

## **Dynamics of Women's Empowerment on Economic Development in Kenya**

By

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### **Abstract**

Women are a powerful development force making important contributions to the economy as entrepreneurs, workers and to the welfare of their families throughout Africa and in Kenya. However, inequalities in property ownership, discrimination in the labour market and other business-related obstacles hinder women from competing with men. It is against this backdrop that this study sought to examine women's empowerment on economic development in Kenya. Empowerment programs provide a channel for access to education, control of resources and to venture in productive activities which enable women to build a sustainable livelihood. The key focus of this study is on increase in literacy levels and education standards, increased life expectancy, increase in per capita income and improvement in levels of environmental standards by women. Secondary data was analyzed using qualitative and quantitative methods whereby a total of fifteen (15) studies were reviewed that used different methods. Five (5) studies were conducted in Kenya and ten (10) others from different parts of the world that yielded varying results. Several themes emerged among them: education, access, empowerment, participation and control. This study revealed that women in development activities are faced with political, social and economic impediments influenced by socialization process for both sexes which determine the economic activities by women. For instance, women are perceived as homemakers and therefore they are socialized to care for their homes and children. This contributes to low self-esteem for women who are made to believe that they are inferior to men and can therefore not stand up for themselves. Therefore, women economic empowerment should involve programs that seek to improve the living standards of women through education, access to credit, employment and control over land and property rights. Interventions should analyze the interface between law and customary regimes to provide practical solutions to women weak rights to the property. This report will be useful to the Government departments in their efforts to formulate and implement gender policies, non-governmental organizations dealing with women's empowerment, Micro finance institutions in formulating their programs and the women in empowering themselves to work towards achieving self-sufficiency and improved standards of living.

**Keywords:** Kenya, Gender, women, empowerment, equality, development, sustainable livelihood

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### **1.0 Background**

Gender is a set of culturally shaped and defined characteristics associated with masculinity and femininity (May 2009). Unlike the term women, gender allows within its conceptualization the possibility of analyzing power relations between men and women. Accordingly, gender does not only apply to one particular group but to the process by which gender is put into practice in society. World Bank Report (WBR, 2010) defines gender as socially constructed roles and socially learned behaviors and expectations associated with females and males. Aguilare et al., (2002), agrees with this definition by defining gender as a social construction that assigns to men and women a series of socially differentiated characteristics and roles. Gender is not primarily an identity or role that is taught in childhood and enacted in family relations. Instead, gender is an institutionalized system of social practices for constituting people as two significantly different categories, men and women, and organizing social relations of inequality on the basis of that difference. In Kenya just like many developed countries, the issue of gender is entrenched in its socio-political and economic structure.

Women and men are different biologically, but all cultures interpret and elaborate innate biological differences into a set of social expectations about what behaviors and activities are appropriate, and what rights, resources, and power they possess. In Kenya just like many developed countries, the issue of gender is entrenched in its socio-political and economic structure. In this study, gender is conceptualized as socially and culturally constructed roles, behaviors, expectations, and opportunities that determine one's relations in terms of access to and control over resources, power, and rights which in turn ascribes their participation in both social and economic development.

The concept of women empowerment is viewed differently by different authors. For instance, SIDA, (2009), defines women empowerment as the process which increases women's real power over economic decisions that influence their lives and priorities in society. Duflo, (2005), states that women empowerment involves an improvement in women's ability to manage their own lives. This is obtained through increased access to key resources and activities. To World Bank Gender Equality Plan, (WBGEP, 2007), economic empowerment enables markets to work for women (at the policy level) and empower women to compete (at the agency level). ICRW (2011), states that a woman is economically empowered when she has both the ability to succeed and advance economically and the power to make and act on economic decisions. United Nations (UN, 2008) argues that women's economic empowerment can be achieved by targeting initiatives to expanding women's economic opportunity; strengthen their legal status and rights, and ensure their voice, inclusion, and participation in economic decision-making.

