The consequences of this situation of harassment have forced many female workers to delay or postpone marriage, childbirth and other nurturing roles.

Lack of trade union representation

The workers at the EPZ companies do not have trade union representation. Usually, where there are no unions to represent them, workers suffer more. Even after the current government of National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) was voted into power with the elections of December 2002, and legislation that introduced labour unions in the EPZ was enacted, workers complain that they are still barred from joining the unions. The workers claim that whenever labour officials are called to investigate claims of mistreatment, they always take sides with the employers and ultimately accuse the workers of indiscipline. At the end of the day, the workers who were in the frontline in complaining were usually fired. This became intimidating enough to make workers accept the status quo with its problems of mistreatment just in order to have a paltry salary. The following graffiti demonstrate that lack of representation by trade unions was a real issue at the EPZ:

Example Six

16. Where is Atwoli? (This is the name of the current boss at the Central Organisation of Trade Unions (COTU)
17. We are suffering!
18. Can you face our problems?
19. Just talk and talk and nothing

The examples above were written in a dialogic way, by different 'authors'. The workers said that if COTU could adequately represent them, then all the problems highlighted would drastically reduce. They insist that a collective bargaining agreement should be there between the trade unions and their representatives at the industrial court. This would most likely improve both their salaries and their working conditions. However, with the new NARC government, things are slightly better at the EPZ companies in terms of representation. In January 2003, almost ten thousand workers textile workers from a number of the EPZ firms were sacked for striking for better working conditions. Some of them have, however, since been reinstated following intervention by a committee of officials from COTU, the Federation of Employers (FKE) in Kenya, and the Labour Ministry in Kenya. More, however, still needs to be done to give these workers adequate security.

Conclusion

From the foregoing analysis of samples of graffiti and subsequent discussion, it is evident that they are functionally useful in society; that far from being vandalism and the expressions of people who are idle, they are actually expressive modes adopted by minorities or sub-groups who have been marginalized and denied other avenues of self expression; that in the context of workplaces, they can act as communication avenues for women who are often voiceless and are in constant search for a voice of their own. We have seen that graffiti are actually an alternative means of expression for women and that the 'writers' are participating in a form of communication similar to that found in consciousness-raising groups. This paper has also examined how women in difficult and marginalized situations can and do voice opinions, solicit advice, support, console and even encourage each other, and sometimes call male dominance into question in a society that otherwise silences them. This kind of discourse should be tolerated and even encouraged if we wish to know more about the plight and suffering of women in our society.

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4

Widening Participation for Women Returners to Learning – Meeting the Challenge through eLearning

Shirley Bennett

Abstract

The importance of the lifelong learning and widening participation agendas can hardly be ignored today. In attempting to involve non-traditional learners in Higher Education, elearning has been held up as the ideal way to provide anyplace-anytime study for mature students who need to fit learning around the demands of daily life. Women, in particular, stand to benefit from this means of course delivery. However, simply putting a course online to give flexibility of where and when people can study does not of itself provides the answer. Experience in face-to-face lifelong learning suggests that access in this sense is only one part of the story. This paper will explore the experiences of women returners taking part in a vocationally-oriented schools-focused Foundation Degree programme which uses a virtual learning environment for the delivery of some modules of the programme and more generally for course support. A comparative discussion explores ways in which the findings of this work might be applied to ensure effective design and implementation of courses involving distance or blended learning for women within African contexts.

Introduction

Peraton draws our attention to the fact that in the developing world there is a crying need to address issues of access to adult education as a tool for personal and national development. 'There remain large numbers of adults who never went to school, or who dropped out early; their life chances are restricted and their potential contribution to their society and economy may also be reduced' (2001: 7).

This need does not solely embrace basic education but includes provision of access to higher education, to meet what Kuzvinetsa Peter Dzvimbo, Rector of the African Virtual University, has described as 'a high demand for quality education at tertiary level on the continent'. He advises strategic investment in higher education to meet a significant need for skills upgrading amongst the African workforce in order to prevent the increasing 'isolation of Africa from the Global Knowledge Society':

> Global evidence shows that countries that have succeeded economically have also invested heavily in tertiary education and training. We in the AVU are convinced that, the education and training of Africans at the tertiary level is just as important as the education and training at the primary and secondary levels. Without higher education, there can never be any large numbers of qualified teacher educators in our Universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education (Dzvimbo, 2004).

Within the UK, the need to widen, as well as to increase, participation in Higher Education is especially urgent in the case of older women since, as Medhurst has shown:

> Older women are the ones that are less likely to hold higher education qualifications except for the few … that return to learning later in life. This group of women, especially those over 40, will be increasingly behind in qualification terms. Only by returning to education in greater numbers will this disparity decline (1997: 28).

As a number of papers within the International Gender Conference held in Egerton University, Kenya in April 2004 highlighted, the under-representation of girls and women in all sectors and stages of education in Africa is a significant problem. Colleagues pointed in particular to the difficulties women face as adults within a continent where traditional roles and expectations, family and domestic responsibilities and restrictions on travel present significant barriers to women's participation in education, particularly at the higher levels.

In the west, strong claims have been made for elearning as a tool to address the need to widen participation in education. Similarly, the African Virtual University sees elearning as having an important part to play in broadening the provision of accessible opportunities for engagement in Higher Education within Africa. Initial recruitment would suggest that this applies specifically to widening the engagement of women; the African Virtual University website reports 'a high enrolment of women (over 40 per cent) due to the flexibility offered by the distance learning technology'.

But is elearning really the right tool to help address the broad issues of providing access to learning for African adults, and to address gender inequalities and widen women's participation within adult education? This paper addresses this question. Drawing on lessons from the experience of students and staff involved in a UK-based programme with a specific remit to widen participation in Higher Education, involving a predominantly female student body, we argue that strategies can be found to meet challenges which should not be underestimated but which can be addressed to deliver benefits which outweigh the problems faced.

Research methods

The project on which this paper draws sought to explore the benefits and challenges involved in using elearning as a tool to widen participation in higher education, and the strategies which can be used to address these challenges. The purpose of the present discussion is to consider what lessons can be learnt from the UK case study in order to determine strategies which might be applicable and helpful for the effective design and implementation of elearning courses to widen women's participation in Higher Education in Africa.

The programme which formed the basis for the case study is the Foundation Degree in Pre-16 Learning and Teaching Support, a new degree programme for Classroom Support Assistants within primary and secondary schools in the Humber Region of the UK. Foundation Degrees have a specific remit to widen participation in Higher Education through vocationally-related programmes targeted at non-traditional learners through partnership between Higher Education, Further Education and sector employers.

This particular programme is delivered by the University of Hull and five Further Education colleges within a consortium, and in the first year involved 115 adult returners to learning, with a ratio of 113 women to 2 men. Access to this programme is by non-traditional routes. Few learners possess standard formal qualifications and they range in age from 24 to 56, with the largest number of students in the 40-49 bracket (the 30-39 age group bracket follows close behind). At 80 credits per year, the study load is high in terms of part-time learning, given that participants combine study with family responsibilities and full-time work in Learning Support. The first year of the Foundation Degree in Pre-16 Learning and Teaching Support programme includes modules covering the emerging role of learning support in schools, child development, child protection, foundations of English, Maths and Science, communication skills and the skills needed for study at higher education level.

The programme is delivered by 'blended learning', combining face-to-face classes with online learning supported by Merlin, a Virtual Learning Environment

developed at the University of Hull. Merlin supports asynchronous communication between the students and their tutor and provides a set of features which allows for collaboration, access to resources and course content, assignment submission and feedback.

The Foundation Degree utilises all of these communication features for cross-programme communication amongst tutors and students, and for the support and extension of classroom study through facilitated online discussion. In addition, one module per year is delivered almost entirely online: coursework tasks and resources, collaboration and discussion and the submission of work all take place using the virtual learning environment. The use of online learning removes the necessity for students to attend classes two nights a week, and is intended to help them fit study around their other work and family responsibilities, while still providing students with tutor and peer support.

The research methods which generated the data used in this paper involved focus group discussions exploring the teaching of adult returners within traditional courses, a case study investigation into the use of elearning on the Foundation Degree programme, and workshop discussions about elearning amongst African participants in the International Gender Conference in Egerton University, Kenya.

The focus group involved staff experienced in teaching adult returners to learning within traditional face-to-face teaching environments. Discussions explored the needs of adult learners, the challenges and barriers which they face on returning to learning, and the strategies which can be used to help them to develop their confidence, overcome the problems they face, and build on the skills and life experiences they bring to study.

The case study investigation comprised questionnaires to students involved in the Foundation Degree programme, exploring their experience of online learning; evaluation of existing course design for the online module delivered in the first year of the programme; focus groups with staff involved in teaching this online module; and focus groups with students in specific institutions looking in more detail at specific aspects of their experience of learning online.

A comparison between issues arising from these studies and the priorities within the African context drew on workshop discussions during the International Gender Conference at Egerton University where participants were invited to explore the advantages elearning might offer in the African context, uses that could be made of elearning, problems they would face in implementing elearning in their context and strategies which might be employed to meet those challenges.

Discussion

Within the following discussion we will consider four aspects of the use of elearning with non-traditional learners and for each explore the benefits offered, inherent challenges presented, and strategies which can be employed within elearning course design and delivery to address these challenges and realise the potential which elearning offers.

The first two areas to be discussed are access to IT and the Internet on the one hand and the development of necessary IT skills on the other. These were the two main issues highlighted in the Egerton Workshop as being especially relevant for the African context.

The other two areas for exploration in this paper focus on pedagogical issues. The first concerns the use of elearning to facilitate and support collaborative and constructivist approaches to learning. The second concerns the development of the 'softer' skills such as time-management and information literacy which learners find they need when they encounter the new learner roles which elearning and the use of the Internet in general involve. Neither of these pedagogical issues was prioritised within the Egerton workshop. This confirms trends highlighted by recent research undertaken in Scotland by the eLearning Alliance (Martin and Jennings, 2002) which confirmed earlier findings by Massy (cited in ibid.) showing that a focus on technological skills is typically seen as the more immediate concern in early stages of elearning adoption. A focus on understanding the eLearning process, instructional design and the development of strategies appropriate to the learning needs of eLearners typically comes to the fore as a concern once progress has been made in addressing the immediate technical issues.

The findings of our case study confirm that technical issues do not exist in isolation, and suggest that in considering the use of elearning to improve access to education for African women it will be important to consider both technical concerns and pedagogical issues within elearning course design and implementation.

Access to IT as access to learning

eLearning as the route to flexible, accessible learning is probably the most frequently cited advantage of this new mode of education. The image is one of elearning removing or reducing the attendance requirement at face-to-face classes and allowing people to access learning in a variety of locations within everyday life, whether at home, at work, whilst out shopping or in local library and other IT centres (DfEE, 1998).

There is clear evidence that this flexibility of place is particularly important to women. In one case, research in America showed that 'approximately 75 percent of the women had deliberately chosen a programme delivered via distance learning technologies primarily for the convenience associated with taking courses online or at remote sites near home or work' (Furst-Bowe, 2001: 408). Comments such as 'this type of programme allows me to spend as much time as possible at home with my family', from a participant in that American study, show that the opportunity to fit study around family responsibilities is of major significance in making learning accessible to women.

We found the same in our case study investigation. Our learners expressed appreciation of the flexibility that allows them to study at times that suit their pattern of life. The majority of our students are wives and mothers, juggling study around family responsibilities and full-time work. When asked to identify the one key benefit of this mode of learning, 40 per cent of students chose the flexibility either of time, pace or place offered by learning online. Interviews with students showed that they like 'the flexibility of when and where you work' and the ability to 'go online at 2 a.m. in the morning if you want'.

This issue of flexible access to learning, and in particular the provision of distance learning courses, was similarly identified by participants in the Egerton workshop as the main advantage of elearning in the African context. They noted extension/outreach work, the provision of courses where there is a lack of local expertise, and the targeting of specific hard-to-reach groups as key priorities. In particular, participants felt that elearning could empower women and provide opportunities to overcome traditional barriers to women's participation in learning and progress in academic work. They emphasised the difficulties that African women experience in accessing learning provided at a distance from their home, citing as reasons their heavy domestic responsibilities in a society where roles are heavily gender-related, and the physical restrictions imposed by childbirth and childcare. These responses confirm the findings of evaluations of short courses in Gender, Poverty and Development run over two years by the Centre for Women Studies at Egerton University. These have shown a strong need to develop programmes that women can access while near their homes where they can still take care of other family needs like breastfeeding and housework (Odhiambo, 2004).

However, claims for elearning as a tool to widen participation often ignore the fact that accessing such flexibility is not trouble-free, and that those who need the flexibility are the very people who are likely to have most difficulty accessing the technology needed to take advantage of the benefits which elearning promises.

Even in the UK, Internet access itself is by no means universal and education providers attempting to meet the needs of hard to reach learners cannot take it for

granted. Research conducted by the Universities for the North East (2002) warns that a digital divide is being created with some groups in society having better access to the technology than others and UK government statistics for July-September 2002[1] estimate that 54 per cent of UK households lack Internet access. Our research suggests that these issues of home access and the associated costs are significant, since our findings indicated that flexibility meant the flexibility to study from home. Although the option of Internet access at school existed for many, less than 10 per cent of the Internet access for the group took place at work. For these wives and mothers, many of whom are single parents, childcare difficulties meant that institution-based Internet access is not always a viable alternative even when such is available. This of course, raises further problems of cost. The report by researchers from Price-Waterhouse Cooper (2000) following a 2-week interaction across our student-group concludes that 'the cost on-line is high, (they) need to find a cheaper ISP'; 'Paying by the minute is expensive, an alternative is essential'. Home use also brings conflicts of priorities over shared use of the computer/telephone line, for example with children needing the computer for homework. These were rated in student questionnaires as major constraints in learning online from home.

In the African context, home IT access will only be available to a tiny fraction of the population. On the other hand, childcare is less likely to be a problem within a context of extended family structures and close community relationships. Consequently, access to the Internet is more likely to be via local learning centres and/or Internet cafes. This does not, however make barriers presented by technology a non-issue. Indeed, the problems are even worse in the developing world. As Perraton has highlighted:

> Learners need to have access to the equipment needed to do anything more technologically demanding than read books .... All equipment needs a power supply … and rarely interrupted power supply for computers. There needs to be a service industry capable of maintaining equipment. To use the Internet, the user will need a service provider and to be able to meet the costs of this and of line charges, both likely to be higher, in real terms as well as in relation to earnings, in the south than in the north. These requirements already restrict access … New technologies may narrow rather than widen access (2002: 148).

All of these issues were raised as pertinent to the African context in the Egerton workshop, emphasising problems related to both general disruptions to the electricity supply and the lack of provision in the very rural areas that could benefit most from local access to learning. In fact, in addition to the other problems mentioned

1. http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/intal202.pdf

by Perraton, the discussions pointed also to the poor quality of local service providers and problems with Internet congestion. This, and the cost of Internet access are the issues emphasised by the Rector of the African Virtual University:

> The major problem among African institutions today is the high cost of bandwidth and this in turn affects connectivity in Africa despite the fact that, there are about 48 satellites that cover every square inch of the African continent! Out of the AVU's thirty four partner institutions, only nine have Internet connectivity of more than 128 kilo bits per second (kbps) and this is shared by the whole university. (Dzvimbo, 2004).

In the face of such challenges, it is reasonable to ask whether elearning is appropriate for the African context. The easy answer would be to abandon the notion of elearning for Africa, but the African Virtual University does not see this as an option:

> The use of traditional teaching and learning methods alone (particularly those that are purely residential) fails to provide sufficient access to up-to-date courses which are relevant to the needs of a rapidly growing student base and which would enable graduates to participate in the expanding knowledge economy so crucial to the economic development of African countries. A key challenge for the AVU then is to clearly articulate a pedagogical model for the delivery of content within its partner institutions that addresses the needs above (Dzvimbo, 2004).

A more constructive approach is to consider strategies which neither ignore technical challenges nor see them as insurmountable. Strategies are needed in terms of both practical measures to address the problems and consideration of issues of Internet access and cost at the course design stage.

As indicated above, on the programme which formed the context for the case study, the personal circumstances of the participants meant that problems were largely experienced at the level of the individual and the family. So too, strategies put in place focussed on tactics such as loan of laptops and the provision of advice and guidance as to the best and cheapest ways to access the Internet.

Participants in the Egerton conference identified that strategies to tackle the problems within the African context have to involve structures and policies at national and regional levels. Measures such as intensification of the rural electrification programme, power cut management and the use of stand-by generators to cope with power cuts demonstrate that major initiatives are needed to address problems with the electricity supply. So, too, measures to increase access to computers themselves were seen to require actions such as governments waiving taxes on

computers and computer accessories, provisions to enable the purchase of mobile computer facilities, and the availability of cost-effective equipment provision of credit facilities. They emphasised, too, the role of the private sector in addressing the challenges faced: they felt, in particular, that the private sector had a role in the provision of training in IT maintenance, etc., and in the provision of more service providers offering affordable rates in order to expand the Internet market.

Both the conference participants and the Rector of the AVU identify that economies of scale are important if financial aspects of the technological challenges are to be addressed. The AVU sees achieving this as one of their roles, in partnership with an expanding number of African universities, 'we are now working with more African universities in exploring ways of sourcing bandwidth as a consortium so as to make use of economies of scale' (Dzvimbo, 2004).

Such large-scale measures are clearly needed. However, strategies can also be put in place at the level of the design of an individual elearning course. One approach is to ensure that an 'elearning course' does not rely solely on internet technology. eLearning does not mean channelling all learning through the computer. It is important to integrate different media, including paper-based resources, into the course and even where a course is taught principally online, participants can combine online work with study away from the computer. This will help to alleviate the problems of IT access and cost, and will simultaneously make the new mode of online learning more acceptable and familiar to students since most people unused to working on computers find it hard to work completely onscreen.

eLearning can be used alongside other modes of learning, resulting in what is referred to as 'Blended Learning'. On the Foundation Degree programme, we have found that students respond well to a combination of face-to-face and online learning and the AVU has adopted a strategy of blended, or 'mixed-mode' delivery for their distance learning courses, making use of both technology and traditional distance education methods.

Decisions about the 'blend' of the different modes of teaching and learning cannot be left until the point of course delivery but need to be taken at the course design stage. It is important to consider the role that each element will play and how the face-to-face and online parts of the course will complement each other. Much about the design and implementation of the learning experience will flow from such decisions. It may be, for example, that a decision be taken to ensure the provision of course resources in hard copy, so that students are not dependent on downloading reading material from the internet, which in itself can be expensive. As was pointed out by one of the students on the Foundation Degree, 'the printing of materials from the Internet is expensive in terms of ink and paper. Why does it have to be online? We could just have hard copy'.

This issue is relevant for Africa too. As Perraton has pointed out, past experiences with distance learning in the developing world show that an approach where technology is used to 'centrally load materials which are then downloaded electronically to the tutors in outposts' simply shifts costs from the provider to the students (Perraton, 2002: 145). To use the internet in such a way would make elearning guilty of the sort of 'top-down', distributive approach for which many previous distance learning experiments have been criticised (Perraton, 2002: 83) and would fail to exploit the real advantage of the internet, namely to enable communication amongst learners and tutors and promote active, participatory approaches to learning.

eLearning for IT skills

The UK government white paper '21st Century Skills, Realising Our Potential' (DfES, 2003) describes ICT as the third basic skill. The use of elearning, with the accompanying necessity for ICT skills development, offers adult returners a vital opportunity and imperative to gain skills which are central requirements in today's world.

The argument that the Higher Education has a responsibility to ensure that students develop the IT skills they will need for the job market is often used of traditional students in UK mainstream higher education (Morris et al., 2003). I would claim that we fail the women we wish to engage in adult education if we do not seek opportunities to enable them to develop these skills, to catch up with mainstream students and to avoid being left behind in facing the demands of the society of tomorrow. The same is, of course, true of women, and indeed of the working population at large, within developing countries. As the International Labour Organisation has pointed out,

> The latest World Employment Report finds that, given its different speed of diffusion in wealthy and poor countries, the information and communications technology (ICT) revolution is resulting in a widening global digital divide … The report says that unless this is addressed urgently, the employment aspirations and productivity potential of millions of workers in scores of developing countries won't be realized. Access to the technologies, and ensuring that workers possess the education and skills to use them, are the fundamental policies that developing countries need to consider, the report notes (International Labour Organisation, 2001).

Both the UK Government and the ILO here refer to ICT skills as a gateway to improved employment prospects. The same ILO report refers to the development of ICT skills offering other benefits:

> ICT can also be made relevant to the objective of poverty alleviation, not just through its effect on economic growth, but also through improving access to health care, education and other social services. Public and/or private assistance to community-based organizations to provide access tailored to the needs of poor persons is one place to begin (International Labour Organisation, 2001).

On a personal level, too, our research shows that the development of ICT skills is valued. We found that students on the Foundation Degree valued highly the growth in their ICT skills and found benefits within both their personal lives and their work in schools, saying, for instance, that in the classroom they used the computer more with the children and felt more confident in doing so.

Although the development of ICT skills has been shown to be important, the difficulties should not be underestimated. As adult returners to learning, the students on the Foundation Degree had few pre-existing computer skills when they started the programme and found that the use of elearning proved to be something of a 'baptism by fire'. In the first year of the programme delivery we did not fully appreciate the extent of the challenge our students would face. We did not provide dedicated training at the start of the course and when asked for suggestions as to changes to the module for the coming academic year this was the single most important recommendation made; almost 60 per cent of students mentioned the need for face-to-face Merlin and IT Skills training at the start of the programme as their priority.

The need for ICT training is clear, especially when courses involve adult returners to learning, whose computer skills may be weaker and who have previously experienced failure to succeed in learning. One strategy adopted on the Foundation Degree in Pre-16 Learning and Teaching Support was the provision of training in computer skills at the start of the online course. This was introduced from the second year of delivery, allowing a two-week induction period, including 6 hours of IT training, introductory tasks which can be carried out independently and support for first steps in online interaction with peers. The impact on the students and their learning has been remarked on by both students and tutors and the practice has been continued ever since.

It is important that any ICT training for elearning should provide not only generic ICT skills, such as file management, but also training in the use of any virtual learning environment used on the course. Navigating and operating within the unfamiliar environment of a virtual learning environment can present challenges to any learners unless they are properly prepared; it is important that students' first encounter with the new learning environment is supportive.

Some students will have ongoing support needs. Course costing should allow for continued support if technical skills and lack of confidence with IT are not to prevent adult returners from participating properly in module content (Bennett and Marsh, 2003). There needs to be technical support from someone able to provide quick and clear responses to IT queries from students. Opportunities for individual tutorial time or group workshop sessions focussing on IT skills are also useful.

Measures such as these do not only involve cost; they need to be built into the course design itself and the allocation of learning time and assumed student skills. Instructions for tasks should be simple and clear, worded in a way that reflects the steps that students need to go through to take part in course activities. These activities themselves should initially require only simple IT tasks, with any move to more complex activities introduced in a progressive fashion so as to support evolving IT skills.

eLearning for collaborative and constructivist approaches to learning

The Rector of the African Virtual University declares a commitment to the promotion of approaches to learning which promote deep learning, 'involving constructivist approaches to learning and teaching that foster modelling, coaching, scaffolding, articulating, reflection, exploring, and autonomous and reflexive praxis by learners' (Dzvimbo, 2004).

Within traditional adult education, and in line with principles of 'social constructivism', the vital importance of social aspects within the learning process is well known, especially for women learners. Social interaction helps to maintain motivation, break down barriers and build confidence as participants engage together in the joint enterprise of creating new meanings within the classroom activities. The social and collaborative aspects of the learning experiences are as important online as in face-to-face classes; indeed, evidence suggests that they may in fact be even more important if independent, lone learners are to remain motivated and involved. Students on the Foundation degree reported that one of the aspects of elearning which they like is the sense of studying WITH other people, overcoming the isolation of distance learning and feeling part of an online community even when physically distant from them: they appreciate the opportunity for 'studying with other people online, even if not in body'.

Research in America has shown that 'when instructors design courses so there is little interaction, or pay inadequate attention to students, they may drive students away from programs or cause students to become disengaged from the learning process' (Furst-Bowe, 2001). Participants in the Egerton Conference highlighted opportunities for communication, interaction and collaboration as an important opportunity which the internet could offer to distance learning in Africa. Other papers during the conference highlighted the particular importance of such factors

within the preferred learning styles of women and girls and suggests that this should be a priority within a gendered approach to elearning course design.

Furthermore, the communicative opportunities offered by the Internet can be exploited to actually enhance the opportunities for women to contribute to discussion on a more equal footing with men. Learning online can empower minority or disadvantaged groups and enhance their participation in discussion. Communication through the computer screen means that inequalities of gender, race, age, income-bracket, etc., amongst students become less obvious and therefore less important. As a result, there is evidence that those who might feel intimidated by their 'difference' within face-to-face contexts feel empowered by the relative anonymity of the online context and express their opinions more readily here than in a conventional classroom setting (Furst-Bowe, 2001).

However, the effective promotion of online communication within elearning courses is not trouble-free, and this needs to be taken seriously even at the course design stage. As we have seen, non-traditional learners do not come to elearning courses with well established IT and Internet skills. Communication through the computer can feel uncomfortable at first, and it can be hard for individuals to see their online colleagues as real people. Students may doubt the possibility of quality communication through email and conferencing, and may feel vulnerable putting thoughts into words in an online forum, especially because of the relative 'permanence' of the written word. Comments made in class are transient, and as the conversation moves on, individual statements are forgotten. The text-based format of much online communication means that contributions remain fixed, for all to see, throughout the period of discussion. This can initially feel quite threatening without the establishment of a sense of community and trust amongst the online group.

Time-pressures, too, mean that if online communication is voluntary, encouraged, but peripheral to the main learning process, there is often little take-up (Perraton, 2002: 145). Meaningful online collaboration will not just happen 'because it is a good thing'; for students to see the purpose of online discussion and take the trouble to participate, it must be built into the overall course design from the start.

This has been the approach within the Foundation Degree programme. The Virtual Learning Environment, Merlin, is used to give students opportunities for interaction, collaboration and peer support outside the restrictions of a weekly or fortnightly face-to-face class. These online discussions are seen as a valuable element of the overall learning and even where modules are primarily face-to-face, online discussions facilitated by course tutors form part of every module to consolidate learning in class, extend exploration of issues raised, and help learners share resources and learn skills such as referring to reading to support points of view in a debate. To this

end, full use is made of all the communication and group-building facililities within the virtual learning environment. Individual email facilities and general conference areas allow students the chance to contact tutors and peers. Students are encouraged to use the group community features specific to Merlin, namely the Who's Online?[2] and Who's Who?[3] , as tools to overcome any isolation of working alone at their computer, ask questions or simply chat with fellow students.

Such community-building facilities and the efforts to enable the creation of a virtual group based on mutual trust and co-operation are not peripheral to the use of the internet to provide a quality learning experience. When asked to identify what they felt to be rewarding aspects of learning online, most students focussed on these opportunities for peer support and social interaction, with statements such as, 'You can chat online and help and motivate each other' and 'The most valuable was the mutual support and friendship between us'.

eLearning for learning skills

In an online seminar some years ago, participants argued that elearning was suitable only for 'sophisticated learners', and should be used only for postgraduate courses directed at learners with well-developed study skills. Although we cannot afford to ignore such a claim, accepting it at face value is to take the easy option, an excuse which, if adopted, deprives adult learners of the benefits which elearning may offer, benefits which also include the opportunity and imperative to develop the very study skills which they may indeed currently lack, skills which will be of benefit in any future study and within the world of work.

Robert Hawkins, writing for the World Bank Institute, argues that:

> today's Networked World demands a workforce that understands how to use technology as a tool to increase productivity and creativity. These skills include 'information reasoning', a process in which reliable sources of information are identified, effectively accessed, understood, contextualized, and communicated to colleagues. Furthermore, employers require workers to have the skills necessary to collaborate, work in teams, and share information across global networks, that is, to analyse issues from a multidisciplinary perspective … knowledge workers need to be flexible and able to learn quickly as work environments continue

2. Students are able to see who else is online at the same time as they are.
3. Each member of the group has his/her own homepage and is encouraged to provide brief background and personal details as well as a photo and audio file. The completion of the homepage is optional but students on the whole see the benefit of this feature in getting to know each other and building a group identity.

> to change dynamically. Workers must learn how to learn, and quickly acquire new skills (Hawkins, 2002).

We should not assume that this lacks relevance for a continent such as Africa. Dr Subbiah Arunachalam (2002) of the M S Swaminathan Research Foundation argues that current lack of access to the Internet for scientists in the developing world is creating a new form of poverty - information poverty. Increased Internet access can open up the information-rich context of the network. Yet, as Hawkins intimated, access to information is not the whole story; we all need to be critical consumers of knowledge:

> The dominant issue in education today is not access to more information. In fact, making sense of the quantity of material they are exposed to is a serious challenge for students ... Because of this information explosion ... the goal is to give students the abilities and strategies required to manage this overwhelming breadth and depth of information (Garrison and Anderson, 2003: 11).

Undoubtedly, involvement in elearning courses does require participants to develop such new skills. And the demands placed on women, in particular, mean that they have often gained life-skills from their experience of juggling the many responsibilities and duties of family life, perhaps alongside the demands of a full- or part-time job. Participation in elearning courses can help these women adapt skills of time management and prioritising of work, to the demands placed on them by studying online and using the internet.

One aspect of the wider study skills involved is the need to adapt to a fluid, cyclical pattern of learning which lacks the strict linear structure of face-to-face classes. Our research showed that some students appreciated the fact that a flexible elearning course structure allowed them to pace and manage their own learning and to revisit areas causing them individual difficulty: 'You can have another go at things', and, 'module A was all there to start with so you know clearly what you have to do. You can therefore pace yourself and choose which part of the module to do first. You are not dictated by class teaching'. However, some learners found time-management within this flexibility a challenge, and had difficulty adjusting to the autonomy and responsibility of elearning. They were used to face-to-face, tutor-led learning with imposed deadlines and wanted more structure: 'We were told to do (the Skills module) at our own pace, right up to August 19th … Because we were not given deadlines, we have not done the work. You have to be disciplined to work at your own pace'.

A number of students initially felt they could not move forward without tutor support, complaining about 'waiting for replies to questions if the tutor is not online at the same time as you' and saying that 'we wait too long for feedback

on our work too'. This presented problems also for tutors, who found this student expectation of instant response demanding. 'There is a tendency towards 24/7 access with eLearning. The students expect instant responses, as if you are a computer not a human being'.

This dependence on the tutor illustrates the fact that the challenges we face in using elearning, a mode of study which asks learners to be 'more self-directed, more motivated and extend more effort than when they were students in a traditional classroom' (Furst-Bowe, 2001), go beyond study skills themselves. It is well documented that adult returners to learning often bring negative 'baggage' from previous learning experiences, resulting in a lack of self-belief and confidence, and an in-built fear of being assessed and fear of being wrong. Their doubts will not go away when moving learning online, for 'the online learning environment is not just another physical environment, more complex than others, but a new space for teaching and learning. Technology itself does not improve learning' (Alexander and Boud, 2001: 4).

Similar strategies can help with both these issues of dependence and time- and work-management. Clearly there is a need to build training in skills of time and work management into the elearning programme for adult returners. Over and above this, when designing an elearning programme, it is important to identify clearly the focus or aim of the 'e' and 'non-e' parts of a complete course package. For example, we can involve students in using the internet specifically for information searches, communication and interaction and provide for other tasks, such as reading and writing, to be done away from the computer or at least without the need to be online. Identifying a clear role for the different aspects of a course enables tutors to provide students with guidance about how to structure their study time and manage their work in a way which helps them cope with problems of limited internet access. If they have a clear idea of how to structure their work, if they know exactly what they should be doing online and what can be done offline, learners will not be so dependent on the tutor to tell them what to do when.

Conclusions – eLearning to widen the participation of women in adult learning

This paper sought to address the question of whether elearning might represent a useful tool to provide access to learning for African women. We have explored the benefits and the challenges involved, and have drawn on our experience of using elearning with non-traditional women adult returners to learning in Hull to suggest strategies which may be of value within similar initiatives in the South.

We have seen that there are both technical and pedagogical issues to consider, from access to computers and the Internet, and the development of appropriate IT

skills, to the facilitation of active, collaborative learning and the development of relevant study/learning skills. We have seen that experience shows that 'well managed mediated learning environments can enhance student experience and there is ample evidence from students and educators to support this' (Morris et al., 2003). At the same time, we have demonstrated that if strategies to address the challenges are to be effective, the issues must be addressed not just on a piecemeal basis but at the very start of course development and course design.

Throughout the discussion, a recurring aspect of strategies relating to course design has been the need to identify the particular role that elearning will play in relation to other components within the overall course programme. This is vital if we are to ensure that the online, face-to-face and private study elements within a blended learning course are to complement each other and if student needs are to be met and the challenges they face addressed. No one approach suits all; the specific use that an educator decides to make of technology and the internet will depend on their understanding and position in relation to learning theory:

> The Internet acts as a type of Rorschach test for educational philosophy. When some people look at the Internet, they see it as a way to deliver instruction. When other people look at it, they see a huge database for students to explore. When I look at the Internet, I see a new medium for construction, a new opportunity for students to discuss, share, and collaborate on constructions (Garrison and Anderson, 2003: 39).

Each of these models of elearning has something to offer which can enhance the adult learning experience. Undoubtedly, many forms of elearning provide opportunities for self-pacing and reflection, which can be appreciated by those adult students who lack confidence or learn more slowly. Other courses use elearning to maximise opportunities for student independence, inviting students to surf the web in pursuit of their individual interests as adults; adult learners are treated as adults and given autonomy and control in deciding the focus of their learning. Yet other programmes of study emphasise the collaborative potential of the Internet and use elearning to provide opportunities for active collaborative learning.

The key issue here is that effective implementation of elearning to widen adult participation in education is not a matter of technical sophistication to provide a media-rich learning environment. The more important thing is to ensure clarity in the design and implementation of elearning courses. In so doing, we can develop courses in which we exploit the ways in which elearning can embrace the needs of adult learners, adapt to the particular challenges inherent in adult learning contexts, accommodate adult learning styles and facilitate the type of learning on which they thrive.

Of course, there are a multitude of contextual factors which mean that lessons cannot be applied from one situation directly to another. The particular approach chosen must be sensitive to context, and we do well to take heed of the cautious note expressed by Govinda Shrestha that:

> … so long as the trial experiments are done with small groups of tertiary students in high technology countries, the innovations are likely to be inappropriate to the mass distance education needs in low technologies countries (Shrestha, 1997).

However certain principles apply in all contexts. Our research has shown that neither problems nor benefits can be taken at face value. In using elearning for widening participation, course design must be education and development-led, not technology-led. It is vital to keep the needs and situation of the learners paramount in our minds in elearning design, delivery and implementation. This should be the philosophy underpinning our use of elearning with adult learners and it will go far to help us identify strategies appropriate to the particular contexts in which we work.

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5

The Self-Help Group – Ideal Vehicle for Gender Education

Marion W. Mutugi

Abstract

The self-help group concept began in rural Kenya as a women's initiative for availing ready cash for emergencies as well as support for occasions such as weddings and funerals. The composition, leadership and informality of these groups provide a regular forum for peer education which can be used to identify local development issues and introduce interventions for the alleviation of poverty. This paper presents a model from the Kirinyaga District where a Community Based Organization acts as an umbrella to provide interaction within and between members of one hundred self-help groups. This has provided a forum for the dissemination of gender-specific training in the areas of agriculture, health, education and micro enterprise. The effectiveness of the self-help group as a forum for gender-based training for advances in agriculture, science, technology and entrepreneurship is presented and discussed.

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the self-help group as a forum for introducing gender-specific advances in science and technology. A comprehensive definition of self-help groups was given by Katz and Bender in 1976 (cited in Katz, 1981):

> Self-help groups are voluntary, small group structures for mutual aid and the accomplishment of a special purpose. They are usually formed by peers who have come together for mutual assistance in satisfying a common need, overcoming a common handicap or life-disrupting problem, and bringing about desired social and/or personal change. The initiators and members of such groups perceive that their needs are not,

> or cannot be, met by or through existing social institutions. Self-help groups emphasize face-to-face social interactions and the assumption of personal responsibility by members. They often provide material assistance, as well as emotional support; they are frequently 'cause'-oriented, and promulgate an ideology or values through which members may attain an enhanced sense of personal identity.

The formation of a self-help group is therefore a spontaneous reaction to individuals' common experience of an undesirable situation, and it is one which helps them to gain control over matters that concern them most by empowering them to seek solutions for individual and collective benefit. Katz clearly describes the progression of this empowerment from hopelessness, to agreeing, engaging and finally creating the group.

The history of self-help groups is reviewed by Nayar et al. (2004) and Zola (1979). The earliest records of self-help groups date back to the 19th century in both industrialized Europe and frontier days in America. In Victorian Europe, the need for self-help group formation was triggered by deteriorating social structures, which led to increased poverty, disease and death in a disadvantaged sector of the population. These groups focused mainly upon the health sector, and provided support for predicaments such as terminal illness and old age. They fulfilled a need that was no longer met by existing social and health services. In America, however, the stimulus for forming these groups was immigration to the New World where people were thrust into a strange environment without services to aid their survival. They therefore turned to one another, and formed groups with members who shared similar social characteristics such as race, religion, or country of origin, irrespective of sex or age. The main activity of these groups was social services such as burial and funeral rites as well as borrowing and lending money.

In Asia, the Gandhian philosophy of self-reliance provided a framework for the development of self-help groups in India and Bangladesh, with a primary focus on poverty alleviation, by providing income-generating units for economic empowerment. These groups further developed into fully-fledged economically oriented co-operatives with elaborate systems of saving and credit provision. They specifically targeted women and it was estimated in the 1990s that around 85 per cent of the groups in India were formed exclusively by women and were operating as production-oriented, income-generating units. Lately, these groups have been used for social support, especially in relation to the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

In Kenya, the self-help group concept started out in the rural areas primarily as a women's initiative with the specific aim of social and economic empowerment. Membership of these groups were generally based on residential proximity or family relatedness. Later models have based their membership also on economic or

developmental activities and are often of mixed gender. In mixed membership groups, women tend to be relegated to the periphery as far as leadership is concerned. A major exception is the position of treasurer which is almost always held by a woman, even in mixed gender groups. Sport and drama based self-help groups are common among the youth but tend to be male dominated in their membership and leadership.

The initial self-help groups were women's groups whose main activity was saving and lending money - the popularly-called 'merry-go round'. Older groups, which are more cohesive, tend to move on to development activities such as the purchase of household utensils, items of clothing (lessos and sweaters), iron roofing sheets and water tanks, as well as the construction of latrines and bathrooms. Other than these activities, the self-help group provides the single most important forum for education among women at the grass roots. This is due to its social organisation and cohesion, important considerations for peer influence and healthy competition among members.

A shortcoming of each self-help group is a tendency to be secretive about the deliberations of their group and a reluctance to share experiences with others. This results in isolation, even among groups of geographical proximity, leading to a shortage of new ideas. In many cases, the lack of new ideas leads quickly to apathy among members, especially after every member has received the expected benefit like a water tank. This apathy usually leads to the disintegration of the group. To overcome isolation, linkages need to be built with other self-help groups. This provides an opportunity for sharing ideas that have been tried, proven and tested within similar geographic and probably socio-economic groups. To foster these linkages, it is important to have a focal point organisation that plays the umbrella role of bringing groups in touch with each other.

It is with this need in mind that the Ndia Integrated Women Development Association (NIWDA) was started as a community based organisation (CBO) with corporate self-help group membership. The sole purpose of NIWDA was to provide linkages between various self-help groups so as to document and share best practices in the areas of agriculture, health, education and micro-enterprise and thus stimulate activities for poverty alleviation, especially among rural women.

Materials and methods

Ndia is one of the administration divisions of Kirinyaga District in the Central Province of Kenya. It is basically an agricultural area and cash crops like tea and coffee are the traditional economic activity. Food crops like rice, maize and beans are also grown. The main livestock industry is dairy farming, which has also faced challenges in view of the collapse of traditional marketing outlets like the Kenya Cooperative

Creameries. With the recent price slump in coffee and to a lesser extent tea, horticultural crops like tomatoes and French beans are now being cultivated. Despite the rich agricultural potential of Ndia, the trend of development has been slowed down and reversed in the last decade due to the dependence on cash crops as the main economic activity. It is against this background that this work was carried out.

NIWDA started in 2002 as a women-led corporate membership organisation with the single objective of providing a forum for gender-sensitive education exchanges that will encourage development and the alleviation of poverty. There are 16 executive committee members who form the board of this organisation. These were chosen on the basis of their leadership quality, i.e. elected from positions of leadership in at least three other organisations such as churches, self-help groups, schools and cooperative societies. These 16 women were balanced for age, educational level and religious affiliation and came from the four administrative locations of the division. Self-help groups are introduced to NIWDA by executive committee members and on application, they are affiliated to, benefit from and share information through linkages with other member groups. Groups are accepted for affiliation regardless of gender composition as long as they are interested in the specific priority areas of agriculture, health, education and micro-enterprise. Figure 1 below shows the NIWDA model.

To date, over 100 self-help groups are affiliated to NIWDA. They are varied in membership, gender composition and age, as well as objectives and activities. Membership preference is given to groups whose activities are economic and development oriented as opposed to groups dealing purely with welfare issues. However, as Table 1 demonstrates, of the original activities of the groups affiliated to NIWDA, almost two-thirds were welfare related, fifteen per cent were economic and the remainder had a diverse range of objectives.

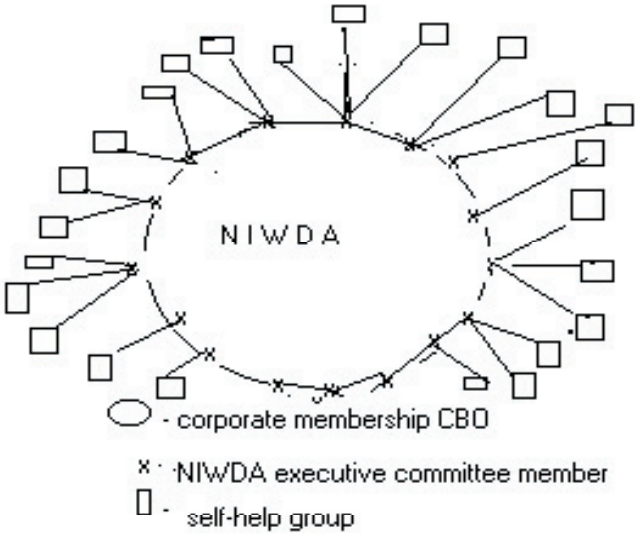

Fig. 1 The NIWDA model

Monthly meetings are held and hosted by the membership self-help groups in different geographic areas of the four locations. These meetings are open forums where training is given on topics chosen by the local members. Guest speakers are often invited to handle specialised topics although a major activity always includes speakers from the other self-help groups with experience in the particular topic under discussion.

Table 1
Original activities of self-help groups affiliated to NIWDA

Type and activity of self-help group	% of groups
Welfare: merry go round, burial, hospital bill, Christmas lunch	62
Economic activity: goat keeping, market women, bicycle transport (*boda boda*)	15
Neighbourhood: informal settlements, security	8
Clans: conflict resolution land adjudication,	5
Social activity: drama, acrobatics	3
Water project, common origin	2
Other	5

Every member self-help group is supposed to send a representative to each meeting, and this person is then expected to play the role of trainer of trainers once they get back to their group. Once they get to know each other, members of various self-help groups are encouraged to interact with each other and provide consultation beyond the patronage of the umbrella organisation.

Results

Four distinct programmes existing in NIWDA will be briefly discussed.

Agriculture

The fact that Kirinyaga is predominantly an agricultural area was the foremost concern of the membership in identifying this programme. This was especially important given the fall in prices of the traditional crops of tea and coffee. It was felt that the programmes should concentrate on products that are traditionally considered 'a woman's crop or animal'. In this way, there would not be competition with men for management and marketing of the product and this would further empower the woman directly. It was with this in mind that banana growing and dairy goat keeping were chosen for they are traditionally accepted as women's

responsibilities. It was further decided that only genetically improved varieties would be introduced.

Dessert bananas developed by tissue culture techniques for pest resistance and synchronized maturation were the crop of choice. Banana seedlings are ordered and purchased by individual members through their self-help groups. Once the volume of fruit is more than the local market can take, its marketing to urban consumers is planned through these same groups.

The Alpine dairy goat is the animal choice in view of the many small land portions that are not able to support dairy cattle. A pedigree breeding male is purchased by a self help group, and used to sire genetically improved offspring using the local breeds of females. The offspring are then further bred up to the third generation, thus producing milking goats. To avoid inbreeding, the he-goats are changed after every generation. The breeding males are later exchanged through linkages with self-help groups who have the same dairy goat keeping activity.

To support the programmes, NIWDA worked in collaboration with Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT), Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI), and the Ministry of Agriculture, who supply scientific and extension input. Education on orchard management and animal husbandry, as well as on the advantages of these improved varieties is conducted at the monthly forums, where demand is created.

Health

The health programmes in NIWDA are both preventive and curative, and emphasise the use of naturally and locally available products. Education on the benefit and use of traditional food grains and vegetables is provided in order to change the current trend towards dependence on processed foods considered 'modern'. The use of natural remedies as a locally available and affordable means of dealing with ill health is also encouraged. Local people with knowledge of natural remedies are especially important for implementation of this programme.

The issues arising from the HIV/AIDS pandemic are also handled by NIWDA in order to achieve and maintain high levels of sensitisation and advocacy. Of particular interest is identifying the infected, encouraging them to accept their condition and providing an enabling environment for their acceptance in the community.

The International Centre for Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE), Maendeleo ya Wanawake, Ministries of Health and Agriculture, as well as various NGOs, collaborate with NIWDA on this programme by providing resource people and materials.

Education

Under this programme, training on civil, legal, human, gender and children's rights is conducted. This is especially important in view of the history of Kirinyaga as one of the districts in Kenya notorious for domestic and land-related violence. A strong aspect of this programme involves land issues among the slum dwellers in the informal settlements and villages next to the trading centres. Several NIWDA women have been trained as paralegals to train and provide readily available intervention where necessary.

Though initially viewed with suspicion by men who thought that educating women on their rights would empower them to cause social discord, this programme is now very popular, to the point that the provincial administration and police refer cases to NIWDA for counselling and evaluation. Support for specialised training for this programme has come from NGOs like the Federation of Kenya Women Lawyers (FIDA Kenya), League of Kenya Women Voters, Women's Political Alliance Kenya, Pamoja Trust and Shelter Forum, as well as Independent Medical-legal Unit.

Micro-enterprise

This programme targets NIWDA self-help groups whose mandate includes some economic activity. Training on business proposal writing, planning and reporting are taught to inject professionalism into business. Record keeping, saving, growth and reinvesting are especially emphasised to increase the viability and sustainability of business. The establishment of a village bank providing credit to individual members for business start-up and expansion is managed by NIWDA and secured by self-help groups. So far, this is the most visible programme due to its ability to transform a person's self worth and credibility in society. For its success, it is important to target business oriented people at the lowest socio-economic level who have no other means of acquiring credit and whose compliance to the stringent requirements of accountability is highest.

Discussion and conclusion

NIWDA has provided an umbrella organization that provides linkages for sharing information between self-help groups and thus demystifying the closed systems that these groups operate. So far, it appears that single-gender self-help groups are more effective in terms of the reception and application of information. Free flow of information within and between groups is highest in women-only groups, followed by youth groups and men-only groups. According to our experience, mixed-gender self-help groups are the least receptive.

The major lesson learned within the two years of NIWDA's operations is that it is possible to have a women-led initiative for development using the self-help group as an entry point. A networking model can thus be used to introduce new interventions for poverty alleviation using the self-help group as a ready-made vehicle. It is important to note that these self-help groups were pre-existing and were used irrespective of the activity they were initially constituted for. Although this work targets the woman, it is interesting to note that there are men-only self-help groups affiliated to NIWDA, indicating that a rural male community also benefited when they recognized a women's initiative and accepted women's leadership.

From this preliminary experience, we strongly recommend using pre-existing self-help groups as reliable and effective vehicles for the exchange of information both vertically and horizontally and for educating populations on issues of development. According to Kropotkin (1904), the self-help group is the oldest and most natural system of improving the situation of human beings. Since this system is basically a women's structure in Kenya, it is recommended that development organizations utilize the self-help group as a ready-made social organ for gender-sensitive education for development and poverty eradication.

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6

Environmental Policy and Law: A Gender Perspective

Charles Charo Lugo

Abstract

In many rural areas and low-income cities, environmental problems in and around the home impose an enormous burden, particularly on women, children and the elderly. Practical policy strategies are therefore needed to assist women and children in diminishing and transcending the environmental hazards associated with traditional roles. This paper gives the result of a study of the environmental health hazards of three types of cooking fuels on principal homemakers (mainly women) in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA). The study revealed that the levels of respiratory particles appear to be disturbingly high, especially for wood and charcoal users, when compared to WHO recommendations. Levels of carbon monoxide from charcoal were also higher than UNEP-WHO guidelines. From these results, an extrapolation is made to the Kenyan situation. The paper concludes with an overview of the Kenya National Environmental Health Policy and its implementation plan. There is a general need to include gender perspectives in environmental policy, especially in the management of environmental risks and health hazards in and around the home.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to show the impact of gender relations on environmental issues, and to indicate why there is a need for reforms in environmental policy and law to make them more gender sensitive. Satisfactory achievement of sustainable development and sound environmental policy depends partly on adopting a transformative approach to gender policy and action.