Women's economic empowerment is the process of achieving women's equal access to and control over economic resources and ensuring they can use them to exert increased control over other areas of their lives (Taylor and Pereznieta, 2014). Its achievement is now a global policy priority in light of its potential contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as evidenced by the convening of a dedicated High-Level Panel by the UN Secretary-General to bolster progress in this area. Women's economic empowerment can be achieved through equal access to and control over critical economic resources and

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opportunities, and the elimination of structural gender inequalities in the labour market, including a better sharing of unpaid care work. A key factor in all the definitions, however, is that women empowerment relates to the ability of women to manage their lives. Women empowerment gives a direct link between empowerment and equal opportunities. The process of empowering women improves their ability to manage their lives by improving their access to education, access to formal sector employment, access to entrepreneurship, access to finance, control over fertility among others. The improved ability to manage women's own lives entails an expansion of their opportunities in the direction of equal opportunities in comparison to men.

## **2.0 Women Economic Empowerment.**

Measuring empowerment depends on the establishment of universal standards but at the same time must allow for indicators which are sensitive to context. Approaches to measuring women's empowerment in more broad terms involve defining what is meant by empowerment and identifying the different elements which make up this definition. These elements are variously defined as; resources, agency, and achievements (Kabeer, 2001); control over resources and agency (Malhotra, 2002); agency and opportunity structure (Alsop et al., 2006); agency, structures and relations assets, knowledge, will and capability (Charlier and Caubergs, 2007). In most cases, these elements are then broken down into sub-dimensions with associated indicators and sources of measurements. Thorlind (2000) believes that social economic empowerment indicators provide important measures and are necessary prerequisites, of any further generation of democracy-promoting social capital in developing countries. He outlines the social-economic empowerment indicators as; literacy and social awareness (mass literacy campaigns and functional literacy training), economic empowerment (credit, employment levels, minimum wages), self organization (groups, people's federation and cooperatives), and participation in local institutes (local governments, village courts, civic associations)

### **2.1 Feminist Approach to Economic Empowerment**

Feminist theories first emerged as early as 1792 in publications such as "The Changing Woman", "Ain't I a Woman" and so on. The changing woman is a Navajo Myth that gave credit to a woman who in the end populated the world. In 1851, Sojourner Truth addressed women's rights issues through her publication "Ain't I a Woman". Sojourner Truth addressed the issue of women having limited rights due to men's flawed perception of women. Truth argued that if a woman of color can perform tasks that were supposedly limited to men, then any woman of any color could perform those same tasks (Kolmar, 2005). African women including Kenya are also capable of performing tasks similar to those done by men if conditions are favourable and are given equal opportunity to participate.

Feminist researchers embrace two key tenets that their research should focus on, the condition of women in society and their research must be grounded in the assumption that women generally experience subordination. Themes explored in feminism include discrimination, objectification, oppression and stereotyping (Macionis and Linda, 2010). Although there were not any feminist terminologies based on their arguments, all these women founded a lexicon of debates that contributed to modern feminist theory. For example, Sojourner Truth raised the issue of intersectionality, while Susan B Antony raised the issue of the language debate. In the late 1960s feminist psychologists such as Jean Baker Miller, sought to bring a feminist analysis to previous psychological theories, proving that there was nothing wrong with women but rather with the way modern culture viewed them (Zajko,

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Vanda and Leonard, 2006). This is as a result of socialization processes that play a key role on how women are viewed by the society and how they view themselves as subordinate to men. This affects how they perform and their role in economic empowerment and control.

Feminist economics broadly refers to a developing branch of economics that applies feminism insights and critiques to economics. It encompasses debates about the relationship between feminism and economics on many levels. One prominent issue that feminist economics investigates is how GDP does not adequately measure unpaid labour predominantly performed by women such as housework, childcare, and eldercare (Waring, 2008). In the house worker's handbook, Betsy Worrer presents a cogent argument that reproduction and domestic labor of women form the foundation of economic survival; although, unremunerated and not included in the GDP (Marilyn, 2004). The perception of women as homemakers make women believe that they are inferior to men and can therefore not stand up for themselves.

## **2.2 Summary and gaps**

Although the literature reviewed shows gains in women empowerment, the non-tangible elements of this framework have not been given a priority. According to the literature reviewed, a woman is economically empowered when she has both the ability to succeed and advance economically and the power to make and act on economic decisions. However, to succeed and advance economically, women need the skills and resources to compete in markets as well as fair and equal access to economic institutions. To have the power to benefit from economic activities women need to have the ability to make and act on decisions and control resources and profits. However, women are still disadvantaged when compared to men in virtually all aspects of life. Women are deprived of equal access to education, health care, capital and decision making power in the political, social, and business sector.

Women in development activities are faced with many challenges and they come in many forms but three main areas stand out: social, political and economic impediments. As noted earlier, the socialization process for both sexes one way or the other influences the kind of economic activities that women find themselves in. For instance, women are perceived to be homemakers and therefore they are socialized to care for the home and children. This contributes to low self-esteem for women who are made to believe that they are inferior to men and can therefore not stand up for themselves. Also, lack of access to or inadequate education and low literacy levels has hampered their ability to: Acquire vocational skills for self-employment; rural women are the most disadvantaged in terms of access to education and other forms of formal and informal training programs.

Given such limitations, rural women are mostly engaged in mainly subsistence farming activities, and low-income generating activities, while poor urban women operate marginal enterprises in the informal sector. These activities yield little or negative returns on investment because the enterprises experience little or no growth during the lifetime of their owners. The purpose of this study is to explore women empowerment on economic development in Kenya and provide ways of addressing the problems in regard to how level of education enhances the economic empowerment of women; access to credit assist in economic empowerment of women; level of employment facilitate economic empowerment of women and how economic resources contribute to the economic empowerment of women.

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### **3.0 Methodology**

This study used secondary method of gathering information on gender issues in Kenya analyzed using thematic and descriptive techniques. After using the phrase 'women empowerment on economic development' to search in these platforms, 30 articles written between 2006 and 2016 were retrieved. Articles were selected for review based on relevance to the theme of this study which revolved around women empowerment on economic development in Kenya. Thematic analysis method was also employed to review fifteen (15) articles out of the 30 retrieved. This enabled categorization of the social status of women relative to the men in Kenya and subsequently an assessment of the average woman nationally and regionally. Socio-economic characteristics of women, including access to and control of resources for economic production like in education, employment and enterprise ownership, financial services (e.g. credit services), participation in decision-making e.g. political participation, was also analyzed. The key themes that emerged were education, access, empowerment, participation and control. The results of this review were used to discuss the key theme of this study with women empowerment on economic development in Kenya.

### **4.0 Results and Findings**

The results of this analysis show that the majority (60%, 9) of the studies reviewed applied to contexts outside Africa. Only 13% (2) of the studies apply to the African context. Majority (73%, 11) of the studies reviewed does not emanate from or include Kenyan context. Only 26% (4) of the studies reviewed apply to the Kenyan context. This shows a dearth of knowledge regarding the implementation of women empowerment on economic development in Kenya. Studies that apply to Kenyan context have focused on participation, inclusivity, and economic empowerment.

#### **4.1 Status of Women in Kenya**

Generally, men are credited with performing three-quarters of all economic activities in developing countries; women actually perform 53 percent of the work (United Nations 2005). The 1995 UN Human Development Report states that "an estimated \$ 16 trillion in global output is currently 'invisible' of which \$ 11 trillion is estimated to be produced by women. In Kenya, the new constitution has given women equal rights with men including the right to ownership of property such as land. The constitution also states that no more than two-thirds of political appointments shall be of the same gender. However, a large proportion of women in Kenya live below the poverty line than men in Kenya 54% of rural and 63% of urban women live below the poverty line (UNESCO, 2008). In addition to low or lack of education, limited access to economic resources is one of the major reasons why poverty is prevalent among women in Kenya especially those living in the rural areas and marginalized areas. Despite the fact that women constitute about 80% of agricultural labor, yet credit to this sector disproportionately favors men.