There are three different ways of looking at gender and the environment, or gender and development in general. The first is an equity approach, which argues

that gender equality ought to be adopted as a development objective on the grounds of morality and justice, including equity in decision-making about the environment, and access to and control of the resources and benefits of sustainable environmental policies. Secondly, the efficiency approach argues that women need to be full participants in any environmental programme in order for its objectives to be achieved, given the significance of women's labour contribution, managerial skills and knowledge about the environment as well as their role in production and reproduction.

Thirdly, the transformative approach argues that the present structure of society needs to be transformed in order to ensure a people-friendly, sustainable development process in which women and men are able to empower themselves and live full, dignified lives, regardless of class, race, ethnicity, religion or national/imperial locations. Transformation of gender, class and other relationships is sought at all levels of society from the individual, household and community, to the national and global levels.

In recent studies of gender-environment relations a spectrum of perspectives has emerged. They are in agreement that there are differences between women's and men's environmental relations, and that these differences should inform policy concerning environment and sustainable development. They nevertheless conceive of gender-environment in different ways, and this is where policy implications diverge.

A predominant set of perspectives highlights women as having a 'special' relationship with the environment, as its users or 'managers'. In development circles, this approach has become known as Women, Environment and Development (WED), and as a common emphasis of policy and intervention from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to major donor agencies, it represents an explicit attempt to link the earlier Women in Development (WID) approach with recent environmental policy concerns. WED draws heavily on images of women's current roles as users and managers of natural resources: hewers of wood, haulers of water, custodians of genetic resources, food producers and so on. These images support the view that women have an especially close affinity with the environment, and that women's interest and environmental interests are complementary; what is good for women is good for the environment and vice versa. In policy terms, this has often become an argument for women's increased participation in environmental management.

Gender, environment and epidemiology

Although this paper does not set out to discuss Environment and Epidemiology, there is a strong focus on environmental problems in and around the home and

how they impose an enormous burden, particularly on women, children and the elderly. Practical strategies are needed to assist women in diminishing or transcending the environmental hazards associated with their traditional roles.

Since it is usually women who care for and manage the home and its environs, most households' environments cannot be said to be equally gendered. Moreover, the home and neighbourhood environments are critical to the health and well being of women. Adult men tend to spend more time away from the home, and thus face fewer of its environmental hazards. This gender dimension to the local environment is strongly conditioned by affluence, is of special relevance to environmental management in low-income cities, and particularly in their more disadvantaged neighbourhoods. In such areas, some of the most serious environmental problems are concentrated around people's homes (McGranahan, 1993).

Age is also another conditioning factor. While it is to be expected that low-income children will be especially at risk from local environmental deficiencies, it is not questionable that young girls will be more at risk than boys. This is because young girls, stereotyped to be future mothers, are more fully involved in the management of the home environment, the sick and other children.

A qualitative appraisal of burdens and risks conducted in Ghana's Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA) showed that women were usually formally subordinated to the male household head, despite having considerable responsibility and in some cases autonomy. Away from home and in the workplace, environmental management typically becomes a public responsibility, administered primarily by men themselves working in hierarchically structured organizations. The quantitative analysis indicates however, that between what men at least perceive to be the private arena of the household and the realm dominated by the state are a number of niches where women play important roles that are to some degree an extension of their domestic responsibilities. Women typically work together to manage the environment of the house compound, and are considered primarily responsible for maintaining the spaces between the compounds (Songsore and McGranahan, 1995). They are usually responsible for children, who move from place to place.

The quantitative results confirm and go beyond the observation that adult women, on account of their household responsibilities, bear an inordinate share of the environmental health burden within the domestic sphere. Despite changing gender relations, women's environmental responsibilities have gone largely unchallenged. Government supported service delivery has lessened some of the women's burden, at least among the more affluent households, but much still needs to be done. In Kenya the government has policies and laws guiding the construction of houses in the municipalities and cities. However, there are no building codes for rural areas. The demand by the National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA) that

every development project, including housing, must be subjected to Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is so far not yet enforced. As a result, most home environments are not covered by this legislation. This points to an important gender-related challenge in local environment and health improvement. Orthodox policy tools are designed for the public sector and deal primarily with problems that extend physically as well as socially into the public sphere. In much of the world, traditional gender roles place burdens upon women within a decentralized but male dominated private sphere. Some writers have suggested that women are currently in the process of leading a transformation within the private sphere analogous to the democratisation of the public sphere (Giddens, 1992). Whether such a transformation is taking place is debatable. It is clear, however, that inflexible gender roles and an over-reliance on orthodox public policy can make it difficult for women to manage the household environment efficiently, let alone allocate responsibilities in an equitable manner.

Gender and age divisions of labour in household environmental care: a qualitative account

The principal environmental management tasks normally performed by women include cleaning the home, toilets and bathrooms; washing clothes; fetching water and buying or fetching domestic fuel for cooking; going to purchase food items and other household needs from the market; cooking food, serving meals and cleaning dishes. In all these activities, they may be exposed to serious environmental health risks.

Managing the home environment

Not all environmental caring roles are necessarily undertaken by the principal female homemakers. As revealed by many studies, a complex division of labour often exists between wife and husband, wife and especially female children, wife and housemaid or foster child, wife and mother-in-law or sister-in-law. These vary according to the composition of the household, stage in the demographic cycle, wealth, type of employment of adults and whether the principal female homemakers are also the principal 'breadwinners'. This variation notwithstanding, women generally take their roles as carers for the home environment and as wives and mothers most seriously. The social norm is for women to do the unpaid physical work and for the men to pay the bills like rent, electricity bills, toilet charges and provide money for the upkeep of the family.

Caring for children, the elderly and the ill of the household

For principal homemakers with infants and children, caring for the home also includes feeding, bathing and clothing the child. It is the mother who has to keep

close watch over the children, monitoring their health state, worrying when children fall sick and taking them both to health care providers and to school. The mother, together with the grandmother and female siblings, is the child's entertainer, playmate, educator and socializer. All these activities entail a heavy demand on the woman's labour time and often stand in conflict with other domestic tasks and income generating activities. As in most cultures, 'idealization of the institution of motherhood as all powerful, strong and caring brings with it the implication that mothers alone have full responsibility for child-bearing and all the related household caring and domestic work' (O'Connell, 1994: 37). Of the mother's workload, caring for infants at walking age especially can be tiring and difficult. At this age, for instance, the child is excited about eating, and eats almost everything. The child is prone to many environmental hazards, and most children suffer from environmental diseases. In low-income cities, waste disposal is a major hazard to such children. Worse is the careless disposal of used condoms which children pick up and use as balloons after mouth-inflating them, thus exposing themselves to serious health hazards.

Women in their turn physically nurse sick children and adults (especially elderly people) while increasingly contributing towards paying the health bills of low-income households. Women are not only exposed to communicable diseases when other household members become ill, but often experience an increase in their responsibilities, adding to an already stressful life.

Managing communal areas

In low-income neighbourhoods, where the majority of the city's population is found, a nexus of informal arrangements has developed for managing communal areas and facilities within the house compound and in the neighbourhoods. It is the internal architecture of house compounds, more than kinship networks, that determine the institutional arrangements for managing shared facilities and spaces (Songsore and McGranahan, 1995). These include the courtyard in the compound house and the immediate surroundings, the in-house shared toilet, kitchen and bathroom. Collective responsibilities also include mechanisms for sharing out electricity and water bills among all members who share the same meter.

A gender division of labour is evident, as women play a critical role in maintaining good hygiene and sanitation within these communal areas. Women are responsible for cleaning shared kitchens, bathrooms, courtyards, toilets and the immediate environs of the house. Arrangements for joint management are often negotiated between the principal female homemakers from each household within the house compound. Bachelors who do not have female dependants are exempted from these "feminine" duties. In such activities, women are exposed to more environmental hazards than men. There is therefore a need to reform environmental

policy to make it more gender sensitive. The poor representation of women at the policy-making levels is a major obstacle to this as it denies them a chance to shape policy in response to both their practical and strategic gender needs at the household level.

Gender, class and the hazards of managing the local environment: a quantitative analysis

Studies have indicated that the degree of exposure of an individual, or a household to environmental hazards within the home is mediated by the socio-economic status of the household and the gender, age and economic position of individual members (Songsore and McGranahan, 1995). Irrespective of the gender of the head of household, women play the dominant role in environmental management within the household. Also, most middle-income households tend to employ other females as homemakers. Studies in the GAMA indicated that of the 1000 households interviewed, 95 per cent had women as the principal homemakers with a mere five per cent having a male as a principal homemaker. Women as a group therefore bear the primary responsibility of managing the household environment. But according to their class location, they may be confronted with an entirely different array of environmental hazards, and rich women may be in a position to transfer these burdens to poor working class women and men hired by the household (Songsore and McGrahanan, 1995).

Household wealth and the environmental burdens of women

The key areas considered in this section relate to water and sanitation; insect vectors, pest and insect control methods; and indoor air pollution and housing problems. Statistics for five wealth groups of roughly equal size illustrate the extent to which the environmental burdens on women become more severe with the declining economic position of the household (Songsore and McGranahan, 1995). They also illustrate shifts in the niches within which these environmental problems are encountered and managed locally. The poorer the household, the more likely it is that women must cope with the potentially conflicting interests of other households, which share technologies and environmental services.

Water and sanitation. Women and children, who are responsible for water collection and its use for laundry, cooking and domestic hygiene, suffer most if supplies are contaminated and difficult to obtain. Women in wealthy households have access to exclusive household facilities and do not face the hazards of collecting child faeces found in household environment or cleaning a household and neighbourhood environment in which accumulated garbage and human faeces are often intermixed. By contrast, women in poor households have to manage household

and neighbourhood environments characterized by faecal contamination and filth from garbage accumulation and sullage. The poor rely mostly on crowded communal or shared pit latrines. As a result of the crowding of these sanitary facilities, open defecation is often practiced by neighbourhood children. Women act as the principal household managers in poor communities and face numerous health hazards as a result of inadequate water supply and sanitary facilities.

Insect vectors, pests and insect control methods. Women as environmental managers have to cope not only with inadequate water supply, poor sanitary conditions and accumulations of garbage, but also pests and insect vectors such as flies, mosquitoes, rats and cockroaches which find their habitats in the poor, crowded household environments. These pests are implicated in the transmission of various communicable diseases such as malaria and various diarrhoeal diseases. Malarial mosquitoes breed in undrained accumulations of water, and flies are prevalent in kitchens, toilets, cesspools and uncovered household refuse containers.

Poor households face particular burdens with regard to insect vector and other pests. Apart from mosquitoes, which appear to be cosmopolitan in distribution, with perhaps higher concentrations around peri-urban zones, all the other pests show a marked concentration in poor households. Women in wealthy households have fewer problems because they can afford more effective pesticides. Mosquito coils cause more pollution problems. Women in especially poor households have to face additional problems related to indoor air pollution, crowding and other housing inadequacies. While these are important problems in their own right, crowding and inadequate housing also make the pest issue even more of a collective problem.

Indoor air pollution, crowding and other housing conditions. While the availability of adequate potable water, sanitation services and solid waste disposal facilities are of critical concern to the central government and the metropolitan authorities, the same is not yet the case for air pollution. This is because the technology and the legality of identifying the sources and amounts of air pollutants in the region are not easily accessible and available. In Kenya, such technological and legal interventions have hardly been introduced and, to the extent that they do exist, there is a need to create awareness of them, particularly among the rural and the more disadvantaged urban people. There is no direct policy that relates architectural designs to air pollution. Most rural and some peri-urban households are poorly ventilated and most living rooms serve both as the bedroom and the kitchen. Within the home environment, women and children are sometimes exposed to high levels of indoor air pollution from cooking fires, particularly when wood and charcoal combine with poor ventilation and overcrowding. The use of inefficient fuels such as charcoal and wood fuel is particularly common in poor households. Small-scale industries operated by poor women in the home and

neighbourhood environment such as fish smoking, brewing, and local food manufacturing add to the risk of indoor air pollution. Most households do not have the luxury of a separate kitchen, so they often cook in the open air where risks of exposure may, however, be reduced. Moreover, since poor households live in poor neighbourhoods where other households are likely to be cooking with smoky fuels, the smoke exposure from cooking fuels becomes a collective problem that is very difficult to manage. Other problems common in poor households relate to leaking roofs and to a lesser extent, mould and dampness.

Exposure to emissions from cooking fuels

The predominant source of in-house air pollution is fuel combustion. As such, many of the relevant pollutants are the same as those outdoor: sulphur dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitric oxide, nitrogen dioxide, polycyclic organic matter, and particulates generally. In addition to the composition of the pollutants, the degree of health damage is related to exposure situations, concentration, time and extent of exposure, and the physiological and psychological status of the individual. Many of the emitted compounds have long-term effects on health (Ellegard and Egneus, 1992: 4). The exposure of women to respiratory particulates and carbon monoxide shows a wide variation in relative risk depending on the cooking fuel used. The GAMA studies provide useful data on the contribution of cooking fuels to air pollution and how this varies by the wealth of the household.

Exposure to respiratory particulates when cooking

In the GAMA studies, a subset of 199 women was monitored for respiratory particles (RSP) and carbon monoxide (CO) while cooking a meal using various fuels. Average concentrations of respiratory particles (RSP) (_g/M3) were calculated from three sources of fuels namely: wood, charcoal and Kerosene/LPG/Electricity. Wood users were subjected to the highest average concentrations, followed by charcoal users. Kerosene, LPG and electricity users were lumped together because of their small sample size. Analysis of variance indicates statistically significant differences in exposure to RSP among the three fuel-user groups. The results were as shown on Table 1.

According to the WHO guidelines for outdoor air, the mean daily concentration of total suspended particles (TSP) should not exceed 150-230 _g/M3 more than seven days per year. In view of this, these levels appear to be disturbingly high, especially for wood and charcoal users.

Women in poor households are more likely to use wood (especially those in the rural areas who engage in subsistence fuel wood foraging), together with

charcoal as their principal fuel. One can therefore safely conclude that poor women face the highest exposure to these respirable particulates with possible short and long-term damage.

Table 1
Average concentrations of RSP (_g/M3) in three groups of fuel users

Wood			Charcoal			Kerosene/LPG/Electricity		
Mean	SE	n	Mean	SE	n	Mean	SE	N
587	94.0	21	341	34.4	122	195	55.0	24

Source: Benneh et al. (1993).

Exposure to carbon monoxide during cooking

Carbon monoxide (CO), which is emitted from cooking fires, can also be injurious to health depending on the concentration of the gas in the inhaled air, duration of exposure, respiratory volume, cardiac output, oxygen demand of the tissues and concentration of haemoglobin in the blood (Songsore and McGranahan, 1995). Table 2 below shows the average exposures and time-weighted average concentrations in three groups of fuel users. Charcoal users were most exposed to CO, followed by wood users and finally the group of fuel users employing kerosene, LPG, and electricity. About six per cent of charcoal users were exposed to an average CO concentration greater than 25ppm, the UNEP-WHO guideline for one hour of exposure (Benneh et al., 1993: 70). There are a number of other pollutants, whose exposure levels can be expected to be correlated to exposure to CO or particulates. Examples include carbon monoxide from hurricane lamps, traditional mosquito repellants, sulphur dioxide, hydrogen sulphide, dust, etc. Overall however, exposure monitoring suggests that smoke from cooking fires is a matter of major concern.

Table 2
Average concentrations of CO measured as dose units (ppmh) and calculated time-weighted averages (ppm) in three groups of fuel users

Wood			Charcoal			Kerosene/LPG/Electricity		
Mean	SE	n	Mean	SE	n	Mean	SE	N
24.1	9.1	24	33.1	2.9	137	3.8	1.1	32
Concentration (ppm)								
Wood			Charcoal			Kerosene/LPG/Electricity		
Mean	SE	n	Mean	SE	n	Mean	SE	N
7.5	3.0	24	11.0	1.0	137	1.2	0.4	32

Source: Benneh et al. (1993)

Discussion

Many of the more critical environmental risks and health problems are closely tied to the gender roles of principal homemakers. The poor, with their limited resource base, are especially vulnerable to environmental risks and disasters. Droughts and other calamities of nature affect them more than others since they have limited 'fall back' options. In rural Kenya, women are largely responsible for collecting and using fuel wood. The government, development agencies and civil society organisations are increasingly incorporating a gender perspective in their policies, programmes and projects aimed at protecting the environment. However, the goal of achieving better environmental working conditions within the household is still a long way from being realised, and the commitments made at international conferences and in conventions need to be translated into practice at the household level.

Legislation aimed at protecting the environment is in place in Kenya. However, it is not adequately enforced. The main challenge is therefore to create awareness of the fact that environmental conservation is crucial to sustainable development. Without a protected resource base, poverty cannot be eradicated.

Over the years, the status of sanitation in the country has declined. Outbreaks of sanitation-related diseases such as respiratory infections (like TB), cholera, typhoid, diarrhoea and intestinal worm infestations are on the increase in low-income areas with poor sanitation coverage. Sanitation is not ranked high in the development agenda, resulting in a low-level of resource allocation and limitations in technology choices. Socio-cultural factors have also taken their toll on the improvement of the sector in some communities.

The increased focus on matters of gender and energy in development over the past decade has led to a growing recognition that women and men have different needs, interests and roles and that their access to energy resources and services therefore differ (UNDP, 2001). In Africa, women traditionally shoulder the burden of household energy management, spending considerable time and personal energy on collecting and using energy for cooking and food processing, and other energy-demanding activities.

The use of wood as a household fuel is overwhelmingly concentrated in less developed countries where, for a number of reasons, alternative fuels like natural gas, kerosene, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), and electricity, have not been widely adopted. The impacts of such widespread wood consumption extends across a range of social and environmental issues including health problems associated with indoor air pollution, and environmental change associated with both greenhouse gas emissions and the depletion of local forests and woodlands. In addition, heavy reliance on wood fuel creates high labour demands and potentially hazardous conditions for members

of the households that typically affect women and children in a disproportionate way. There is, therefore, a need for effective policy interventions that will include a gender perspective if indoor environmental health problems are to be alleviated.

The Kenyan health policy framework does not give a clear direction as to how to address the environmental health problems. The government, through the current health policy framework, has decided to shift emphasis from curative health services to preventive health care. The level of environmental sanitation and hygiene standards is seen as key to preventive health. The process of developing the environmental sanitation and hygiene policy is, however, still at its formative stage.

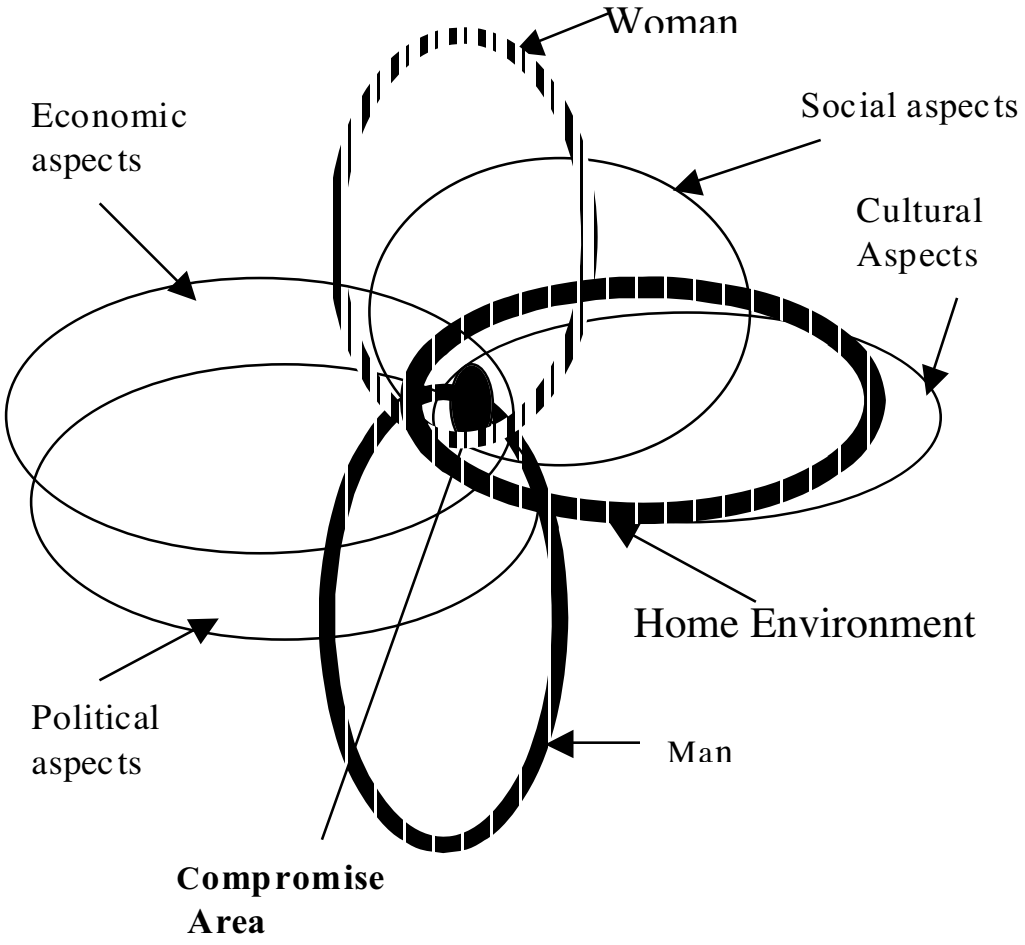
Conclusions and recommendations

To address all the issues concerning this sector, it has been proposed that the envisaged policy addresses the following five areas: information, education and communication; legal framework; institutional framework; technology; and resource mobilization.

- Information, education and communication (IEC): Kenya as a country does not have a comprehensive IEC strategy for environment and sanitation. Drawing on current advances in information technology, the strategy should explore and exploit all available avenues of information collection and dissemination to the full benefit of the policy.
- Legal framework: There is a need for the coordination of activities and issues that pertain to the formulation of sanitation and hygiene policy. The objectives will include: reviewing existing legislation/policies with a view to identifying inconsistencies, contradictions, inadequacies with regards to enforcement of Environmental Sanitation and Hygiene (ESH) issues; examining laws and policies related to environmental sanitation and hygiene, with a view to proposing policy statements that address privatisation, standardization, gender issues and disaster management; and examining the responsibilities and legal mandate of key sector actors related to ESH.
- Institutional framework: There is need to develop a position paper for the institutional framework relating to ESH policy development.
- Technology: A draft policy on technological issues should be developed, specifically to identify issues as they relate to environmental sanitation and hygiene policy, and to identify gaps in the technical formulation of environmental sanitation and hygiene policy.
- Resource mobilization: A draft resource mobilization position paper that aims at promoting sustainable delivery of ESH services should be developed. Specifically, it will identify potential sources of funds and identify the current shortfalls in provision of resources to the sector.

The aim of a national environmental policy is to protect the right of every citizen to a healthy and decent environment, which is key to every citizen's life. A lot of concern has been on the management of the environment outside the house/home. Neglect of the in-situ environment will reduce the effectiveness of the ex-situ environmental management interventions.

Over 80 per cent of Kenya's urban population use charcoal as their primary source of domestic energy and over 30 per cent of the nation's rural population also use it to meet some of their energy needs. Over 99 per cent of the nation's rural population use wood fuel (Ministry of Energy, 2002). Women, who are the principal homemakers, are faced with more environmental hazards in the home than outside the house. There is a need to protect women from hazards. There is also a need to engender the home environment. This can be achieved through the transformative approach. The present structure of society needs to be transformed in order to ensure a people-friendly, sustainable development process in which women and men are able to empower themselves and live full, dignified lives, regardless of culture, class, race, ethnicity, religion or national/imperial locations. Transformation of gender, class and other relationships is sought at all levels of society from the individual, household and community, to the national and global levels. When men are exposed to these environmental hazards, the plight of the woman will be highlighted for policy interventions. This interaction resulting in the compromise area can be illustrated as shown in the figure below.



Compromise strategies therefore need to be developed between both males and females to reduce or avoid these hazardous situations. This should cover all aspects: political, social and cultural. Interaction of these dimensions with a gender perspective will produce a compromise area for the creation and operation of an effective gendered national environmental policy.

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7

Engendering Urban Governance: Experience in Participatory Planning in Nakuru, Kenya[1]

Samson W. Mwangi

Abstract

We argue in this paper that urban governance must be gender-sensitive if it is to be equitable, sustainable, efficient and effective. This paper focuses on the institutional challenges, problems and options of incorporating a gender perspective in participatory planning in urban management in Nakuru Municipality. The process of Localizing Agenda 21(LA 21) in Nakuru town, Kenya, started in 1995. This approach provides greater opportunities for addressing gender concerns. However these are seriously affected by obstacles related to uncertainties and power relations among different actors. This paper examines the state of affairs in a secondary town where an international organisation, UN-Habitat, that has an articulate gender policy, was the chief technical advisor of the project but gender concerns seem to have been ignored or marginalized. Changes in organisational culture and operational procedures will be required to foster gender-sensitive analyses and consultative process. A gendered approach to good urban governance offers solutions to many of the challenges presented by social and economic diversity. Finally, this paper attempts to link the norms of good urban governance and gender concerns using the Nakuru experience.

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Introduction

Gender issues in participation, responsible urban government and civic engagement are important themes in Agenda 21[2] and the Habitat Agenda, and are the central issues in this paper. There is insufficient recognition of how men and women use and contribute to the city in different ways; how this is influenced by different responsibilities in the home and society and how this in turn affects their ability to engage in public life. Too little has been done to plan and manage cities with women and other marginalized groups. We argue that a fresh perspective is needed that recognises women as integral players in urban governance and which facilitates their participation in urban partnerships.

Participation and civic engagement are critical determinants of good governance, a concept that addresses issues of social equity and political legitimacy and not merely efficient management of infrastructure and services. The different ways in which women and men participate in and benefit from urban governance are significantly shaped by prevailing constructions of gender, whose norms, expectations and institutional expressions constrain women's access to the social and economic, and thus political resources of the urban area (Beall, 1996).

Localizing Agenda 21 programme was spearheaded by UN-Habitat which adopted a gender policy in 1996[3] soon after the Second UN Conference on Human Settlements, Habitat II. When we focus on LA 21 process in Nakuru, we observe that there was no deliberate effort to translate this gender policy into practice. The LA 21 programme offered opportunities where gender mainstreaming in urban governance could have been successful. However, opportunities were never utilised and our findings indicate that women, youth and the poor were largely left out of the new governance structures and that the traditional elites and articulate working class dominated the entire decision making exercise.

2. The process of developing and implementing a Local Agenda 21 (LA 21) started in Nakuru in 1995 and brought new insights into good urban governance in the town. LA 21 is a local-government-led, community-wide, and participatory effort to establish a comprehensive action strategy for environmental protection, economic prosperity and community well being (ICLEI, 1997: 2002). ICLEI outlined the key elements to the process as: full community participation, assessment of current conditions, target setting for achieving specific goals, monitoring and reporting. The call to engage in LA 21 processes on the part of the local authorities and communities has, arguably, been the most successful line of implementing Agenda 21.
3. UN-Habitat has a clear mandate, and is under strict requirement, to implement and promote gender mainstreaming in the international process towards equality between men and women, girls and boys through human settlements development. This mandate is outlined in a number of internationally ratified and adopted documents and action plans, as well as in UN-Habitat directly linked declarations and resolutions. The UN-Habitat's mandate to work with gender mainstreaming towards the goal of gender equality is also outlined in a number of resolutions adopted by the Governing Council of the UN-Habitat and the General Assembly.

Policy makers and planners, whether men or women, need to be gender-aware in order that women's needs and interests are addressed and women themselves brought into the planning exercises and process (Beall, 1996). For instance, gender-sensitive urban planning would be responsive to the increasing phenomenon of women-headed and maintained households. Their particular vulnerability to poverty and their specific economic survival strategies will only be reflected in urban policy-making if categories like the 'household' and the 'neighbourhood' are desegregated by gender and family type.

Urban governance, gender and local agenda 21 – exploring the concepts

Existing literature in the areas of urban governance, gender issues and local Agenda 21 is reviewed to identify knowledge gaps that this paper seeks to fill. Though not fully exhaustive, we have tried to distil the core issues that this paper addresses. The term governance is highly contested by social and behavioural scientists. Its popularity and the way it is being used raise a number of conceptual difficulties. The concept is given a variety of meanings by different users and has progressively become a component of 'aid-speak' and a political 'sing song'. It is a word characterised more by its widespread use than by its clarity or singularity of meaning (Mwangi, 2002). Paproski (1993) explains the concept of governance as the process of interaction between the public sector and the various actors or groups of actors in 'civil society'. The crucial distinction between government and governance is the notion of civil society, which can be defined as the public life of individuals and institutions outside the control of the state (Harpham and Boateng, 1997).

The recent concern with governance in urban areas stems from a more general attention being paid to 'good governance' as a development issue. One approach sees urban governance as essentially preoccupied with questions of financial accountability and administrative efficiency (Sampford, 2002). An alternative approach, of relevance to our paper, is one more interested in broader political concerns related to democracy and participation (Robinson, 1995). Good governance not only benefits citizens, it also brings benefits to economies. More specifically, it is seen to assist in fighting corruption, maintaining democracy, improving the quality of life and life chances for all citizens, improving the opportunity for people to manifest their desires and wishes in life and promoting security, equity and sustainability (ibid.).

The aim of analysing gender issues in urban development and ensuring that all components of development, policy formulation and decision making, planning, programming, monitoring and evaluation address gender concerns, is

the point of departure of this paper. It has become very clear for researchers and practitioners that integration of gender concerns in mainstream development will not be achieved unless there is a deliberate effort to ensure such inclusion.

The United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985) not only focussed global attention on gender-based inequalities, but also facilitated in-depth investigation and analysis of the origins and manifestations of gender imbalances in development. However, the awareness created of the needs of women in development did not necessarily lead to innovative strategies for tackling the root causes of inequality and discrimination. Indeed, we still witness many efforts aimed at developing women-specific projects and strengthening the capacity of women's organisations for selfish ends, and the carrying out of gender-blind research (Gachukia, 1993). Most policy makers, planners, programmers and researchers continue to exclude women, treating them as mere consumers of services, rather than as crucial contributors and participants – they have been described as catalysts – in the process of development.

Beall (1996) argues that gender is an essential construct on which to frame a set of questions regarding the processes and outcomes of marginalisation in the urban environment. Socially conferred roles and responsibilities differentially determine how women and men may contribute to and benefit from city life. Despite this, factors responsible for marginalisation of women and minorities in decision-making processes are present in many municipal governments. Marginalisation of these groups has adverse implications for good urban governance and is against the principles of an inclusive city.

At the same time, it is important to recognise the diversity and complexity of people's lived experiences in cities around the world. Women, just like men, are not a homogenous group, as was recognised in the shift in international thinking from Women in Development (WID) to Gender and Development (GAD). There are elderly women, working women and women who have the majority of responsibilities in the domestic sphere. There are also women who are trying to balance many of these roles at the same time. Moreover, women are not the only group to be excluded from urban governance, from the development of urban policies and from the planning of our cities. Other groups also experience such marginalisation on the basis, for example, of ethnicity or class (Beall, 1996).

Gender-sensitive urban governance becomes a function of the engagement of urban planners and policy-makers in the lives of urban dwellers (Beall, 1996). Indeed, this should be a mutual engagement as it is important that the knowledge, energy and expertise of women and men at the grassroots level are brought into the policy-making and planning process. Women and men (and not genders) organise,

participate and engage in urban governance and partnerships. Women make up specific political or interest-based constituencies, either as women or as specific groups of women.

On the other hand, a gender perspective refers not to a constituency or the participants but to the practice of urban policy-making, planning, management and organisation itself. It refers to a recognition of and responsiveness to the different roles and responsibilities of women and men in human settlements and the social relations between them. Beall (1996) argues that an understanding of gender interests and social diversity in urban governance, together with gender-competent urban planning practice, can be equally adopted by women and men practitioners concerned with achieving equitable and participatory human settlements' development.

The onus of implementing the key objective of Agenda 21, that of sustainable development, has been placed clearly on local governments and their constituent communities. The real routes to the success of Agenda 21 therefore lie at the local, micro level. The Habitat Agenda has reconfirmed the LA 21 framework as a valuable approach to harmonise urban development and environment. Conceptually, the two agendas highlight the need to institutionalise a new approach to urban development planning and management that articulates environmental issues with social and economic development concerns for the present and future generations. In short, both agendas call for a new approach to urban environmental planning and management and a shift of emphasis from local government and environment to one of local governance and sustainability (Selman and Parker, 1999).

Local Agenda 21 process in Nakuru addressed a variety of issues relating to the improvement and development of sustainable human settlements that is a key concern of the UN-Habitat which, as has earlier been said, played a principal role in the development and implementation of the Local Agenda 21 in Nakuru. The UN-Habitat's overall goal of mainstreaming gender equality and women's rights into all activities implies that LA 21 had to be proactive regarding equality between women and men, boys and girls, in all areas of its mandate.

Despite an obvious presence as citizens, women stay under-represented in governing structures. With only a few exceptions, there is a marked absence of women in local decision-making processes. Although women are key players at the local level in household livelihood strategies and residential organisations, they are subject to exclusion from critical decision-making forums. While the emphasis is on the need for empowerment of women, the policy goal is gender equality, meaning the involvement of both women and men, and attention to issues of concern to both. It is essential that the Campaign for Good Urban

Governance as a whole, address gender issues throughout, especially within its other flagship outputs.

The international community[4] defined gender equity as women's and men's equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities. It is acknowledged that this will take time and effort to reach. However, all governments should strive for this goal in urban management as in all other development initiatives.

From the foregoing, we observe that the role that men and women play in urban development is crucial and that any programme aimed at ensuring good urban governance needs to identify specific roles. Though a lot of literature exists on gendered urban governance, there has been very little empirical research on gender issues in urban governance and the implications of ignoring these concerns. There is therefore a need to examine the extent to which such principles have been put in practice, the opportunities that exist and the constraints faced in implementing these principles.

Household decision-making processes in Kenya

In examining gender relations and resource mobilisation and management within urban households in Nakuru, it is important to understand how decisions in the household are made. The key question is whether decisions are reached collectively or whether one individual or group dominates the process. Our analysis shows that households do not have a set pattern of decision making. Instead, households contain both co-operative and conflict elements, which can yield many different arrangements depending on the bargaining strengths of individuals involved. This bargaining is influenced by several factors including social norms and cultural attitudes. Decision making patterns varied among the households covered in this survey with variations occurring even within the same household.

Our observations were that most decisions are made by household heads (predominantly men); less often, both spouses make decisions jointly. A female respondent noted that the strength of joint decision making is that it provides

4. The international community has affirmed and re-affirmed its commitment to women's empowerment and gender equity in a number of documents. The most important and strongest is CEDAW, Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, from 1979. The binding commitments of the Convention were reaffirmed in the Beijing declaration of 1995, and its Action Plan – the Platform for Action. In this, the Fourth World Conference on Women, governments re-affirmed their commitment to strengthen equality between women and men, identifying 12 critical areas of concern to this objective. The Beijing conference also adopted gender mainstreaming as the overall approach to achieving gender equity.

a forum for females to correct the males through dialogue. On the other hand, some females who played no part in decision making appreciated the fact that they would thus not be blamed if things went wrong. The paper shows that even in cases where decisions were made jointly, husbands were found to have an upper hand. Interviews revealed that even in cases where women had suggested ideas, the final decisions came from the male partners. The following factors were evident in influencing household decision-making processes in Nakuru. These factors can also influence decision-making elsewhere and we summarise them in the following categories:

Factors related to traditions and culture. Economic, educational and cultural factors influence decision-making patterns among the households interviewed. The patriarchal system, in many African traditions, tends to have a profound influence on households' decision-making. The consultations that take place within the household are shrouded by male dominance, which does not provide the female partners with a conducive forum for negotiation. Even in cases where the males have assisted their female counterparts to start a family business, the male spouses were still obliged to meet major capital expenditure for households. The status of the household head also has an influence on decision making. There are also some gender stereotypes that affect the way decisions were made in the households studied, though it was beyond the scope of the paper to examine these.

Factors related to economic background of the household. Economic ability of household members was found to greatly influence the pattern of decision making. Lack of economic power hinders women from effective participation in decision making. This has been recognised by women as demonstrated in their participation in income-generating activities in all the neighbourhoods studied. Male spouses have an upper hand in making decisions, which have economic implications, such as sending children to school, going away on holiday and the amount of affordable rent.

Household headship was also attributed to economic responsibilities, with most respondents conceding that husbands are the household heads because they shoulder a major part of the budget. One male respondent noted that if the husband lost his economic base and could therefore not meet his economic responsibilities, a female spouse could do whatever she wanted. To this man, being a household head was directly linked to the ability to provide for the family. The male respondents seem to be at peace with their role and how it is perceived. However, some complained about the economic pressures they have to face. One respondent noted: 'we do not enjoy our salaries, we get them when we have already borrowed a lot of money'. One female respondent justified men's right to the position of household head, saying 'traditionally and biblically, man is

the household head'. This further emphasizes the importance of economic and cultural factors in decision making. We observe that these factors also affected the way in which men and women participated in LA 21 processes and meetings as shown below.

Factors related to education. Education also seems to influence the pattern of decision making. Households in which spouses have attained at least upper secondary level of education engage in discussions on most matters affecting household members. This was even more the case where spouses had the same or similar levels of education.

LA 21, urban governance issues and gender analysis in Nakuru

As seen from the preceding sections, decision making at the household level favours men more than women and this has implication for urban governance. Our household survey indicated that men were more likely to be aware of and participate in the municipal council's meetings either as members of the neighbourhood organizations or members of the zonal development committees. All the above factors that affect decision-making at the household level also affected the participation of men and women in the LA 21 and other municipal council meetings.

Table 1
Knowledge of the LA 21 process by gender

	M	%	F	%
Yes	14	58.4	10	27.7
No	10	41.6	26	72.3
Total	**24**	**100**	**36**	**100**

Source: Household survey, 2003

Table 1 above shows that in all households interviewed in our sample survey, 58.4 per cent of male respondents had knowledge of the LA 21 process and activities while 41.6 per cent did not. Of the female respondents, 27.7 per cent had knowledge of the LA 21 process while 72.3 per cent did not, indicating that more men than women were aware of the LA 21 process. This can be attributed to the fact that in all the LA 21 processes, whether consultative meetings, planning workshops, or communication, very few residents in Nakuru were aware of the initiatives. It also shows a gender difference in the knowledge of development interventions. Of course it is practically impossible to involve everyone, but awareness creation was not done and this limited residents' participation.

Table 2 shows the reasons for not participating in the LA 21 meetings. The majority of the respondents indicated that they never participated in LA 21 meetings because they did not know of the process. In all, 26.7 per cent of the households indicated that they participated. However, examining further the issue of participation in the meetings of the Zonal development committees, the interviews show some contradictory findings. This can be attributed to the fact that some residents are not able to link the zonal development committees and the LA 21 process. There is therefore a need for decision-makers at the municipal level to unpack the LA 21 process and initiatives in such a way that local people understand the initiative and relate it to the activities in their localities.

Table 2
Reasons given for not participating in the LA 21 process

	Frequency	Percentage
Don't know of the process	36	60
Was never given a chance	2	3.3
Spouse or household member was participating	16	26.7
Did not have time	6	10
Total	**60**	**100**

Source: Household survey, 2003

Table 3
Participation of the household in the LA 21 meetings in the four zones by gender

	Central		Western		Eastern		Southern	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Never participated	2	4	4	5	5	5	2	3
Participated in the past	4	1	2	1	2	0	5	1
Still participates	4	0	2	1	3	0	4	2
	N-15		n-15		n-15		n-15	

Source: Household survey, 2003

Although women are key players at the local level in household livelihood strategies and residential organisations, they are subject to exclusion from critical decision-making forums. While the emphasis is on the need for empowerment of women, the policy goal is gender equality. We must also remember that gender relations are not static and can change over time. An analysis of gender relations

in urban governance is thus a complex process due to the range of issues addressed and the variations existing within and between households.

The Belgium Administration for Development Corporation provided funding for all activities within the framework of developing the Local Agenda 21 in Nakuru and entrusted the UNCHS with its management. Within the Municipal Council of Nakuru a core team was formed which included a medium-level officer of the council. The team is responsible for project planning, implementation of day-to-day project activities, monitoring project progress and preparation of monthly project reports. The team had grassroots links with the community through representatives of CBOs. Then there was the planning team that was responsible for the preparation of the strategic structure plan.

Table 4
Composition of the planning team by gender

	Frequency	Percentage
Male	11	73.3
Female	4	26.7
Total	**15**	**100**

Source: Fieldwork 2003

Table 4 above shows that the planning team was dominated by male participants, constituting 73.3 per cent, while women constituted only 26.7 per cent. Given this disparity, it is possible that women's concerns within the planning process may not have received the required attention and that there might have been a tendency to overlook some important issues especially in transport and housing. In fact, none of the proposed actions for the intended spatial structure mention any specific action aimed at meeting either strategic or practical gender needs.

The following tables show the composition of other participating partner institutions in the plan preparation, aggregated by gender. One general observation is that women were the least represented of all the participating partners and this has serious implications. We contend that the primary practical requirement for incorporating a gender analysis into urban planning initiatives is to consult with and listen to women so that their roles and resulting needs are better understood. However, the manner in which issues of gender are actually addressed depends upon the policy direction envisaged.

Table 5
Composition of the DURP team by gender

	Frequency	Percentage
Male	5	100
Female	0	-
Total	**5**	**100**

Source: Fieldwork 2003

We observe that the participants from the Department of Urban and Regional Planning (DURP), were all male and that there was no single female in the team. DURP was involved in the sectoral studies that guided the preparation of the strategic structure plan.

Table 6
Composition of the Housing and Building Research Institute (HABRI) by gender

	Frequency	Percentage
Male	2	66.6
Female	1	33.3
Total	**3**	**100**

Source: Fieldwork 2003

The Housing and Building Research Institute was involved in conducting studies on housing. Table 7 shows that 66.6 per cent of the team were male while 33.3 per cent were female.

Table 7
Composition of the Department of Architecture

	Frequency	Percentage
Male	2	66.6
Female	1	33.3
Total	**3**	**100**

Source: Fieldwork 2003

The Department of Architecture of the University of Nairobi was involved in design studies and it had two males and one female.

Table 8
Composition of the Postgraduate Centre of Human Settlements (PGCHS)[5], Leuven, by gender

	Frequency	Percentage
Male	5	100
Female	0	-
Total	**5**	**100**

Source: Fieldwork 2003

The PGCHS played a prominent role in the entire LA 21 process. Besides organisational support, it also co-ordinated the Belgian Consortium (BC) of Belgian Universities, municipalities, consultancy firms and NGOs, providing support to programme activities and provided specific competence as well as supporting tools and techniques.

Table 9
Composition of the UN-habitat, ITDG and WWF by gender

	UN-Habitat		ITDG		WWF	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Male	2	40	2	100	3	100
Female	3	60	0	-	0	-
Total	**5**	**100**	**2**	**100**	**3**	**100**

Source: Fieldwork 2003

Tables 5 to 9 above thus show that there was gender imbalance in all the organisations involved in the preparation of the strategic structure plan and the area-based action plans.

Planning with a gender perspective: emerging issues

Women and men experience and use the urban environment in different ways and thus have different priorities in terms of services and infrastructure. Despite this, women's interests and needs as users of the urban environment rarely featured in the LA 21 process in Nakuru. This is hardly surprising since women were largely

5. This was also the convenor of the Belgian Consortium of professionals, consultancy firms and NGOs.

excluded from the planning and decision-making processes. There is a strong argument, therefore, for policy-makers and planners, whether men or women, to be gender aware so that women and men alike are consulted and encouraged to participate fully in the planning and decision-making process in the town. Below, we highlight some examples that were addressed in the LA 21 documents to indicate the different gender needs in urban transport and housing.

The Nakuru experience has shown that women and men have distinct transport requirements. However, the way the intended spatial structure addressed transport in Nakuru disregarded women's priorities because of a focus on mobility rather than accessibility and because of pre-occupation with the formal sector. Women's travel needs frequently require transport outside the peak hours and to alternative destinations than those of men. In Nakuru, women in low-income neighbourhoods travel to the municipal markets very early, and in the mid-morning, to buy vegetables and other agricultural outputs at the wholesale market for retailing in their neighbourhoods. It was not the priorities of women only that were overlooked in transport planning, but also those of men outside centrally located, formal sector employment. However, we do observe that women depend more than men on public transport and on walking than on private cars or other vehicles. Yet the conditions of public transport are often pathetic. Affordable transport is overcrowded, dangerous and often unreliable and irregular. This hinders women in their domestic and caring responsibilities, impedes their productivity and even threatens their safety. It is therefore of utmost importance that the transport concerns in the intended spatial structure, and the area-based action plans, be reviewed to address these special needs.

Within housing and basic urban services, we note that the urban poor are generally denied access to secure land tenure and housing and to basic infrastructure and services, not only in Nakuru but also in other major and growing urban centres. For political, legal and economic reasons they are often confined to sites that are unsuitable for human settlements. In the low-income neighbourhoods in Nakuru, insecurity of tenure discourages the poor from investing in public space, and yet there is ample evidence that women organise themselves into community groups to improve their surroundings and security. Mwangi (2002) observes the crucial roles played by community-based organisations in environmental management and improving the quality of life in Nakuru.

In Nakuru, we observed that in housing upgrading programmes and related interventions, women are often excluded by conventional eligibility criteria; their incomes are too low, they do not have security of tenure, or they do not have the time and skill to engage in self-help schemes. Even the women who are included are rarely consulted. The special needs of women were ignored in the design studies of housing improvements, the location of housing and the provision of basic

urban services. We argue that women, as prime users of housing and other urban infrastructure, often have insights which can improve designs and prevent failure and wastage. We note that women's responsibility for household and community management gives them particular vested interests in safer water supply, efficient sanitation, solid waste removal and the provision of affordable sources of energy. In the recent preparations of the ward-based local authority service delivery action plans that are supposed to increase participation of local residents, women rarely spoke in the meetings even though they formed the majority of those attending. Even when one did get a chance to speak, it was only after a number of men had spoken. The following section discusses the opportunities for and challenges of incorporating a gender perspective in the LA 21 process.

We can distil, from a variety of sources, the opportunities consistent with the LA 21 principles that would improve gender-conscious decision making in an urban set-up before focusing on the actual experience in Nakuru. Some of the following issues can be exploited with urgency:

- increase the number of women and youth representatives in all teams and committees that are involved in the LA 21 process;
- include women's practical and strategic needs in all proposals within the Strategic Structure Plan and especially in the Intended Spatial Structure and action plans;
- mobilize women and other marginalized groups, for example through pressure groups, neighbourhood association and grassroots organizations. This is extremely important because unless those groups that have traditionally made decisions see that women and other marginalized groups are extremely well mobilised, they will treat these groups as inconsequential.
- increase the number of women representatives by nominating a higher number to the councils.

Although such opportunities have offered themselves before, they were not exploited fully during the entire LA 21 process since an enabling environment may not have existed. Most of the urban poor live in low-income settlements and are exposed to health-threatening environments. We argue that urban development in many towns in Kenya is a gendered phenomenon. It often affects changes in the roles men and women play in society, with regard to participating in decision making at the municipal level, household management and leadership.

Experience in Nakuru has proved that not much has changed, and women particularly were either sidelined or thought to be irrelevant to the process of developing the strategic structure plan, which is now seen as the blue print to guide sustainable development in Nakuru municipality. Empirical evidence shows that gender issues were totally ignored and what is now evident after eight years is that

the role of minority groups in general was ignored. There are a number of explanations for this: one of the major ones, and relevant to this paper, is that the movement of men and women from the rural to urban areas contributes heavily to a gendered urbanization.

Gender selective migration reflects a range of social and economic imperatives and constraints surrounding men's and women's activities, power and status, new patterns of behaviour, access to resources and social organization. In this way, gender differentiated rural urban mobility is not only a measure of existing gender relations and roles but can act as a catalyst for change through appropriate policy changes. It is increasingly important to search for policies that improve the allocation and utilization of resources in urban areas for effective urban management. However, age structure, gender relations and spatial issues affect the planning and management of urban affairs. The fact that intra-household patterns vary should be taken into consideration to avoid underlying assumptions that all households are identical and to recognise that they react and perceive urban management differently (Mwangi, 2002).

In the past, women have acted rather passively, because of their subordinate status, exploitation and denial of basic human rights. Failure of women to take action has been blamed in part on socio-cultural practices, and man-made barriers that have been erected in the political and economic arenas. Decision-making based on meetings, as was happening during the preparation of the Local Agenda 21 in Nakuru, was almost invariably weighted towards those with the confidence to articulate their position. These people are usually the ones already favoured with wealth, education and power, and the meetings were never as democratic as they were claimed to have been in some quarters.

Many of our interviewees noted that the shift from passive to active democracy can only work when it combines with the beginning of an answer to this problem; failing this, it may indeed make matters worse. 'Equal opportunity for all has to be made something more than a form of words', observes one of the CBO female leaders during one of the key informant interviews. We therefore note that given the power that is attached to superior skill, this means changing the way tasks were distributed and the context in which ideas have been discussed. In short, people will have to unpack and dismantle the assumptions that those who speak with confidence and clarity are therefore more worthy to be listened to. In the long term, we need to recognize that what has been considered natural talents and skills can, on the contrary, be taught and passed on.

Gender issues and the norms of good urban governance

This section examines the various principles or norms of good urban governance and analyses how gender considerations can be included in these norms while

situating these in the Nakuru case. From the recent literature on good urban governance, we can distil seven interrelated norms: sustainability, decentralisation, equity, efficiency, transparency and accountability, civic engagement and citizenship, and security. Whilst each of these is applicable to both men and women, there are specific gender aspects that need to be highlighted. This section uses the norms as an analytical framework for viewing women's greater inclusion in the decision-making process.

Sustainability. Women play a critical role in urban life, with extensive responsibilities for their families' welfare. Sustainability is a cornerstone of future cities' planning, and consultation with all stakeholders in cities, in particular for environmental planning and management, has been identified as a prerequisite for sustainability (UNCHS, 2000). At times, women's livelihood strategies and efforts to provide their households with basic necessities bring them into conflict with local government. It is essential that urban poor women's constraints are recognised and worked with, through supportive partnerships with local authorities. An attempt to address this norm was made during the consultation workshops organised in Nakuru in 1995. However, our observations are that very few women were involved in these meetings and those that were did not represent the needs and aspirations of the urban poor. This will eventually undermine the noble initiatives of LA 21.

Decentralization. Decentralization presents the opportunity for greater involvement of men and women in planning and consultation processes, and also has the potential for a more gender-conscious allocation of local resources. The municipal council of Nakuru is the authority closest to its citizens and hence in the best position to involve women in the decision-making process and in consultation. The decentralisation of authority and resources is also an important means of improving stakeholder participation. However, struggles around resources at the local level can be unruly and local patron-client networks sometimes involve malfeasance and pork-barrel politics, which may serve further to exclude women and the urban poor rather than to encourage them into the political process. On the other hand, the case of partnership in Nakuru, especially in the areas of waste management and water supply, shows how women's involvement may counter these trends. The ability of the MCN to amend the municipal by-laws shows that it has power to encourage broader participation by the majority of its citizenry. Zonal Development Committees are decentralised units that act as mechanisms for broader participation. There is a need for gender equity and awareness in the composition of these committees, which are mechanisms for community participation in urban governance. Our experience in Nakuru regarding participatory budgeting during the preparation of the Local Authority Service Delivery Action Plans indicates that women gave their priorities only after a couple of men had spoken. This pattern was repeated in almost all the meetings we attended as observers.

Equity. This in urban governance implies representation as well as access to resources. Equity of access to decision-making and the basic necessities of urban life are fundamental to good urban governance. Yet there are countless ways in which income or social status affect people's ability to participate in town life and access its resources. Even when resources are available, public expenditure may be under-allocated in gender terms. For example, economic restructuring often impacts more heavily on women, as cutbacks are concentrated on health and social services, which support their domestic and caring roles as noted by Moser (1996). Women's rights to representation, as well as to basic services and other urban resources, cannot be denied. LA 21 plans are now being implemented, and there should be measures to ensure that gender equity is achieved and that the benefits from development programmes and services are equally distributed and accessed by all, regardless of gender.

Efficiency. The role women play in the urban economy is often not recognised because much of it takes place in the informal economy or is hidden from view as home-working. Urban managers in Nakuru need to be efficient in terms of finances and administration. This means regulating and coordinating local authorities' management, and targeting finances for effective performance. To ensure that this happens, women and men have to be able to contribute optimally to their own survival and the economy. A key challenge is to make visible and valued the contribution of women as well as men to the efficient operation of the town. Efficiency is compromised when women and the poor are not involved in decision-making and policy choices.

Transparency and accountability. A World Bank paper demonstrates that the greater women's rights are, and the more women participate in public life, the less public sector corruption there is (World Bank, 2000). However, women must be in a position to access, interpret and comment upon local government performance. Transparency and accountability depend upon city administration and politics being open to public scrutiny. Communication needs to be accessible to people who cannot handle complex documents, to those not used to engaging in public debate, and to working parents with limited time; all factors affecting women more than men. LA 21 process in Nakuru was supposed to be transparent and accountable. Though there exist a number of monitoring and evaluation reports, these are not readily available to the general public, and information exchange is only with the local elites and participating organisations.

Civic engagement and citizenship. Existing literature on community participation and urban partnerships, governments and international agencies alike, have increasingly appreciated the importance of women's grassroots organisations. The crucial role played by women organised on the ground - in advocating for services and in providing infrastructure and basic services themselves in the absence of provision from other sources - cannot be over emphasised. It is the responsibility

of local authorities to encourage the full engagement of both men and women citizens. It is also in their interests to do so, to ensure the effective functioning of urban neighbourhoods. Prior to the LA 21 process in Nakuru, only a couple of CBOs were active. The fact that many more emerged since then (over 130 groups can now be identified) indicates at least that it is feasible for these organisations to achieve results, and at best that a widespread participatory movement is taking place. The enthusiasm and willingness of CBOs to work towards better living conditions is now beyond doubt. We note that the more recent CBOs and other beneficiaries have too high expectations of the project and their expectations may not coincide with the strategic structure plan that they did not help to formulate from the beginning. We also observe a major challenge ahead since the multiplication of the CBOs, and their demand for technical guidance and financial support, exceed the capacity of the LA 21 project and the municipal council of Nakuru (MCN) to provide adequate and timely delivery of services and advice. CBOs are actively involved in waste management, awareness creation, community clean-ups and management of water kiosks. We observed that the majority of members of the CBOs were female and they dominated in clean-up exercises while men are involved in negotiating with the MCN on matters touching the neighbourhoods and neighbourhood security.

Security of individuals and their environment. Insecure and even hostile urban environments can be perpetuated by local authorities' lack of attention to planning for women's security both domestically and in public places. Security of individuals and their environment is not confined to low-income neighbourhoods though. It is a matter of growing urgency as unsafe areas in the town restrict access and mobility for their citizens, especially women. Moreover, violence against women is just as likely to happen in the home as in public spaces. If women leave abusive relationships, they invariably lose their homes and security as well. Thus violence and the fear of violence prevent women from full and equal participation in the social life of their community and threaten the democratic functioning of our society (OECD, 1995).

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it can be seen that there are opportunities and prospects for a successful LA 21 and the implementation of the strategic structure plan, but those involved must embrace gender considerations. There is a strong desire to continue with the process. The LA 21 project in Nakuru makes it clear that there are gaps to be bridged within the municipal planning system itself, between politicians and chief officers, and between officials at different levels and in different sectors if participatory decision making is to be achieved.

Addressing gender issues in urban governance require competence on the part of urban professionals. It is not a straightforward initiative. The process of

developing forms and styles for participatory decision making, involving men and women outside the urban government structures and public planning system, also requires a parallel process directed at co-ordination and cross-sector learning. The tasks and roles of decision-makers and other actors in the urban management and planning process will have to change.

Urban areas, as both sites and symbols of the rapid pace of social change and development in many societies, have come to represent a critical problematic in development discourse and practice. We have argued that good governance, with its emphasis on civic engagement and participation, can only be properly understood with reference to prevailing constructions of gender. We have analysed the LA 21 process in Nakuru, which has the promise of improving urban governance and have observed that gender issues were not given due prominence. We have further attempted to elucidate the factors responsible for the marginalization of women in urban decision-making. Despite their lack of formal power, women often play an important role in urban development, particularly at the neighbourhood level. However, their multiple roles continue to constrain them from full engagement in the processes and institutions of urban governance. Engendering the practice of urban governance directs attention to broader questions of diversity and civic engagement. Women are not the only group to be marginalized. If civic engagement is to harness the full complement of human energy and creativity, then urban areas need to be inclusive and to welcome social diversity.

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8

Conflicts, Conflict Resolution and Peace Building: the Role of Pastoral Women

Daudi E. Ekuam

Abstract

Even though women everywhere bear the greatest burden of social ills during conflicts, women in pastoralist communities experience particular suffering both during and after conflict. The most distinctive feature about pastoralists' conflicts today, as opposed to previous times, is that the major casualties are women and children, the most socially vulnerable members of the community. They face physical violence, starvation and poor sanitary conditions, as well as rape and other forms of sexual violence. This paper seeks to interrogate the traditional role of pastoralist women in conflict and conflict resolution with the aim of changing the public policy paradigm to fully integrate women into the peace processes in order to resolve the seemingly intractable conflicts among pastoralists. Although much attention has been focused on the way changes have impacted on pastoralists since the colonial period, little attention has been given to the role of women in these societies. Nevertheless, traditionally they contributed significantly, both positively and negatively, to conflicts. Despite the difficulties they face, pastoral women have time and again shown their resilience in overcoming despair, and in building peace. This paper seeks to emphasize that focusing on women means bringing the whole community on board.

Introduction

There is no doubt today that women and children bear the greatest burden both during and after conflict. According to Hussein and Liebenberg (1999), in Africa alone, out of the 30 wars fought in more than 15 African countries since 1970, more than 90 per cent of casualties were civilian women and children. Women suffer physical violence, starvation and poor sanitary conditions as well as sexualised violence. According to Farr (2001: 17), '… during conflicts, women

surrender their physical well-being and bodily autonomy'. They get raped; they are made to contribute to the war effort by producing more children to replace those lost in conflict; they lose access to healthcare; they become infected with sexually transmitted diseases; and they end up with illegitimate children. Moreover, their own men, especially if defeated, may re-assert themselves on women through the use of force – made easier through their numerous 'idle' weapons. Poverty and dispossession further worsen the position of women, especially during post-conflict recovery.

Conversely, women are important actors in conflicts and are usually actively involved in all stages of conflict and conflict transformation. Women contribute to conflicts, even militarily. They carry guns across conflict zones, pass information, supply food to combatants, and even hide fighters and their weapons. In some cases, women embrace war with enthusiasm. Indeed, in some areas, militarisation of women is inevitable, so as to be ready for mobilisation in times of conflicts and afterwards.

In spite of the crucial role women play in conflicts, women are invisible in the conflict resolution and peace building efforts of communities and nations even at the UN level. The UN's Beijing Platform of Action (1995) set out in its Strategic Objectives on conflict, 'to increase the participation of women in conflict resolution at decision-making levels and protect women living in situations of armed and other conflicts or under foreign occupation'.[1] It went further to declare that it is committed 'to promote non-violent forms of conflict resolution and reduce the incidence of human rights abuse in conflict situations'. The Windhoek Declaration of May 2000 sets out practical ways in which the UN and member states can promote women's involvement in national security and in the implementation of peacekeeping missions and negotiations. Then in October 2000, the UN adopted Resolution 1325[2] which asserts, inter alia, that as 'women play an important role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace building, they must therefore participate equally and be fully involved in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and deserve an increased role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution'. Despite the spirit of these declarations and protocols, little ground has been covered. Furthermore, there is lack of co-ordination and networking within the UN itself regarding the harmonisation of its gender-focused resolutions.

1. UN Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995.
2. This Resolution marked a watershed in women's issues because it made sure that 'Women Count At Last'!

Most African governments today have not embraced the need to promote non-violent forms of conflict resolution nor provided funds for this purpose. Instead, most states resort to intervening militarily to resolve conflicts. The task of overcoming violence has been left to civil society organisations (CSOs) and international agencies, whose missions are sometimes not in line with conflict resolution and who frequently have limited funding and technical capacity.

Whereas women in the western world have made great strides socially and politically, and some have become influential in public forums, the same cannot be said about Kenyan or African women generally; even more so, the pastoralist woman. The next part of this paper seeks to interrogate pastoral conflicts, placing emphasis on the traditional role of pastoralist women in conflicts, conflict resolution and peace building processes; seeking to identify the different actors and making recommendations on the way forward. Above all, this paper seeks to open debate among researchers, government officials, aid and donor agencies and conflict practitioners on this important topic.

Status of pastoralists in Kenya

Pastoralists occupy 80 per cent of the total area of Kenya, territories commonly referred to as Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASAL). They comprise some six million people who derive their livelihood from livestock and livestock products. Due to the harsh environmental conditions, droughts and famine are common. Owing to environmental uncertainty, pastoralists have developed a very flexible social system and highly mobile lifestyle as a survival strategy.

For almost a century now, pastoralists have suffered '… prejudicial treatment reinforced by discriminatory laws and state policies' (see Goldsmith, 2002a). Moreover, development interventions in pastoral areas have been characterised by general ignorance about pastoralists and pastoral systems (Hendrickson et al., 1998). Many well-intentioned projects have failed because of the stereotypical views held by researchers, government officials, aid and development workers. Nor have pastoralists themselves been given the opportunity to influence what has been done in their name. For these reasons, pastoralist areas today are characterised by poverty, lack of economic opportunities, conflicts (brought about by competition for diminishing resources), low education rates and poor infrastructure. This is the environment in which pastoral women find themselves, day in and day out.

Conflicts over natural resources, where raiding is one specific form, are endemic in pastoral areas. Traditionally, livestock raiding was regarded as a way of restocking to support the complex processes of socio-cultural reproduction and management of pastoral resources. In conducting such raids, which Hendrickson

et al. (1998) term 'redistributive raiding',[3] care was taken to minimise deaths, especially with regard to non-combatants. However, 'predatory' raiding has overwhelmed the social motive through its sheer intensity and scale. Cattle rustling has assumed a commercial angle. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the region has made the situation worse. Pastoralist women and children are increasingly becoming victims of these raids. In fact, resulting from the human toll, pastoral women are opting for militarisation and are directly involved in the engineering of conflicts. In this regard, they have supported their men in supplying them with war essentials like information, clothing, shelter, and medications.

Recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in pastoralism from local donor organisations and international agencies. Consequently, a number of CSOs and NGOs are increasingly getting involved in conflict resolution and peace building activities. However, pastoral conflicts are proving intractable in spite of the massive resources spent by a myriad of organisations towards bringing about peace. The overall picture today for pastoralists is one of increasing impoverishment due to conflicts occasioned by livestock rustling. Moreover, even though governments and development agencies in the region have made it part of their policies to include the gender agenda in all their development undertakings, women are still ignored in matters of conflict resolution.

Pastoralist women and conflicts in Kenya

Pastoralism is a system that relies predominantly, though not exclusively, on livestock herding over expansive ranges. As a production system, it is basically a response to climatic and environmental conditions (Osamba, 2001). While it is the best way in which natural resources in the rangelands can be put to use, it has always lacked the support of the highest offices in government. As a result, pastoral people are constantly in danger of marginalization and impoverishment. Their drought-prone environment, with scarce resources, has made them most vulnerable. Although pastoralists have over the years developed mitigating mechanisms against environmental uncertainty, recent waves of conflicts have tilted the equilibrium.

Since the colonial period, development planners in Kenya have never recognised pastoralism as a rational production system or lifestyle. For this reason, development interventions in pastoral areas have been characterised by general

3. Term used by this author to denote a traditional form of raiding that was undertaken for restocking purposes as opposed to the commercial type or 'predatory raiding'.

ignorance about pastoralists and pastoral systems (Hendrickson et al., 1998). In addition to their geographical position on the borders of Kenya, pastoralists have been relegated to the periphery of political and economic participation in society. According to an Oxfam report, 'almost the entire population in the arid lands can be classified as living below the poverty line'. The National Poverty Eradication Strategy, 1999-2015, acknowledges that 80 per cent of the ASAL districts' population is categorised as absolutely poor (Birch and Shuria, 2001). Kenya has one of the most contrasting regional inequalities in Africa. While Nairobi, Central Province and parts of Rift Valley compare favourably with any other middle level human development countries, the pastoral districts fall in the lowest category. Poverty today emerges as the most formidable challenge to pastoralists in Kenya, particularly women.

The place of the pastoralist woman

Whilst attention has been placed on the development, or lack of it, of pastoralists in general, women in these societies have received little attention. As Joekes and Pointing (1991) state, '… by contrast, much has been written about the position of women in agriculture in Africa, in particular about the adverse effects on them of the social and economic transformations in the twentieth century'.

In the few works that have been carried out on pastoralists, a number of stereotyping observers liken a woman's role in the pastoral economy to that of the beast of burden. On the contrary, I would argue that pastoralism nurtures the 'corporate family'. This is a family business to which all members are committed, each member with a specific role, which complements others (Spencer, 1999). There is a clear traditional gender division of labour where women's roles are highly valued. In conflict, as producers and bearers of children, they are protected from high-risk undertakings like fighting.

Although there are slight variations in the cultural role of women from one pastoral group to the other, the similarities are much stronger than the differences. In virtually all pastoral communities, girls, right from their formative years, are socialised to assume family caregiver responsibilities. Traditionally, women are in charge of household tasks such as food preparation, fetching firewood, building dwelling structures, milking, fetching water, watering animals and caring for children. Pastoral women have also taken to agro-pastoralism, small-scale trade and handicraft making to supplement family income. Due to their stereotypical view, some civil society organisations regard gender relations in pastoralist societies as socially patriarchal and as showing inequality in access to resources, formal power structures and decision-making (da Conceicao, 2002). The following section will examine a few important areas in the livelihood of a pastoralist woman.

Land and property ownership. Land in pastoralist areas is owned as a common property resource, whose use was traditionally regulated, together with other natural resources, for the benefit of the whole community. Regulated use was necessary in order to prevent degradation, and the responsibility was vested in elders, the depository of all the community's interests, including its history. Although the borders of land owned by the various groups of pastoralists were delineated, movement across these borders was common, depending on the season and on mutual agreement (Joekes and Pointing, 1991). Such use of land was meant to provide security and minimise the risk arising from the unpredictability of the climatic conditions. With this kind of arrangement therefore, rights to land use were co-operatively owned. This form of land tenure gave everybody equal access, and in that way guaranteed livelihoods.

Today, land tenure in Kenya is based on English property law, and 'it negates the communal system that was understood and practised by pastoralists' (GOK, 2001a). The tenure arrangement prevailing in most pastoral land now is Trust Land. The land is vested in the local county councils to hold 'in trust' for the benefit of the residents. Unfortunately, the concept of 'trust' between the council and the local residents is seldom enforceable (Lenaola et al., 1996) for four reasons. First, the Minister of Local Government has a major say in the decisions of the county councils over land matters. He or she is capable, through legal provisions, to prevail upon the councils to implement the central government's wishes, however unpopular. Second, the President has statutory power to allocate Trust Land to anybody directly. Third, the Commissioner of Lands has an administrative mandate over Trust Land and can exercise it in whichever way he/she deems fit. Fourthly, the Minister for Lands and Settlement may also declare trust lands an adjudication area. Consequently, it is becoming increasingly difficult for pastoralists to exercise management rights over their Trust Lands. A wave of giving away trust land, piecemeal, has set in.

As trust lands pass into the hands of individuals, pastoralist women are increasingly being dispossessed of this important resource. Capitalist forces have set in. As Athoo (2002) points out, '… the private tenure regime (of land use) does not offer opportunity for women to get to manage resources'. The creation of group ranches in Maasai areas and the subsequent sub-division of the land into individual holdings is a major tragedy for women in this society. The appropriation of dry season grazing lands in some pastoral areas, like Turkana, for the establishment of game reserves, for example, has similarly affected pastoral women.

As far as other forms of property ownership are concerned, it is instructive to note that pastoralism is like a 'corporate' family business, where every member has 'shares' and is committed to the advancement of the 'business'. The Western stereotypical 'ownership' must not be confused with the way property is owned in pastoral communities. The role of the man is that of the manager or Western-style Chief Executive

Officer of a family business. In fact, among the Turkana, when a woman attains middle age, she assumes a matriarchal role. The husband consults her in all decisions concerning property. She can also take crucial decisions regarding property, including livestock, in the absence of the man, as long as it is in the interest of the family. In cases of ownership disputes, decisions are made democratically and follow the rules of natural justice. Similarly, Ahmed (2002) observes that contemporary Somali women are not subservient, but live with men in a relationship of interdependence. They are considered the most resourceful persons in the pastoral economy.

Key development challenges to pastoralist women. As stated earlier, there is no doubt that pastoral areas in Kenya have lagged behind in development for very long, mostly through neglect. Many reasons have been advanced for this neglect. Everyone, however, seems to agree that the major contributor to this state of affairs has been the stereotypical attitude of successive governments and other development actors towards pastoralism as both a land tenure system and a way of life. Consequently, '… inappropriate policies and development interventions have systematically undermined their institutions and strategies for responding to environmental adversity' (Hesse and Odhiambo, 2002).

The most common developmental challenges that face pastoral women today include:

- ***Poverty***: The National Poverty Eradication Strategy, 1999-2015, acknowledges that 80 per cent of the ASAL districts' population was categorised as absolutely poor in 1999 as against a national average of 51 per cent. This means that 2.4 million women in pastoralist areas were languishing in abject poverty (GOK, 2001b).
- ***Illiteracy***: According to the Little Fact Book on Socio-Economic and Political Profiles of Kenya's Districts, the average literacy rate for pastoral areas is 46 per cent. For women, the figure in some pastoral districts is as low as 26 per cent. The school dropout rate is highest among female students in these areas.
- ***Insecurity***: This results largely from conflicts emanating from livestock rustling. Women and children continue to bear a heavy burden in terms of loss of lives and internal displacement. Human rights abuses are also common.
- ***Famine***: As a result of droughts brought about by delicate environmental conditions.
- ***Marginalisation***: This is both political and economic. There is also non-participation in formal political organs and governance structures, both locally and nationally. There is a lack of access to economic opportunities due to sheer neglect or to historical exclusion from mainstream economy.
- ***Institutions/structures***: Pastoral women lack supportive structures or institutions. Even where they exist, they are weak and lack capacity to sufficiently address their needs.

Pastoralist women and conflicts

The most common type of conflict among pastoralists in the region involves livestock rustling and disputes over access to natural resources. Livestock raids in the past were characterised by social restraints and moral limitations. Despite the negative portrayal of raiding in most studies, there are in fact two types of raiding, that is, redistribution and predation (Hendrickson et al., 1998: 6), a distinction which seems to elude many researchers. In redistributive or 'adaptive'[4] raiding, women and children were never harmed unless they came between the raider and his mission. The worst thing that could happen to women in this form of raiding was to be abducted as war booty. A mature woman would be married and taken care of in the same way as other members of the community (cf. Turkana). A young girl, (boys were rarely abducted), would be cared for until she grew to maturity to be married in the abductor's family. This form of raiding also served to make resources accessible to more people in times of difficulties (Swallow et al., 1978). If successful, a community gained access, albeit temporarily, to certain resources such as water, good grazing and a good gene pool (through the abduction of women). The types of weapons used in this type of raiding did not cause massive loss of lives. In a nutshell, pastoralists employed this form of raiding as a coping mechanism in their unstable environmental conditions. It was closely monitored and controlled by elders. Notably, such raids were not carried out as a regular activity, but only when other coping mechanisms were not feasible.

The major concern of pastoral women today is predatory or 'commercial'[5] raiding, which is fast becoming widespread in East Africa. Women are increasingly becoming the major sufferers. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons has made the situation worse. Moreover, the presence of rebel fighters and the influx of firearms from the war zones in the neighbouring Sudan, Somalia, Uganda and Ethiopia have made conflict less controllable. Women in the region have, in consequence, become victims of famine, abject poverty, physical violence, rape and other forms of sexualised violence.

Women's traditional contribution to conflicts. Contrary to popular belief, women in pastoralist communities contribute significantly to conflicts in the region. Among the Turkana, women play a major role both before and after a raid. Although the decision to undertake a raid (adaptive) is the preserve of elders and the diviner in conjunction with the raiders, women have specific and crucial roles.

4. I prefer to call this type of raiding 'adaptive', because it identifies environmental instability as a trigger factor for such raids.

5. I prefer this term to 'predatory' as used by Hendrickson et al, 1998.

Before the young warriors leave for a raid, each one of them has to receive a blessing from his mother. A typical blessing rite involves the following:

Box 1

The mother retreats with her son to her 'Ekol' (house). She cleans her breasts with water in a special 'atubwa' or bowl. She then sprinkles the water onto her son's face and bare chest, chanting blessings while at the same time invoking the names of her ancestors and all the good things that she has done to the community in her lifetime. Afterwards, she may give him some charms to wear so as to ward off evil. The village matriarch may also be engaged to bless the group by having them crawl through her legs while she stands astride. The young men are then released 'to the world' whereupon elders, and finally the Diviner (Emuron) bless them as a group before they depart for the mission.

Pokot women perform similar but even more elaborate ceremonies to bless their sons when they go on cattle raids.

During the warriors' absence, women are supposed to observe certain rituals to ensure the safe return of the young men:

Box 2

- *The mother will tie a knot on the edge (Echilet) of her gown (Eleu), made of skin, until the son returns (or is confirmed dead).*
- *The raider's mother, or his wife, ensures that no milk is put in his normal gourd during his absence. The gourd is kept empty throughout the period.*
- *The mother and/or wife should not take a bath or oil their bodies, an act that signifies a period of mourning.*
- *The women ensure that no one mentions the warrior's name during his absence as this is deemed to haunt him during the raid.*
- *The mother and father ensure that no debts owing (Amica, Ekwuer)[6] to the raider are settled in the young man's absence*

Finally, when the warriors return, apart from rituals that are performed by the elders and Emuron, women have distinct rituals and roles to perform.

6. Loosely translates to debt.

Box 3

- *Women, in conjunction with elders, ensure that no warriors (or raided livestock) enter the homestead before they are cleansed.*
- *When entering the homestead, the women will receive the warriors with very elaborate and intense singing and dancing, in praise of their valour. Those who did not partake in the raid are castigated and branded cowards.*
- *For every warrior or for the group, a sacrificial goat is roasted without being disembowelled. The goat's insides are made to burst on to the chest of the warrior. This is supposed to release him from the bondage of enemy blood (if he killed).*
- *Girls normally tattoo the warriors to signify the number of enemy warriors killed by a particular man.*
- *A warrior may also pass the honour of being tattooed to his girlfriend or beloved sister, so that instead of being tattooed, his lover or sister gets to having it done.*
- *Their mothers or a matriarch shave the men and smear them with red ochre. Each one is given a cowrie shell necklace as an honour.*
- *The women ensure that the warriors are fed well for some time. Women admirers to these men become numerous, sometime to the point of becoming a nuisance.*

Among the Turkana, the eldest aunt of the raider has first priority in the share of raided animals and receives the 'fattest' share.

Among the Borana, a warrior demonstrates his valour by severing a slain enemy's testicles, which he ties around his pet camel's neck like a cowbell. Such a warrior would normally receive a tumultuous welcoming ceremony from the women when he drives his animals home. Women sing and dance in his praise the whole evening and thereafter. Furthermore, the most valorous warrior is offered a wider choice of girls to marry.

Turkana women praise/taunt songs for warriors

Turkana women employ song and dance elaborately to force their men to undertake cattle raids, using extremely provocative songs as shown in the following examples. All the 'boxed' cases were the result of personal interviews and experiences.

Box 4

Turkana	English translation
1. LOPULUMOE	**1. MR. WIPER (OF ENEMIES)**
Lopulumoe ekaguman *Edia ka pakang tounae* *Toiunae ka ngimoe*	*Lopulumoe the sharpshooter* *Son of my father save me/us* *Save me/us from enemy*
Ngayewoiye! Ilemari (Chorus)	***Oh! You will take (cattle)***
Ekiriam loti a Napeitom *Sua kiperi, kiperia!* *Sua kiperi kwa ngingokuo*	*During the battle of Napeitom* *We died, died!* *We died like dogs*
Ngayewoiye! Ilemari	***Oh! You will take!***

Box 5

Turkana	English translation
2. LOOL-OL	**2. COWARD**
Lool-ol iremi iyo oria?	*Coward, when did you raid?*
Iyee ngayewoiye, yangae (Chorus)	
Aar ayole kiwang towara	*He kills a lizard and boasts the whole day*
Aar ngimukuny – ngikemoe ngulu!	*He kills ants – those are his enemies!*
Adwar nyaite aremete ta apa	*His dance bull was given to him by elders*
Aar esuro – ngikemoe ngulu	*He kills a Dik-dik – those are his enemies!*
Eroko ilodi nanae auno	*Give me a rope (to hang) before he nears me*

Box 6

Turkana	English translation
3. KAPE LOKIRIAM	**3. GO TO THE BATTLEFRONT**
Anikirai iyong ekile *Kape lokiriam-ia* *Ekiriem ka ngatuk-a*	*If you are man enough* *Go to the battlefront* *The battle for cows*
Irau nyekadengania (Chorus)	***You are the brave one***
Irau nyekadengania *Kape lokiriem-ia* *Ekiriem ka ngatuk-a*	*You are the brave one* *Go to the battlefront* *The battle for cows*

Box 7

Turkana	English translation
4. EKILE-A-NYATOM	**4. THE MAN OF THE GUN**
Nakorikel nakang *Esakere ngatuk-a* *Ikoku nikang-a* *Esakere ngatuk-a*	*My beautiful daughter* *She is meant for getting cows* *My daughter* *She is meant for getting cows*
Esiyan ngichomin-ngikadokoi-a ***Ekile a – Natelenge esaki etau*** ***Ekile a nyikakoku-a emam kane (Chorus)***	***She's started talking to monkeys and baboons*** ***I want Nateleng's husband*** ***My daughter's husband is not here***
Iyo Ekomwa *Bua atoelokin* *Ekile loa anyatom ngesi asaki ayong* *Ekile a nyikakoku-a emam kane*	*You Ekomwa* *Come we be friends* *I want a man with a gun* *My daughter's husband is not here*

Box 8

Turkana	English translation
4. NYAITIE	**4. THE COW**
Nabokolem Nyaitie,	*Beautiful cow*
Tokuro ngalup toloma	***Dig the earth and disappear in it!***
Eee! Nangoria!	***Yes! Beautiful one!***
Kidaru ngakiro a Nairobi	***Wait for the word***
(Chorus)	***from Nairobi***
Aite aarare ngikiliok	*Men have died because of the cow*
Aite alachare ngikatukok	*Chiefs have been sacked because of the cow*
Aite eusiere aberu	*A woman has been married because of the cow*
Aite aarare ngimoe	*Enemies have died because of the cow*

Box 9

Turkana	English translation
5. AREME ETENGAN NGATUK	**5. ETENGAN HAS RAIDED COWS**
Areme Etengan ngatuk	*Etengan has raided cows*
Yangaee eremi Etengan	*Yes! Etengan can raid*
Iwooye ye ngaaye	*Yes!*
Areme Etengan ngatuk	***Etengan has raided cows***
(Chorus)	

- In the first song (box 4) women, while praising *Lopulumoe's* valour, are appealing to him to use his sharpshooter skills to save them from a marauding enemy. The community is under siege only the bravery of a man such as Lopulumoe can save them. There is also a reward for that – *Ilemari* (You'll take!).

- In the second song (box 5), the women are castigating a coward of the highest order. He never goes to raids. The best he can do is kill things like rats, rabbits, ants. Whenever he does this, he beats his chest as if he has killed an enemy. The girl singing does not want him anywhere near her (courting her), lest she takes a rope and hangs herself, as she cannot stand a coward!
- The third song (box 6) urges men to go to the battlefront to raid cows, not just be lounging around while the others are in the battlefront dying for cattle!
- In this song (box 7), a mother praises the virtues of a warrior (man of the gun). She wants her daughter to be married to a warrior, and not to monkeys and baboons (referring to cowards who do not have guns!). *Ekomwa* happens to be the man of the gun and that is why she would rather befriend him to marry her daughter.
- The fifth song (box 8) praises the cow and its importance to the community. Warriors have brought home cows from the enemy and there may be a security operation by government forces to retrieve them. The cow, as a much sought after animal, is therefore advised to hide in the ground to avoid being detected.
- In this song (box 9), the women simply adore *Etengan* because of his raiding prowess and unrivalled bravery. They cite the many areas and enemies that he has raided in the past. This is meant to incite young men to follow his example.

In summary, pastoral women are fully involved in conflict and its perpetuation. Among pastoralists, conflicts are not 'private' affairs. They involve virtually every member of the community. Pastoralists revere women and regard them as the source of life (Osamba, 2001). Their words and actions are taken seriously and they are able to play an important part in conflict situations. According to African Union Inter-Africa Bureau for Animal Resources (AU/IBAR) report on the role of women in Conflicts and Peacebuilding in the Karamojong Cluster, '… fieldwork and research over the years has shown that (women's role in conflict) is complex as it is typically informal and often hidden from outsiders and non-household members. Women may incite their sons and husbands to go for raids' (Akabwai, n.d.). Pastoralist women have also sustained conflicts by ensuring that the supply lines for food and other war essentially are maintained.

Impact of livestock raiding on women and gender relations. Although pastoralist women have been significantly involved in livestock raiding for a long time, the current form of predatory or commercial raiding has had far-reaching consequences on women and gender relations. Some of the effects are as follows:

a) Internal displacement. According to Ruto et al. (2003: 10), a total of 164,457 people have been displaced by conflicts in the pastoralist districts of northern Kenya. Of these 70 per cent, or 105,500, are women and children aged below 14. Whereas these communities had their traditional ways of taking care of displaced persons, supervised by the elders, these traditional mechanisms have been greatly undermined. Indeed, one of the adverse effects of commercial raiding has been the erosion of the elders' authority over community decisions. Moreover, instead of filling the vacuum, the government's administrative institutions and structures have further undermined the traditional institutions, since they are seen as adversarial sources of authority.

b) Impoverishment/proliferation of urban destitute. Over 60 per cent of the population in Arid and Semi Arid Land areas live below the poverty line.[7] Over 60 per cent of these are women. Traditionally, as has been mentioned in this paper, pastoralist livelihoods provided for all members of the family equitably. The family, on a corporate basis, owned livestock. When the head of the household died, elders had the authority to ensure that dishonest and unscrupulous relatives did not take advantage of the situation to lay unfair claims to the family's livestock. As the authority of the elders continues to crumble, women are becoming more and more dispossessed, due to their relatively weaker position in society, sometimes with the connivance of the very elders who are supposed to assist them.

Traditionally, and especially among the Turkana, impoverished members of the society were given animals on 'loan' to help them recover from losses, even though the 'loan' was always usually negotiated with the male family head. In cases of displaced, widowed or divorced/separated women today, few lenders are willing to take a 'risk' with them. They are considered as unstable families and likely to default.

Without livestock to rely on, pastoralist women displaced by predatory raids find themselves in extremely difficult circumstances economically. In fact, as a result of commercial raiding and the subsequent proliferation of arms, 70 per cent of pastoralist women have had to move to urban surroundings, where they can scarcely eke out a living.

c) HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections. The spread of HIV/AIDS in pastoralist communities is probably the single most momentous threat and is a clear time bomb. Although no authoritative figures are available, there is evidence that the rates of infection are quite high.

7. The World Bank defines poverty line as subsistence on less than a dollar a day

The high rate of rural urban migration, as a result of increased insecurity and lack of economic opportunities due to livestock raiding, has accelerated the pandemic. As more and more women are dispossessed, more of them are starting to engage in commercial sex. Whilst warriors never used to engage in sexual acts with enemy women during a livestock raid, commercial raiders are increasingly engaging in sexual exploits either to satisfy their libido or as a way of disgracing the enemy. Wife inheritance, polygamy, unhygienic birth practices, 'widely travelled' raiders and truck drivers are other factors that contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS in pastoral areas.

Pastoralists have disturbingly low levels of awareness of the pandemic. From personal observation, I should say that the most inimical threat to pastoralists in Kenya today is the high level of ignorance of the disease. A large proportion of the population in the rural areas have not even heard of it and if they have, they do not believe it exists, even though a considerable number of these people have contracted the disease.

d) Loss of life and property. Although accurate figures on the level of loss of life and property[8] in pastoralist communities are not available, in 2003 alone more than 2000 lives and property worth more than 600 million Kenya shillings was lost. The main victims were the 105,000 displaced women and children in the Northern Kenya pastoralist District (Ruto et al., 2003). Many women are rendered widows and, as a result, they migrate to town since they have nothing to lay claim to as their property.

e) Moral decline. Traditionally, the community took good care, both economically and socially, of women who lost their men in raids. As mentioned previously, elders and clan members would take it upon themselves to ensure that such a woman had sufficient animals to provide for her children and herself. She would also be required to be inherited by a close relative to meet her social needs.

In predatory raiding, the beneficiaries tend to be young and affluent. And because the society's social fabric has already been undermined and corrupted by these marauders, they have become an authority unto themselves. They are able to lure widows and young girls with material gains. Promises of wealth from commercial raiders and their free lifestyles have therefore turned displaced women in urban centres into commercial sex workers, providing for the needs of rich, returning

8. The Centre for Minority Rights Development (CEMIRIDE) is currently conducting research funded by USAID on the Cost of Conflict in Northern Kenya in the last ten years. The research seeks to establish the human toll, impact on communities' social fabric and coping mechanisms, impact on institutions and cost of the threat to regional stability and security, i.e. the spill over effect.

raiders. The mere fact that these raiders are 'men of the gun' earns them 'fearful' admiration. In the world of the 'men of the gun', no authority exists, governmental or otherwise.

Divorce was rare in most pastoral communities. Among the Turkana, even when divorce occurred, it was more of a separation than a divorce. Each party was always free to demand for *Lopalikinet*.[9] This would lead to the couple begetting children from 'outside' formal marriage. In essence, this meant that a bond was maintained between the children, the father and kin. It also tied the parents, especially the man, to his social responsibilities. Religious influences aside, this seems to have been the traditional practice in most pastoralist communities. However, divorce is now commonplace in most of these communities.

f) Increased insecurity. Whereas adaptive raiding was conducted with some measure of dignity and directed by the communities' elders, commercial or predatory raiding is driven by greed and personal gain. Commercial raiders are ruthless, not only to the 'enemy', but also to members of their own communities. They are aware of the fact that not many members of the community approve of their activities.

The abundance of small arms and the virtual failure of the state security apparatus in the region have added to the arrogant attitude of the raiders. The 'modern' raiders target not only livestock, but also highways, urban settlements, homes, institutions and commercial premises. What is more, they no longer go out to raid only 'enemy' communities but resort to raiding their own communities' livestock. This has precipitated widespread insecurity in the region.

Women in conflict resolution and peace building. There is a general fallacy among both researchers and conflict resolution practitioners that women were traditionally excluded from decision-making in crucial matters among pastoralists. It is noteworthy that most pastoralist communities are egalitarian in nature and consist of independent individuals who in turn belong to a sub group or clan. In most pastoral communities, the household is the basic decision-making forum. It is at this level of the household/family that most pastoral women participate in decision-making, out of the public 'glare'. The role of the head of the household at the *Tree of Elders* is to articulate views that have already been discussed at the family level. This is part of the reason why women and the youth in pastoral societies seem invisible in general community meetings. In some pastoral communities,

9. Turkana term, which loosely translates to 'the parting gift', and is in most cases made in reference to sexual 'gift'.

women have their own parallel structures in which they exercised authority over their own gender.

As has been explained in the preceding pages, pastoral women play a significant role in conflict perpetuation. However, they play an equally important role in conflict resolution and peace building. Women are seen as the personification of life. They are the originators and sustainers of life among the pastoralists. In this regard, they are respected. It is for this reason that women play a crucial role in bringing about peace in pastoral communities.

Among the Turkana, every mother has an enormous influence over her son. It is believed that the curse of a mother who has been disobeyed by her son is lethal. This is why mothers have a prominent role in administering blessings during raids. The Turkana, like all other pastoralists, have a very rich oral tradition. History and the richness of the language are passed on through oral tradition. Similarly, peace is conveyed through the people's oral tradition. Whereas elders embody the norms and accepted principles of justice in society, women, through song and dance, are the broadcasters of tradition and pertinent cultural messages. During 'visitation' (*Akinyak*) dances (AU/IBAR reports refer to them erroneously as *Alokita*,[10] which is a preserve of men) women, though on a mission to solicit favours from men, use the opportunity to send peace messages, communicated in elaborate dancing, singing and drama.

The Maasai word for peace is *Osotua*, which denotes the umbilical cord. According to Sultan (2000), one does not just cut the *Osotua* with a knife as is done in hospital today. A prayer has to be said and grass tied on the head. The midwife then brings the knife up and down three times before cutting the cord. This ritual symbolises the first relationship between the mother and the child and has a direct bearing on the influence the mother can have on her son when he grows up. During bloody conflicts among the Luos and Maasai, one of the ways women employ to bring about peace is to exchange babies with the 'enemies' babies and suckle them (Osamba, 2001).

Among the Kalenjin, especially the Pokot, *Leketio*, which is a pregnancy belt studded with cowrie shells, is removed by a pregnant woman and placed between warring groups or individuals. The fighting must stop as a result. She does not have to be the biological mother since a mother is mother to all in the eyes of the community. Grass to the Pokot symbolises life-sustenance; life from the womb of Mother Nature. When people fight, picking up of grass signifies that the fight must stop.

10. The actual word is *Alogita*, which is undertaken by men to solicit for 'meat'. Occasionally, the mission may turn violent. For this reason, the men are usually prepared for any eventuality. Because of the inherent violence, women never practice it, at least among the Turkana.

As a result of the role that women play as intermediaries between the family and the community at large, they have developed good negotiating skills. Furthermore, women are easily married across clan or tribal lines. This makes them important peace seekers since they may have a stake, across the communities, in conflict prevention and resolution. This element of intermarriage was instrumental in bringing about peace between the *Degodia* and the *Ajuran* clans in Wajir District of Kenya. Also, as mothers and family caregivers, women have been known to be more effective than men in bringing about peace.

Integrating pastoralist women in conflict resolution and peace building mechanisms

The following key areas need to be addressed so as to fully integrate pastoralist women into conflict resolution and peace building:

1. One of the major setbacks for pastoralist women in Kenya today is their inability to speak with 'one voice'. There are few women's civil society organisations in the pastoral areas, and those that exist are not effective because they lack co-ordination amongst themselves and with those operating in conflict transformation. There is a need, therefore, to encourage coalition building between the various civil society organisations in these areas.

2. Conflict transformation must form the cornerstone of all development programmes in pastoral areas, especially programmes that target women. This will strengthen the sustainability of these programmes.

3. Conflicts and wars are highly gendered occurrences and affect women and men differently. Men and women have different levels of access to power and decision-making, especially among the pastoral communities of Kenya. There is therefore a need for engendering peace building among the pastoralists by strengthening the capacity of local women to participate in conflict resolution and peace building, and through attaining a gender balance in decision-making forums.

4. The special circumstances in which pastoral women find themselves dictate the way they react to conflicts and peace building efforts. It is therefore important to look at each situation differently, taking into account the opportunities and limitations available. Approaches to conflict resolution and peace building can be copied from other places to some degree, but every pastoralist society is different, and things that work in one place may not necessarily work in another. Every one of these communities has its own culture. This serves as the benchmark for a peaceable situation. Any community that is in conflict with another strives for reconciliation. Pastoralists understand well that reconciliation does not come overnight as

with the signing of a formal peace treaty. It is built and nurtured through symbols of peace, which may be material or non-material. The African believes in reconciliation with his/her God, relatives, ancestors and the entirety of nature (animals, grass, plants, mountains, water and the moon). It is for this reason that local conflict resolution and peace building institutions among pastoralists should be strengthened so that they can be employed in conflict resolution and peace building.

5. Including women in peace processes is mandated by international law. In October 2000, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. This watershed resolution calls upon states and all actors to ensure women's full participation in peace processes. The European Union and other regional and multilateral organizations have replicated the resolution. Yet rhetoric is still not matched by reality. Little has been done to implement the resolution. Experiences elsewhere show that bringing women to the peace table improves the quality of the agreements reached, and also increases the chances of better implementation. It is unfortunate that pastoralist women do not feature anywhere within the UN peace organs despite the fact that there are a number who qualify.

6. Although pastoralist women do not participate directly in wars and conflicts, they are very sensitive to signs of conflict or war and can often detect them in good time. It is therefore important to include women in early warning processes. Incorporating gender sensitive indicators into information collection before a conflict occurs and into response mechanisms is vital in addressing pastoral conflicts.

7. Pastoral women and their civil societies' capacities to participate in conflict resolution and peace building processes are weak and ineffective. There is a need to strengthen the local capacities of women, mainly because decisions reached by men and 'outsiders' without the involvement of women are often short-lived.

Conclusion

Due to their seemingly intractable nature, resolution of pastoralists' conflicts and peace building efforts today requires a new and integrated approach. Pastoral women represent an untapped resource. Stereotypical images of women as passive victims of conflicts overshadow their agency and contributions to peace building, and belie the complex reality of their experiences and involvement in conflict situations. Women are victims, but they are also fighters. Women are survivors and they are protectors. Women are also peace builders. Portraying and treating them solely as victims not only undermines their efforts and robs them of the opportunity to progress, but also excludes a vast and untapped resource in terms of peacemaking and post-conflict recovery and transformation.

In situations of conflict, where violence reaches into homes and communities, the political or military hierarchy alone cannot impose sustainable peace. The very people who are affected by the conflict must own the solution. Women have their 'finger on the pulse' of their communities; they understand their needs and have the ability to root peace in these communities. Yet they remain excluded from official peace processes. Pastoralist women have a profound personal interest and commitment to building peace and reconciliation. It is therefore essential to involve pastoralist women in conflict resolution.

9

The Impact of Cultural Perceptions on Gender Issues[1]

Elizabeth Orchardson-Mazrui

Abstract

This paper examines the impact of cultural perceptions on gender issues in Kenya. The paper argues that the perceptions of stereotypical images and words, that portray women negatively, hinder the fight for gender equity and equality. The paper further suggests that in many Kenyan communities, cultural taboos imposed on women contribute to the perception that when women struggle for equality, this means that they want to usurp the rights and roles of men. It is the contention of this paper that since cultural perceptions and attitudes underpin many gender issues, it is critical that these be addressed if the gender debate in Kenya, and elsewhere in Africa, is to move forward positively. Various theories inform this paper, which in particular draws on the insights of John Berger (1972), Peter Coleridge (1993), and Mary Ann Caws (1989), who have written about visual representation and perception.

Introduction

The constructive and destructive power of imagery and words is often not fully appreciated. Images and words are often subtle and insidious. They can be so powerful that they can have a deep and lasting psychological impact. Many children are taught that 'sticks and stones can break my bones, but words will never harm me'. Yet words can be hurtful; words do affect people and they can leave indelible marks.

1. This paper was given as one of several keynote speeches at the International Conference titled 'Understanding Gender Inequalities' held at the Egerton University, Kenya, from 5th - 8th April 2004.

The electronic and print media constantly transmit powerful imagery and words. Images and words can be powerful tools in psychological warfare. For example, the first thing the Americans did in Iraq in 2002 was to topple Saddam Hussein's gigantic statue and to destroy his magnificent palaces. This action was deliberate and calculated as a way of demoralizing the Iraqis and demonstrating the power of America and its military might. The headlines in the print media ran 'Saddam toppled', suggesting that Saddam the person and not the statue had been toppled. The destruction of the statue was visually awesome. Equally powerful was the image of a dead American soldier being dragged behind a pick-up truck by Somali fighters in 1991, soon after America invaded Somalia. Once the image reached America, the American public was outraged and Somalis were branded 'savages'. The power of this image was such that the Americans pulled out of Somalia as quickly as they had invaded the country.

The power of visual and implied images and words can be found in many instances of war. During the Vietnam War, American soldiers routinely sang a song which exalted the penis and the gun as two powerful weapons of warfare. The song urged the American soldiers to use the gun to kill their Vietnamese enemies, and the penis to rape Vietnamese women, not only as a way of violating and demoralizing them, but also as a potent way of emasculating and demoralizing Vietnamese men.

Another example of the power of imagery is that of Winnie Mandela and Nelson Mandela. When Nelson Mandela was released from prison in 1994, his wife Winnie overshadowed him visually and verbally; her gestures and words were more defiant than his. She was much more politically assertive than he was. Winnie was soon removed from the limelight of the South African political arena. On the other hand, Mandela's present wife, Graca Mandela, seems to better represent the image of a typical African woman. She is usually in the background, quietly supporting her husband. Yet, away from Mandela, Graca is a powerful woman in her own right, as an activist articulating the rights of women.

Language, cultural perceptions and taboos

A central issue in this paper is to question the impact of African cultural perceptions, and to some extent taboos, on gender issues. For instance, how do African languages describe women? How do these languages influence us to perceive women? The issue of language is important in understanding human relationships. Mwaura, in a discussion about the importance of using local languages if the communication media is to be successful in Africa, contends that 'Language influences the way in which we perceive reality, evaluate it and conduct ourselves with respect to it' (1993: 27). Similarly, in writing about disability issues, Coleridge states that, 'Our thoughts and attitudes are influenced by the language we use; we tend to

slot into every language patterns dictated by current usage and prevalent attitudes' (1993: 99). He further points out that '… language is a cultural issue in relation to attitudes and self-perception' (1993: 102). Coleridge takes issue with labels applied to disabled people because 'they focus on the person not as a person but as a case or an object' (1993: 99). Labels, i.e. negative descriptive words, devalue a person.

In Africa, language can advance or hinder gender issues, as it can elsewhere in the world. Some African societies are said to have more indistinct semantic systems in which there is flexibility in the words used to describe women and men and their roles in society. In her research on Igbo society in Nigeria, Amadiume notes that,

> … the Igbo language, in comparison with English for example, has not built up rigid associations between certain adjectives or attributes and gender subjects, nor certain objects and gender possessive pronouns … This linguistic system of fewer gender distinctions makes it possible to conceptualise certain roles as separate from sex and gender, hence the possibility for either sex to fill the role (1987: 89-90).

There are ongoing debates about the role of African languages and their place in the global arena. The view that colonial languages have had, and continue to have, a detrimental impact on the African psyche is still a subject of debate. Ngugi wa Thiong'o contends that:

> The domination of a people's language by languages of the colonizing nations was critical to the domination of the mental universe of the colonized (1986: 16).

Many African scholars are of the opinion that in order for African minds to be truly decolonised, the use of African languages must be actively promoted as the 2000 Asmara Declaration on African languages concluded.

Negative cultural perceptions, perpetuated through language and imagery, can be detrimental to a person's psyche. Research carried out by ***PREPARE*** in India revealed that the dalits[2], previously called 'untouchables', perceive themselves to be inferior beings. The research found that *dalits* internalised values about their unequal status to such an extent that:

> The resulting damage is so deadly to the whole of their personality that a profoundly wounded psyche is the prime characteristic of the dalits,

2. Dalits: low caste people previously called 'untouchables' in India. PREPARE is a local NGO working in social action and community health in India.

> whether they are highly educated or totally illiterate (Dharamaraj, 1991, cf. Coleridge, 1993: 153).

The ***PREPARE*** research states that the concept of 'caste' in India is so deeply entrenched that it is difficult for constructive change to take place. Coleridge points out that the caste system can have 'a devastating effect on the self-image of those at the bottom of the ladder' (1993: 152).

The above can be correlated with what happens to women in Africa when cultural prohibitions and taboos are imposed on them. Many African cultures do not allow women to carry out certain duties during, for example, their menses. Taboos of filth and cleanliness during such time limit what women can do. In some communities, uncircumcised women cannot serve circumcised men or boys. In some cases, when a woman's husband dies, she is considered unclean and must go through cleansing rituals before she can be reintegrated into the community. Other prohibitions include what kinds of food, or parts of poultry and animals, women can or cannot eat, how they are expected to behave in front of their husbands and other men, and their extended families. All these taboos and restrictions are bound to have an effect on the psyche of women. Language, and cultural perceptions or attitudes, can either liberate or dominate women. Language and imagery can be effectively used to perpetuate cultural and ideological values, or, more insidiously, domination.

In her discussion about the visual representation of women's bodies, Caws writes that:

> Language included and implied and roped into language about the body, and representing by language is already linked, by the inescapable chain of words, into the body of prior and present and future language events. The picture cannot be neutral or objective, being made up as it is of bodies and parts, of visual representations and linguistic representations … (1989: 26).

Drawing on John Berger's work, Caws points out that a woman's exposure, through visual representation, is not:

> … a matter of her own sexuality, but one of the sexuality of the observer, whose monopoly of passion is such that bodily hair (assumed to represent sexual power and passion) is not ordinarily placed on her objectified body (1989: 117, cf. Berger, 1972: 54).

As far as the representation of the female body in advertisements is concerned Caws, using an ECCO Shoe wear advertisement, points out that:

> It is not only a question of class but also one of motive: the manufacturer makes, after all, with his manus, or hand, his product – which is to say, us. Inscribed with his initials or his name, the shoes trot upon the Paris sidewalks with or without us or anything in them: it seems to scarcely matter (1989: 33).

In other words, women in advertisements become overt or implied objects of desire; they are capable of becoming 'artistically ogled and consumed beings' (Caws, 1989: 112).

In traditional African patriarchal societies, images of women varied from society to society. Among the Kuba, womanhood was viewed as a sad, terrible affair. A statue called *ngaat apoong* symbolized this state; tears on the statue exemplified the sad fate of women. Among the Chokwe and the Dan of Liberia, statues of women glorified their beauty and sensuous pleasure but depicted nothing else. In matrilineal societies, the motherhood of chiefs was emphasized and such women were said to be the source of noble men and noble dynasties. The sole purpose of these women, however, was to give birth to chiefs (Vansina, 1984: 205)

The Holo people of Upper Kwango made statues of women who ruled as Queens. The most famous of these was Queen Nzunga of ancient Angola who fought against the Portuguese and the Dutch and founded the kingdoms of Matamba and Ndongo. Statues of Holo Queens were portrayed as sexless and their facial expression showed resolve. In addition, metal was incorporated in the statues to symbolize their special status as rulers (Vansina, 1984: 205).

As far as Kenya is concerned, visual images tend to depict women as bearers of children, carriers of firewood and water, and market women. More insidious images are found in the electronic and print media. Implied images, those created in the mind by the association of words of descriptions, are found in oral and written literature, and in the print media. It is these images which need to be examined in order to find out if they impact negatively on gender issues.

The impact of cultural perceptions on gender issues in Kenya

This paper addresses the impact of cultural perceptions on gender issues under different sub-sections in an attempt to delineate salient points. My basic argument is that language and imagery can be powerful tools of control and manipulation; and that people sometimes use language to perpetuate certain cultural values and perceptions that can have a negative impact on women and their struggle for gender parity. Additionally, English, Kenya's inherited official colonial language, can also

be used to perpetuate stereotypical images of women which often demean the worth of women and hinder their fight for their rights.

Gender and Governance

Great disparities exist between women and men when it comes to governance. Many of the problems that confront women political aspirants have to do with cultural perceptions about the role of women in society. From the very start of their political campaigns to the time they enter Parliament, women politicians face physical violence and verbal abuse, in addition to lack of funds and moral support. During the 2002 elections in Kenya, several women politicians were subjected to electoral violence. For example Ms Dorcas Wambui, a civic ward aspirant, lost her husband and six members of her family in a fire when political rivals torched her house (Daily Nation, 23rd Dec. 2002). Mrs Grace Wamuyu Nyachae, the wife of the Ford People presidential candidate, had to flee when her husband's political rivals threatened to attack her and her campaign team (Daily Nation, 23rd Dec. 2002).

Cultural socialization does not encourage women to participate in politics, though this trend seems to be changing, as seen after the elections of 2002 in Kenya when more women MPs were elected to Parliament. Culturally, politics has, for a long time, been viewed as the domain of men. In the past, women politicians were often likened to prostitutes. It is not uncommon for rumours to circulate that women politicians are morally loose. According to Cecily Mbarire, a young MP nominated by the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC):

> A woman candidate must live with the perception of going against the cultural grain. She is considered either a senior tomboy or a marital truant. You work late and far away from home. You keep the company of fellow politicians, majority of who are men. Unless you tag along your spouse, your morality becomes an issue. The refrain is that you are loose … some of my male counterparts imagine I'm out for a romantic joyride (Nixon Ng'ang'a, Lifestyle, Sunday Nation, 12th Jan. 2003, p. 3).

In 1997, Charity Ngilu, the current Minister for Health in the NARC Government, made history when she became the first Kenyan woman to run for presidency. She lost badly. Her Chief Campaigner, Njoki Ndungu, now a NARC nominated MP, said: 'Voters told us point blank they could not fathom a woman presidency. Others promised to vote for her because of her looks. Her campaign manifesto was subdued by her womanhood' (Njoki Ndungu, Lifestyle, Sunday Nation, 12th Jan., 2003, p.6).

Political violence is not confined to elections. It also manifests itself in debates on women's issues. For instance, in 2002, when the Kenyan Parliament was debating a law seeking to protect families from domestic violence, the debate,

> … degenerated to personal attacks on women Members of Parliament and judicial officials as well as … FIDA (International Federation of Women Lawyers, Kenya chapter) members … the fear of the male establishment came out very clearly in the statements of MPs. According to some of them, women needed to remain under constant threat of violence to ensure family unity and discipline (Murungi, 2002: 66).

In order for anyone to enter politics, it is necessary that they have the financial means to do so. For the majority of women, this is next to impossible because most women in Kenya have few, if any, independent economic resources. If they are married, their husbands may choose not to support them morally and financially. Though Section 1(1) of the Married Women's Property Act of Kenya provides that a married woman has the right to acquire, hold and dispose of real and personal property, in reality this is difficult for her to do because Section 17 of the Act stipulates that in case of a dispute, a woman must provide evidence that she contributed to the purchase of real property. Under customary law, it is even harder for women to enjoy any rights over property. According to Adhiambo Oduol, 'African customary practices are even more discriminative towards women on the issue of matrimonial property when the matter at stake is divorce.' (2002: 44).

Customary law does not recognize the right of women to possess or dispose of matrimonial property. When women are divorced under customary law, they are usually dispossessed of any real assets. With such scenarios it is difficult, as stated earlier, for most women to vie for political positions. The only way for women to run for political position is for their political parties and other organizations, such as the Centre for Multiparty Democracy (Kenya), which funds political parties, to give them financial suppport.

As far as negative perceptions and images are concerned those targeted at women politicians denigrate women. These perceptions and images, created through words and innuendoes seem always to focus on issues of morality. As pointed out previously, women politicians are frequently called loose or likened to prostitutes. The images that come to mind when we think of prostitutes (commercial sex workers) are of women clad in skin-hugging outfits and micro-mini-skirts. Commercial sex workers are viewed as immoral women who prey on men. When such negative images are associated with women generally, they undermine the worth of women. When images of women politicians are associated with prostitutes, they reinforce the perception that 'loose' women cannot govern others. The leadership qualities of women are cheapened and degraded by such associations.

How can negative images and language that are purposely built around women politicians be eradicated? One way is for women politicians to engage much more in public debates with their male counterparts. Most TV talk shows that debate political and economic issues in Kenya hardly ever feature women politicians. It is necessary to see a situation where male and female politicians come together to expound on their manifestos, or to discuss crucial issues facing the society. Such debates would foster the growth of political debate and dialogue, and demonstrate to the public at large that women are equally intelligent and resourceful enough to play a vital role in governance and leadership. Unfortunately, the few women politicians in Kenya tend to relegate themselves to the periphery of political discourse. They are usually almost invisible and voiceless. Again, this has a lot to do with cultural expectations and perceptions which require that women should not be too visible.

Generally, Kenyan communities have inculcated in their people the assumption that leadership rightfully belongs to men. In patriarchal societies, men, traditionally, are the elders and leaders. They make wide-ranging decisions that affect family and the community. In modern Kenya, when *male* Members of Parliament are given Cabinet positions, their communities often elevate them to the status of elders and accord them the right to use symbols of leadership and eldership such as walking sticks, knobkerries, beaded or feathered headdresses and traditional attire. This illustrates the continuation of traditional patriarchal practices in a modern society. This elevation to eldership and leadership status in their communities rarely happens to women.

Despite the fact that in traditional communities some elderly women are leaders in the realm of rituals and ceremonies pertaining to girls and women, people rarely talk about them as leaders. Women's leadership, in most African communities, is subsumed in male leadership, which is expressed very overtly. Whereas traditional male leadership continues to inspire men in modern society, this is not the case with traditional female leadership. Women have not been able to build on this foundation.

Today, if there is any discussion about women ritual leaders at all, they are usually associated with negative aspects of ritual practice such as female genital mutilation (FGM). In the recent past, women who performed FGM rituals were demonised by members of NGOs to such an extent that these women sometimes went underground and continued to perform these operations in secret. Some communities (for example the Samburu and Maasai of Kenya) are adamant that they will not discontinue FGM because they claim that unless their daughters are circumcised, they will not find husbands. Creative approaches are being pioneered amongst these communities to introduce alternative rites of passage to replace the harmful ones. Some decades ago, two Francophone African countries pioneered alternative rites, such as 'The Throwing Away (or Laying Down) of Knives', where

ritual leaders were encouraged to throw away or lay down their circumcision knives. The purpose of this was to avoid stigmatising the women ritual leaders and driving them underground. Such alternative rites can create positive awareness of the dangers of FGM without ostracising the women ritual leaders. This would go a long way towards changing the perception that women ritual leaders are harmful practitioners who deserve to be punished.

Gender, health, and reproductive rights

In many African countries, women are very disadvantaged when it comes to health care. Health care is expensive and inaccessible to many women. At the rural level, women suffer greatly because the few available clinics are usually mismanaged and do not have adequate medical supplies and facilities. Women have to walk far to reach them. The queues are usually long and women may spend the whole day waiting for attention. Furthermore, with the increasing cost of living, many people cannot afford health care. Hardest hit are poor women and children but many middle-income women are also affected.

Flower farms in Kenya, where women face low pay, discrimination and sexual harassment, have been cited as places where women are exposed to occupational risks to their health. Women workers are often exposed to pesticides, which can lead eventually to cancer, infertility and other health problems. Some decades back, research in Colombian flower farms exposed these health hazards. A film entitled 'Behind every red rose there is a dead girl', showed that many of the young women on these farms became infertile and some developed various cancers, which led to their early death.

Research has shown that women are the worst affected when it comes to HIV/AIDS. Particularly tragic is the stigmatisation of women with HIV/AIDS. Stories are told of women being blamed for bringing this disease to their husbands or partners. Women are chased away from matrimonial homes because they are seen as the cause of the disease. Yet, it has been acknowledged that women are usually the victims, as their husbands or partners often bring the disease to them.

As far as marital infidelity is concerned, a woman who is involved in an extra-marital affair is usually called 'The Other Woman'. She is described as an immoral home breaker and is castigated for stealing someone else's partner or husband. Nothing is said about the man. People condone the idea that men are entitled to their affairs. Negative images are created of such women as shameless prostitutes or ogres. Moreover women, unfortunately, often get into fights with each other instead of confronting their husbands or partners. Wives or partners who have been cheated on are ready to butcher the so-called 'other woman'. They choose not to see the role their husband or partner played in the whole mess.

Some recent soap operas on HIV/AIDS portray unfaithful women as the carriers of the disease and also depict women as the ones responsible for infidelity. Amazingly, some of these programmes are made by women film directors, which raises the question as to why women filmmakers would want to perpetuate the stereotype of women as perpetrators of infidelity and disease. The worst aspect of all is the portrayal of women as the ones who infect their husbands or partners with deadly diseases. This is heightened by images, such as those used in previous campaigns against HIV/AIDS, which symbolically depicted the killer disease as a prostitute. Again, such images devalue women and create the notion that men are morally upright and above reproach.

Women in polygamous marriages are often disadvantaged when it comes to issues such as STDs and HIV/AIDS. Research has shown that in some communities which practise polygamy, it is often the husband who carries HIV/AIDS from one wife to another. Furthermore, when there is not enough money to pay for health care, women in polygamous households may not be able to pay for essential and basic health care services, and if the husband cannot provide for his various wives and his children he may choose to support one family over another.

In communities where the bride price system exists, women are often greatly disadvantaged as far as medical care is concerned. The amount of bride price paid for a wife means that whether she likes it or not, she must stay at her matrimonial home. If she should run away to her parents' home, she may be chased back because the bride price is returnable. In some Kenyan communities, like the Mijikenda[3], a certain part of the bride price, which guarantees the man's rights over his children, is never returned. The children belong to him and the woman has no claim over them. This is different from the Kikuyu community, for example, where the children belong to the mother. Nevertheless, the portion of the bride price which guarantees the man sexual rights has to be returned if the wife runs away.

Cultural stigmas do not help the case of divorced women. Not so long ago the famous, or to some people the infamous, Wambui Otieno, a woman in her late 60s, was in the news when she married a man young enough to be her son. The public abused her in the worst possible way. People said that a grandmother had no business marrying a younger man. Her young husband, Mbugua, was described as a gold digger. What kind of images and perceptions are perpetuated when such a marriage is disparaged openly on TV and in the newspapers? What message is passed on to children? Why is it wrong for an older woman to marry a young man, but it is perfectly all right for an older man to marry a girl young enough to be his granddaughter?

3. Mijikenda: a group of nine culturally similar peoples who live along the coastal hinterland of Kenya.

These cited negative cultural perceptions do not advance the fight for gender equality. Some people might argue that a lot of what this paper cites belongs to the domestic arena only. Yet, these perceptions have far-reaching implications for the advancement of women. Again, as in the Wambui Otieno case, the message that is clearly articulated is that old women have no business falling in love and that it is almost criminal for them to marry younger men. Society gives older men leeway to move into relationships with younger women. These younger women end up being 'sugar babies' to the men (the Kiswahili term used for these young women is *ndogo ndogo* which can be translated to mean literally 'small one' or 'sweet thing'). Such a situation has implications for the future of these young women because they usually end up being chased away with few or no resources to fall back on.

Debilitating cultural stigmas are also attached to women who cannot bear children and to stepmothers. Communities ridicule these two categories of women. Childless women are often chased away from their matrimonial home because husbands and relatives perceive the prime role of women as child-bearers. Some communities view barren women as cursed. In Eastern Nigeria, childlessness is a disgrace. A woman without children is considered worthless and she is described as such, (Nwapa, 1966: 205). The Luo of Kenya[4] generally despise barren women. A barren Luo woman is often required to bring a younger sister or a girl from the lineage to marry her husband and provide him with children. This is done to avoid the family of the barren woman from having to return the bride price paid by her parents to her husband's family. Such a situation places a heavy burden on barren women, who often end up living frustrated and lonely lives.

Some communities portray stepmothers in the same negative fashion as childless women. Many societies describe stepmothers as ogres and child beaters and these images are often conveyed, too, in African children's stories. Today, we often hear stepchildren stating how much they hate their stepmothers. What sort of images do children have of stepmothers? The prevailing conceptions and descriptions are detrimental, because they constantly undermine the positive images that should be developed of women in all areas of social life. Significantly, society rarely stigmatises stepfathers in the same way that it does stepmothers. In Kenya this is because of patriarchal attitudes where a man seldom assumes responsibility for another man's children, and even when he does, there is not the same negativity associated with being a stepfather.

4. Luo: the second largest ethnic group in Kenya.

Gender, sexuality, sexual harassment and violence

The question of gender and sexuality is often an emotive one. It is generally accepted that gender is a social construct which reinforces certain obligations, rights, duties, and expected patterns of behaviour. Kameri-Mbote notes that gender 'emerges as a congealed form of the sexualization of inequality between men and women'. She further sees sexuality as 'the interactive dynamic of gender as an inequality' (2002: 20-21). An important aspect of sexuality is that it 'reinforces relationships of male dominance and female subordination' (Subbo, 2002: 10).

Male dominance of sexuality is continually supported by the cultural images and language prevalent in Kenyan society. Male dominance frequently manifests itself as physical and sexual violence against women. Sexual harassment and violence are troubling issues as far as women are concerned. It is difficult to achieve gender parity if women continue to be sexually abused and subjected to violence whether inside or outside the home. Rape is a powerful form of subjugation and sexual harassment seems to be gaining ground rather than disappearing from our communities. Recently in Kenya, there has been a spate of horrific sexual molestation and murders of minors. Children as young as one year old have been raped and killed in the most brutal manner. Violence and deviant behaviour are growing phenomena in our society, as witnessed in daily reports in the Kenyan media.

When women are sexually abused, many do not report the crime because of the stigma attached to such assaults. The woman is often seen as the one responsible for the crime. The phrases we often hear in this context are negative ones such as 'oh, she asked for it', or 'she must have been badly dressed'. This negative view imprints on our minds the idea that it is the behaviour of women which leads to sexual harassment. A consequence of this is that, 'victims of rape and incest are habitually viewed with suspicion, negatively stereotyped, treated with insensitivity, or pressurized into forgetting about these crimes and moving on with their damaged lives' (Omamo, 2002: 27).

Proving rape is difficult and many offenders do not get charged in courts of law. Even when they are charged, the prosecution may not be effective since in Kenyan courts, 'cultural biases are discernible in decisions made by courts involving gender-based crimes' (Omamo, 2002: 27).

Marital rape is a particularly fraught area. It occurs because some men want to exercise authority over their wives. Culturally, women dare not report marital rape because of the negativity associated with women who dare to disclose such a sensitive issue. Men get away with impunity because they know that the law often sides with them by being silent or by meting out light sentences. In the case of R v. Dan Udeda Wamamba (Omamo, 2002: 27) the accused assaulted and raped his wife

and left her comatose for a month. The husband was fined 10,000 Kenyan shillings (equivalent to about 120 US dollars) and sentenced to four months imprisonment on his own guilty plea.

The theme of male control pervades most depictions of sexual relations. One example is the way that condoms are often advertised in the media or on billboards. The images and language used here reinforce the idea that power and control over sexuality belongs to men, thus making the condom itself a weapon of male domination. Thus a TRUST[5] condom advert, aired on television until recently, showed an attractive young woman dressed all in red and driving an expensive-looking red sports car. The car breaks down in front of a garage in the middle of nowhere. After the mechanic fixes her car, the young woman drives off with a happy smile. There is also a satisfied smile (smirk?) on the mechanic's face. The viewer is made to realize that not only has he fixed the car, but he has also 'fixed' the girl, i.e. pleasured her sexually. He fingers his TRUST condom as he watches the girl drive away. The advert says 'life is all right with TRUST'.

If one analyses the advert, it has elements which are negative as far as women are concerned. Traditionally in visual symbolism, red is used to symbolise sex, lust, and moral looseness, especially in women. The young woman in her red clothes and red car is contrasted with the greasy blue overalls of the mechanic, which symbolise his blue collar status. The negative connotation is that only a morally loose woman would have sex with a total stranger, and one of a lower class than herself. The notion that TRUST condoms offer protection does not diminish the possibility that a negative perception may be perpetuated that suggests that the young woman is morally loose.

This method of advertising condoms, which always show the man in control of them, is particularly troubling in a country where HIV/AIDS is rife and where women are viewed as promiscuous if they carry condoms themselves. None of the TRUST condom adverts ever show women carrying condoms. Apart from advertisements, there is also the proliferation of music videos, soap operas, and magazines from African and Western countries, which, in many cases, verge on obscenity and pornography. The body gestures and language used are sexually explicit. Several religious organizations, especially the Catholic Church, have voiced concern over these images and sexual language in the media, especially in light of the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS.

Though Western culture is often blamed for the erosion of morals, it is also imperative to look at how modern African imagery also plays a part in perpetuating

5. TRUST is a brand name and their condoms are advertised vigorously in Kenya.

negative images of women. For example, Congolese[6] dances usually feature young women who dance provocatively in and around equally provocative male dancers. The body language and sexual innuendoes, which will no doubt help to sell the videos or live shows, seem to suggest that women, as erotic objects, provide sexual excitement. Similarly, in many soap operas, women are shown as sex objects who often wreak havoc in homes and on each other.

Negative images and language contribute to sexual harassment at the work place, schools, colleges, and universities. It is frequently reported in the Kenyan media that women complain of being sexually harassed when they go for job interviews, when they have to pass exams, and in a myriad other situations. Sometimes the same media interviews people on the streets and these people often say that women have themselves to blame because they dress indecently or made the advances themselves. Because of such negative attitudes women, as stated earlier, find it difficult to report sexual harassment crimes. Omamo cites another case of indecent assault, in which the accused was acquitted on the ground that indecent assault had not occurred because the accused 'had merely touched the complainant's buttocks and put his hand under her blouse' (Omamo, 2002: 28).

The only way to stop the violation of women's rights, and violence against women, is for women to be empowered to seek legal redress against the perpetrators of these crimes. Laws that protect the rights of women in every sphere of society need to be enacted where they do not exist and must be enforced.

Gender, science and technology

Science and technology seem to have become 'buzzwords' in Kenya. This is partly because Kenya wants be fully industrialized by the year 2020. The National Council for Science and Technology (NCST) was established in 1988 to determine priorities for scientific and technological activities in Kenya. The Kenya National Academy for Sciences, under the auspices of the NCST, oversees the development of sciences and technology and excellence in research. It also gives out awards for outstanding scientific and technological achievements. Concerted efforts are constantly made by the Government to encourage more girls to take an interest in science subjects, because few girls opt for these subjects in school.

Girls also tend to perform poorly in mathematics, chemistry, and physics. A question frequently asked is why girls tend to perform poorly in these subjects

6. Congolese: generally refers to people from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Dances and songs are usually called Lingala.

and why they decide not to choose them. One widely-held negative notion is that girls by their very nature do not have an aptitude for the sciences. There is no scientific proof for this, and there are many examples of girls who have excelled in the sciences, but the prevalence of such ideas impedes efforts to open scientific subjects and occupations to women. Schools themselves sometimes contribute to the problem of the gendered nature of subject choice. Mondoh (2000) found that in some girls' schools a higher proportion of arts subjects were offered, while in boys' schools there were a larger proportion of science subjects. Mondoh's view was that this disparity 'forced girls and boys to identify with gender-segregated subjects at a very early stage of their lives'

One of the biggest disappointments for many women after the 2002 elections was for the NARC[7] government to appoint Professor Wangari Maathai an Assistant Minister in the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, instead of appointing her a *full* Minister. This is a woman environmentalist who is world-renowned and who has brought glory to Kenya. She is a living role model yet she was given an Assistant Ministerial position. What message is the Government passing to our girl-children in school?

The notion that African girls are not scientifically and technologically able is not borne out by traditional craft practices in many parts of Africa. For centuries, African women have had the scientific and technological expertise to brew and distil alcohol, to spin, dye, and weave fabrics and mats, to produce and fire clay products, and to prepare and preserve many different types of foodstuff. If one examines the tremendous range of material culture produced by African women, it is possible to see the breadth of knowledge and skills that women possess. It is also possible to acknowledge that these are scientific and technological in nature. Unfortunately, these achievements have been seen as minor crafts as compared to crafts like sculpture, which are done by men, and more attention has been given to material artefacts produced by men than those produced by women. Yet the sense of precision and detail required for the production of material artefacts could easily be transferred to the modern scientific and technological arena, to the benefit of both women and the national economy.

Science and technology are not the only subjects in which many girls do not perform well. In general, girls face many constraints as far as education is concerned. Some of these constraints are connected with early marriages when girls are withdrawn from school and forced to get married. Initiation is another constraint because some communities in Kenya still practise initiation rites and girls are with-

7. NARC: the ruling coalition party in Kenya that came to power in Jan 2003 after ousting KANU in December 2002. Since this paper was written, Professor Wangari Maathai has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for the year 2004.

drawn from school to undergo these rites. Pregnancy is yet another problem that forces girls to drop out of school.

The Kuria, in Kenya, are an example of a community where cultural beliefs hinder the education of girls. Women are treated with little regard; they are to be seen but not heard. As far as education is concerned, some Kuria fathers are of the opinion that educating girls is a waste of money, but that the education of boys is an economic investment. Among the Kuria, once a girl has been circumcised, she feels and behaves like a grown up woman and for this reason is reluctant to continue with her education (Mohochi, 2000). The Kuria example clearly demonstrates the power of cultural perceptions. The Kuria people view a young girl as an economic resource and a young boy as an *economic investment*. Bride price, in terms of livestock, is received for the girl. In turn the livestock enables her brother to get married. It may also enable her siblings to get an education. When times are hard, a girl can be exchanged for cattle, or money, and married off (Mohochi, 2000).

Another cultural practice among the Kuria is that of barren women marrying other women who will provide them with children. In some cases, an older woman marries a young girl who will not have one husband but may be required to sleep with several men to produce children. Such girls have no chance to advance their education (Mohochi, 2000).

The education of girls is also hindered by requiring them to perform household chores such as collecting firewood and water or looking after younger siblings. By the time girls arrive at school, they are too fatigued to concentrate and they end up performing badly in their studies. Their brothers continue to progress through the school system because of the perception that boys will inherit from their fathers and eventually head households. Although boys, in rural areas, may be required to herd livestock, this usually seems to interfere less with their schooling.

In many African countries, education is seen as the gateway to change and prosperity. Through education, people can be empowered to take control of their destiny. As far as the girl-child is concerned, education will increase her level of confidence and expand future employment and leadership opportunities. Negative cultural perceptions that are perpetuated from an early age need to be eradicated, in order to advance the rights of girls and women. Education can help in this fight.

Conclusion

It is clear from this paper that negative cultural perceptions, expressed through imagery and words, can and do hinder the fight for gender equity and equality. As long as there is gender inequality, women will always be the losers. In Africa, this

means also that gender inequality contributes to poverty. The highest percentage of poor people in Kenya are women. Yet research has shown that when women are empowered to take control of their own lives and resources, they prove far better managers than men. For instance, women have a better record than men for repaying building or micro-enterprise loans (Moser, 1993: 71) and they devote a higher proportion of their income to meeting the needs of the household and especially those of children (O'Connell, 1994: 56; Chant, 1997: 57). Consequently, when women are in control of resources, they are better able to look after themselves and their families and see to it that their families advance materially and educationally.

This paper has pinpointed cultural perceptions that may hinder the development of women, or that portray women in negative ways. Negative and positive cultural perceptions have a lot to do with power and control structures in various African cultures. How power and control structures are constructed is an important question to consider. How do they operate to oppress women or to advance issues of gender and equality? Who enforces power and control and how? How do the structures differ between matrilineal and patrilineal societies in Africa?

Research shows that matrilineal societies emphasize co-operation more than subordination. Martin and Voorhies (1975: 22-39) note that descent and residence rules oriented to matrilineality are usually favourably adaptive where conquest has not subjugated people. However, where descent and residence rules are oriented to patrilineality, they are adaptive where resources are scarce or where people have been subjugated. This means that matrilineality is more integrative, while patrilineality is more divisive and acquisitive. Matrilineality is associated with greater sexual equality and patrilineality with greater sexual inequality. It is instructive that in some African matrilineal societies, such as the Duruma and the Digo subgroups of the Mijikenda of Kenya, men subverted matrilineal descent by breaking away and establishing their own patrilineal residence and descent patterns in order to receive and pass inheritance through the male line (Spear, 1978: 108-128).

In many Kenyan communities, girls are socialized from an early age to be subservient to men. A simple example is the rule that it is extremely rude for a woman to look a man in the eyes, so an African woman is expected to always lower her gaze when talking to men. Such cultural conditioning has implications for women. For instance, it reinforces, at the interpersonal and familial levels, the wider structural inequalities between men and women. One of the most glaring of these concerns access to economic assets such as land. According to Oduol (2002:38), '… this asymmetrical pattern of power relations implies that at the family level, the ownership and inheritance of basic resources remain solidly the preserve of men'. Issues of land ownership, inheritance, and marriage rules are favourable to men because of the patriarchal nature of communities. Thus widows in some Kenyan communi-

ties are mistreated and usually dispossessed of matrimonial property and assets. In some cases, widows are inherited by their husbands' brothers. When this happens, a widow is put in a position of subservience whereby 'she is treated as a chattel without any rights whatsoever …' (Oduol (2002:46).

Other negative implications of patriarchy have to do with laws relating to the custody of children, divorce and separation, succession, and so forth, which 'provide differential treatment for men and women with men having choice and advantage and women being subjected to traditional and customary practices' (Murungi, 2002: 63). This means that when men are threatened by the possibility of their wives inheriting property and assets or getting custody of children, they quickly resort to customary laws which favour them.

One arena in which Kenyan men are socialized into believing that they are superior to women, that men are 'warriors', that men never cry or give in, and that men are the natural protectors of women, is during male circumcision rites. This is a significant place where the structures of power and control are recreated and reinforced, time and again, during the confinement period, both overtly and subtly. It is also instructive that women, especially grandmothers, aunts, mothers and sisters are the ones to prepare and serve food for their boys during this period. After these rites, boys, as adult men, can order their mothers and sisters about because this is their right, according to traditional culture. It is interesting that while the detrimental effects of FGM are highlighted, those pertaining to the negative socialization of boys are hardly ever examined. This should be a matter of concern to everyone if the subordination of women is to be redressed, and negative cultural perceptions and practices are to be broken.

One significant area that many people shy away from is that of class in society. This factor is something few people want to address. Yet it is a critical issue. It is important to ask how the hierarchy of class is constructed in modern Kenya. Kenyan society has an elite, wealthy class which wields both political and economic power. The symbols of power associated with this class are, for example, expensive vehicles, expensive clothes and palatial homes. There is also a middle class which aspires to make it to the elite, wealthy class. Then there is the working class which can be subdivided into various categories such as factory workers, semi-skilled labourers, self-employed people engaged in petty businesses, and domestic workers. Right at the bottom of the heap are those who can be called the 'wretched of the earth', to borrow Frantz Fanon's phrase (1977). These are the most oppressed and impoverished members of Kenyan society. Images associated with this group are sprawling slums strewn with mounds of rubbish, poor infrastructure, abject poverty and joblessness.

Elsewhere in Africa, it seems that the countries that have tried most positively to address important socio-political and economic problems are those countries

that have gone through wars and whose leaders tended to lean towards socialism. We can cite the examples of Rwanda, Uganda, Eritrea, Mozambique and South Africa. These countries have tried to positively address the issue of gender inequality. Kenya, historically, has always leaned towards capitalism and been linked to Western countries such as USA and Britain. The Kenyan African National Union governments, under Presidents Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel Arap Moi, perpetuated the notion that socialism was dangerous. Both Kenyatta and Moi detained political dissidents in the 1970s and 1980s respectively. At the time, offices and libraries were raided by the police in search of Marxist and socialist publications and so-called 'seditious' leaflets. President Moi often told Kenyans to go to Tanzania if they wanted socialism. Such utterances made Kenyans shy away from any discussions to do with socialism, democracy, and the struggle for human rights. Only now, in the era of multi-parties, are Kenyans beginning to demand their political, economic and democratic rights.

In this 'New World Order' (i.e. globalisation) period, many discourses focus on the interaction between media and development; this is of interest as far as this paper is concerned. There is also the interaction of the media and democratisation. Some scholars, such as Paul Zeleza, have called this period 'the second wave of African Liberation', in which Africans want to address crucial issues such as politics and economics, the place of Africa in the global arena in the 21st century, the relationship between media and human rights, participation in and protection of culture, the right to freedom of expression, and, of course, gender equity.

One factor to consider is that information technology has permeated every sector of society. This will have a profound effect on cultural perceptions, yet at this stage it is difficult to predict what form it will take. Will information technology be a new mechanism of control or a force for liberation? In the elections of 2002, Kenyans made use of the opening of the airwaves and mobile telephones to debate political and economic issues freely. Mobile phones were used to quickly relay election results and to tally the votes. The Internet is so pervasive that it has eroded the capacity of the Government to control the use that people make of it. Furthermore, the amount of information available is overwhelming. Individuals need to be empowered to be able to use such information positively in their struggle for their rights and their place in society.

Empowerment is a crucial step in changing attitudes and deep-rooted cultural perceptions. Paul Freire (1984) advocated the idea of 'conscientisation' in which oppressed people can start to understand the causes of their oppression. Empowerment reinforces positive attitudes, and the ability for people to speak for themselves. Empowerment is needed in order to eradicate negative cultural perceptions, demeaning images and derogatory language, especially where women are concerned, in the fight for gender equality and equity.

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Conclusion and Recommendations

Rose Odhiambo and Ruth Odhiambo

Women in Kenya constitute a subordinate, disadvantaged and muted group who are routinely treated as inferior and who face coerced sex, harmful cultural practices, stigma and discrimination. Their inferior legal status in relation to marriage, inheritance, guardianship, property ownership, maintenance and other legal matters places them in a disadvantaged position economically and politically, which in turn compromises their ability to challenge their marginalization. Their subordination is, however, now being questioned more and more strongly despite the continuing attempts to justify it, whether by appeal to the physical inferiority of women or by invoking arguments rooted in religion, culture and tradition.

The prevalence of discriminatory practices constitutes a persistent gap between the formal equality of men and women as recognised by national, regional and international legal frameworks, and the substantive equality that they should enjoy. Thus, a gendered perspective on human rights generally, and on equality and non-discrimination specifically, calls for an understanding of the historical, social and cultural circumstances, as well as the structural barriers that impede the realisation of genuine equality, even though much of the existing human rights concepts, language and practice are weakened by male bias.

In this paper we shall outline the major reforms that we consider necessary to combat the continuing violation of women's rights. First, however, we shall outline some of the more significant areas of subordination in Kenya today.

- Certain cultural practices do not allow women to own property. Instead, women in some communities are part of property, purchased at the time of marriage through the payment of bride price.
- Women are severely disadvantaged in the workplace and this problem is compounded by lack of means and avenues to channel their grievances. The workplace, as is the case for most public spheres, has traditionally been male dominated, especially at higher management levels where policy issues are discussed. Similarly, promotion for women has, in many cases, been based less on merit, qualifications, competence or suitability for the work than on the possible sexual favours that a woman is prepared to offer to her male counterparts in management who have the power to influence her fate.
- Occurrences such as broken marriages, death of spouse, and rejection by 'would have been' spouse, have greatly increased the instances of families headed by women. This has not worked well for most women-

headed families. They are economically deprived by the obstacles to women's ownership of property and by women's lack of education and skills and generally disadvantaged position in the labour market. Moreover, women are often unprepared, physically and emotionally, for the instant change of roles that comes with marriage breakdown or motherhood outside marriage, especially since society does not allow the woman as a single parent to take up the full responsibilities of the absent father without complications.

- Women, inside and outside marriage, are victims of rape (including marital rape, date rape and acquaintance rape) and other forms of sexual violence. This not only denies them sexual autonomy but also exposes them to the risk of HIV-AIDS. In relation to HIV and AIDS they face harmful cultural practices, stigma and discrimination. Women are also hard hit by laws requiring disclosure of their status, partner notification and by lack of confidentiality – particularly because of the response this receives from their families and their communities. Their situation is further exacerbated by the lack of criminal and civil law remedies for women who suffer all forms of violence. These factors heighten their vulnerability and reserve, further limiting their ability to mount proactive challenges to the pandemic.
- The range of protections needed by women in the face of the HIV/AIDS pandemic illustrates the interdependence of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. The pandemic is not limited in its impact to those who are infected but extends to family members, colleagues and friends. Thus in Kenya, as in many other African countries, women may have to cope with the loss of their children and the death of other family members, as well as with their own illnesses and possible impending deaths. The added burden of caring for the infected and supporting the remaining family members become overriding realities for women.
- The practice of FGM causes untold physical, psychological and sexual problems. Among the communities that practice it, FGM aims to control a woman's sexuality since by so doing, it binds her irrevocably to her community. The practice has contributed greatly to the subordination of women and is a further illustration of how women are denied the chance to determine their own sexuality.
- Patterns of gender relations are reflected in, and reinforced by, the choice and use of language. Most communities' folklore and everyday conversation are full of expressions that reduce the woman to a state of powerlessness, economic marginalisation, social vulnerability and cultural inferiority without any regard to their actual contribution to the processes of social production and their role in community development. The myths of the various religions provide a strong ideological reinforcement of women's subordination. The use of language and mythology in the enculturalisation of men and women from childhood to adulthood helps to embed prejudices and discriminatory practices deeply in people's consciousness.

- Education is a further area where male domination has been pervasive. In Kenya, children's enrolment in primary school is fairly evenly balanced, but fewer girls than boys complete this stage. Some of the reasons for this have been discussed earlier in this book. At the secondary school level, governments have attempted some affirmative action mechanisms to help raise the status of the girl-child but since the people in charge of implementing these strategies are men, it may be doubted how successful these efforts are.

  The teaching staff at primary, secondary and university levels are all male dominated, which reinforces the prevailing attitude that it is the male child who is endowed with the prowess to excel in education. Where there are a reasonably high proportion of female teachers/lecturers, they are often associated with particular subjects, which helps to perpetuate the prevailing assumption that women can only work effectively in certain areas while all others are the preserve of men. Thus the success of such women, instead of inspiring other women, serves merely to demoralize them further, so that women have remained closed in cocoons of underdevelopment, inferiority and repression.
- The political arena and, by extension, most decision-making avenues in society have also remained a preserve of men. Politics has for a long time been branded a male field, so that uncivilized practices such as intimidation and the use of abusive language have been employed to scare away women from political involvement. Women activists have been the victims of physical and sexual violence. Such acts have gone unpunished, thus forcing women to opt out of political races. Alternatively, women who have braced themselves hard and are lucky enough to have gone through the election processes are regarded in some quarters as not being normal or are treated as outcasts. The resulting effect is that women are denied opportunities for participating in societal development activities and decision-making processes, even those which affect their lives uniquely.

Recommendations

The concept of equality is contained in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and in the 1979 U.N. Convention on All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as provided for in the International Bill of Rights for Women. The UN Convention is supposed to cover women's civil rights and legal equality in all fields, to affirm women's productive rights and to target those aspects of culture and tradition that affect gender roles and family relations in ways harmful to women. The Bill establishes an agenda for national action to end discriminatory or repressive practices. Much, however, depends on the level of an individual country's commitment, through ratification, accession and domestication, to make

them part of Municipal Laws with proper implementation mechanisms. Kenya has ratified these conventions. However, the benefits contemplated by these instruments are not available to women because those instruments do not yet form part of Kenyan law. In the past, the Kenyan government has paid lip service to the law and international conventions without translating the legal niceties into reality for women, hence ratification and stricter enforcement of the existing conventions must become a priority for the present government if women are to make meaningful advances.

The disproportionate impact of various cultural practices, behaviours and attitudes upon vulnerable populations, including women and children, makes the improvement of their legal status and realization of their human rights critical for an effective response to the problems afflicting them. These vulnerable populations are not in a position to contest their marginalization, because they either are not aware of the relevant legislation or cannot act on it. They also lack adequate legal provisions for proper redress, or legal support for economic empowerment.

Based on the foregoing analysis, the following recommendations may be proffered.

Legislative reform

To find solutions to the problems identified, the first and foremost need is to undertake legislative reforms of the various issues which affect women in order to have legal backings which can be easily enforced. To this end, it is proposed that the Kenyan government should enact and/or reinforce penal, civil, labour and administrative sanctions in its domestic legislation so as to punish offenders and redress the wrongs done to women and girls who are subjected to any form of violence, whether in the home, workplace, community or wider society. In Kenya, efforts are being made to stamp out violence in the domestic arena by recognizing it as a crime just like any other. The Domestic Violence (Family Protection) Bill 2001 is already in parliament thanks to the pressure exerted by civil society, and especially by women's organisation such as the International Federation of Women Lawyers (Kenya), though it has yet to be passed as law. If passed, the bill will address the inadequacies of the current legislation on domestic violence and other abuses. Furthermore, an Act of Parliament established the Kenyan National Commission on Gender and Development in 2003. This Act became operational as from January 2004. Its effect is yet to be felt, but it is hoped that it will provide solutions to some of the problems women face.

On HIV/AIDS, there is a need to review and amend laws and to combat practices that may contribute to women's susceptibility to this scourge and other sexually transmitted diseases. Laws should be enacted which criminalize those socio-cultural

practices such as wife inheritance and FGM that contribute to the spread of the pandemic. These laws should embrace more stringent methods to protect women, adolescents and young children from discrimination related to HIV/AIDS. Besides this, women should be given relevant information about HIV/AIDS, and a support system should be put in place to reduce the increased burden imposed on them and the girl-child as caregivers to the infected and the affected people.

There is a need for government, employers and non-governmental organizations to develop programmes and procedures to eliminate sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women in all educational institutions, workplaces and elsewhere. This will be instrumental in creating a safe working environment for women and the girl-child.

There is also a need to embrace affirmative action policies in all institutions in the area of decision making, so as to enhance women's participation in policy-making. This will secure a greater voice for women advocating gender equality in the policy process, so that they can show how their concerns lead to more effective policy in regard to sustainable human development. This again requires political commitment and good will on the part of the head of state.

Property ownership

Laws also need to be reviewed to ensure equality of treatment in respect of the ownership of property and inheritance. Succession laws and property ownership laws should be reformed to guarantee equal rights of succession to women in respect of their deceased spouses without any dangers of dispossession from their spouse's kinsmen. The Law of Succession Act, Chapter 160, Laws of Kenya, for instance, with respect to property devolving on one spouse from another, should be made subject to equal provisions, contrary to the current position where a woman is bound to be dispossessed of certain property from the husband if she remarries. There is no equivalent provision for men.

Property ownership laws such as the Registered Land Act, Registration of Titles Act, and India Transfer of Property Act (1882) should apply with equal force to all, regardless of gender, to enable women to own land and other realties, which have hitherto been the preserve of men in most traditional societies. Women should also be allowed to contract freely with others and be made solely liable for any obligations arising under such agreements. They should be able to obtain finance and credit from financial institutions without any restrictions. These measures will economically empower them.

As far as matrimonial relations are concerned, marriage laws should be reviewed to make them more liberal, with both parties possessing equal rights to

enter into and move out of a marriage at will. Subject to considerations of societal harmony, women should be free to disentangle themselves from the problems that they commonly experience in the name of 'sanctity of marriage'. The laws should also allow equitable division of assets and retention of custody of children upon separation and divorce subject, of course, to a person's behaviour and ability.

Educating women

Lack of education is often cited as a major contributor to women's disadvantaged position. A woman who has received a basic education has a greater capacity to influence events in her life such as determining the kind of employment she can get, the point at which to get married, her control over child bearing, her exercise of legal and political rights and the chance of acquiring political power.

Educating women about their legal rights in these areas is equally important to enable them to protect themselves, in sexual and other relationships, by accessing their rights in practice. Domestic violence, sexual harassment at the work place and rape, as well as other forms of violence against women, are all on the increase, yet the majority of perpetrators still go scot free. There is a need to create awareness amongst women of the existing legal provisions that guarantee their rights, where to look for help with a problem and how to question and confront structures that oppress them. For effective quality education for all, special protective laws could be enacted if administrative practice does not ensure adequate protection. These may include:

- Equal access to sustenance, education, employment and economic opportunity.
- Equal reproductive and sexual rights, including:
  - independent access to reproductive and STD health information services,
  - free choice and means of birth control, such as abortion,
  - determining the number and spacing of children,
  - education on the right to demand safer sex practices
  - education on the right to refuse abusive relations.

While education plays an integral part in empowering women, it is also necessary to empower women socially, economically and psychologically to respond appropriately to the problems they face. Empowerment is a central issue in women's emancipation because through it, women increase their ability to shape their lives and environment and to develop their 'self' awareness, status and efficiency in social interactions.

Public education

It is not enough to educate solely women on their rights and to ignore men. Women's problems come about because of the patriarchal nature of society and its cultural practices. A concerted effort must be made to educate the public as a whole on the dangers of these practices and to change perceptions of women generally. Such education must be pursued in learning institutions at all levels. For easy spread of information, the current administrative structures at village, location, division, district and provincial level can be used to carry out awareness campaigns and to disseminate information to the public. This is very practical where the educational programmes and teaching materials have been developed to sensitise and inform adults about the harmful effects of certain customary practices on the girl-child and women.

During public education, the educator must address issues of culture and beliefs that relegate women to low positions. He or she must target and show people why such beliefs and practices can no longer stand in this era and must therefore be discarded. There should be a concerted effort across the gender-divide to create awareness and sensitise people on issues which are detrimental to the dignity of women. If public education is successful, public opinion may shift and be supportive of the women's cause.

Use of media campaigns

Media is the most influential source of information for many people. TV stations, radio stations and the print media are effective tools in shaping people's behaviour and attitudes. For a long time now, the public media has been criticised as being skewed against women. The blame is not misplaced. TV stations and newspapers often present women as inferior beings and as sexual objects and commodities rather than as creative human beings who are key actors and contributors to, as well as beneficiaries of, the processes of development. The continued projection of negative and degrading images in the media must be changed as this restricts the participation of women in the affairs of society. There is a need to encourage women to access and participate in the media at decision-making levels to promote a non-stereotyped portrayal of women.

On the other hand, media campaigns against practices such as FGM, domestic violence and sexual harassment can be successful if the press gives them proper coverage and accurate reporting. Since the media plays an important role in framing and influencing people's understanding of public issues, media campaigns can be successfully employed to change people's attitudes about violence against women and discrimination against the girl-child, to educate the public on the dangers of female genital mutilation practices and to encourage more positive perceptions of

women generally. The media can also be used to carry out campaigns that emphasize gender equality and non-stereotyped roles of women and men within the family and to disseminate information aimed at eliminating spousal and child abuse and all forms of violence against women. In this way, there would be some hope of tackling those cultural stereotypes and practices that relegate women to subordinate positions in society.

Lobbying and advocacy

Intense lobbying through Members of Parliament, the Provincial Administration, local authorities and religious leaders can be an effective tool for the elimination of discriminatory and repressive practices affecting women. Members of Parliament can be encouraged to pass legislation that outlaws inhuman cultural practices. They could also press for affirmative action to uplift marginalized groups and for the allocation or approval of governmental resources for these groups.

The Provincial Administration will no doubt play an invaluable role in ensuring compliance with the laws passed, as well as providing a direct link between the central government and the grassroots level. Again, the Provincial Administration can be at centre stage in educating ordinary people, especially the vulnerable groups, about their legal rights as well as reporting allegations of violations of those rights. Local authorities, as well as religious leaders, should be at the forefront in reaching out to decision makers and advocating legislative and administrative reforms. They should also provide support to organizations that deal with issues affecting vulnerable groups to ensure that the views and needs of these groups are well articulated.

Blurb

To redress the inequalities that women experience and to integrate them fully into all dimensions of social life remain amongst the most challenging of contemporary tasks, whether from the viewpoint of human rights, social justice or economic and social development.

The papers in this volume address themselves to these issues within the context of Kenya. They provide a striking indictment, supported by detailed empirical research, of the constraints and abuse that women in Kenya continue to experience. They document the effects of current social change, and the efforts of women, individually and collectively, to challenge their subordination. Finally, they offer a wide-ranging set of recommendations for changes of practice in education, employment, law, local and national government, planning, voluntary organisations and the wider realm of culture.