In Kenya, women are considered as 'time poor' because of their dual roles in the household economy, and the labor market on average women work longer hours (12.9 hrs) compared with those of men (8.2 hrs) yet they earn less because more of these hours are not remunerated. This is despite strong support from the government, nongovernmental organizations and the women themselves. The government has supported women empowerment through the women enterprise fund, affirmative action in the education sector and the new constitution which empowers women economically by guaranteeing that a third of all appointments should be from either gender. A number of nongovernmental organizations also support women empowerment such as a forum for women educationists

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(face) Kenya, education for marginalized children in Kenya (emack) girl's forum and microfinance institutions. Women come together to empower themselves through women groups and chamas. The purpose of this study is to discuss factors that influence gender and women empowerment on economic development in Kenya and provide ways of addressing the problems.

#### **4.2 Women Empowerment in Kenya**

Recent estimates suggest that gender parity overall has the potential to boost global gross domestic product (GDP) (Woetzel et al., 2015), and it has been shown that 'national economies lose out when a substantial part of the population cannot compete equitably or realize its full potential' (Golla et al., 2011: 3). In Kenya, 54% of rural and 63% of urban women live below the poverty line (GOK, 2007). Women are also 'time poor' because of their dual roles in the household economy and labor market. On average women work longer hours (12.9 hrs) compared with those of men (8.2 hrs) yet they earn less because more of these hours are not remunerated (Saito, Mekanon and Spurling, 2004). Most cultures conceive women as inferior to men limiting the creative potential of women in Kenya.

Although gender inequality in education enrolment at the primary level has narrowed to almost parity following the introduction of free primary education in Kenya in 2003, disparities in secondary and university education persist and negatively affect both women's labor force participation and their ability to acquire the skills needed to start and grow a business. At the secondary level, 60% of students enrolled in 2007 were male while 40% were female (UNESCO, 2008). Male enrolment in the universities surpasses that of females almost by half. Kenya economic survey, (2008) the proportion of female students enrolled in the Universities was 40.1% while that of male students was 59.9%. The cost of education is the most common cause of girls dropping out of school (GOK, 2002). In general, when the cost of education increases at the household level, families tend to prefer schooling for boys. In addition, girls are more at risk of gender-based violence, and face greater risks of economic and sexual exploitation, coupled with lower education levels and lower level of skills for women entrepreneurs.

In conclusion, women in Kenya have less opportunity to be educated, are more at risk of gender-based violence, female genital mutilation and face greater risks of economic and sexual exploitation. However, there are several parties that support women empowerment in Kenya though without much success. They include: The government through the women enterprise fund, new constitution and the affirmative action for women in the education sector; Nongovernmental organizations such as Forum for African Women Educationists (FAWE) Kenya and Education for Marginalized Children in Kenya (EMACK) Girls forums; Micro-finance institutions such as Kenya women finance trust and Faulu Kenya and women themselves through self-help groups.

#### **4.3 Efforts towards Women Economic Empowerment in Kenya**

Kenyan Government is committed to the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment in compliance with several global and regional instruments, conventions, resolutions and declarations that she is a signatory to, Which include; Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 2001, the Beijing Declaration and platform for action 1995, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) particularly goal number 1 and 3 (Eradication of poverty, Gender equality and women empowerment), the AU solemn Declaration of Gender equality in Africa, 2004, and Presidential Directive on 30% affirmative action for women in appointments and promotions

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among others. The government is also supporting women empowerment through the women enterprise fund, free primary education, subsidized secondary education, and affirmative action for girls' selection to public Universities (one point less for girls).

Nongovernmental Organizations based in Kenya, for instance Kenya Community Development Foundation (KCDF) in collaboration with other partners has continued to increase the number of girls transiting successfully to higher levels of education through the provision of education scholarships and life skills acquisition. KCDF also advocates for policy changes towards greater protection of girls from violence and discrimination in school and at home (Devolved Grants Program Report, 2010). Education for Marginalized Children in Kenya (EMACK) Girls forums support the establishment of girls' forums in over 220 schools in all the districts that it works. The objective of the school-based forums is to promote girls enrolment, retention, completion, performance and active participation in schools by encouraging girls to identify and address the unique problems and needs that affect their education (Education for Marginalized Children of Kenya (EMACK), 2011). At the end, women are more empowered through education and are able to access resources and employment opportunity that enable them to make critical decisions regarding their lives and that of their families.

The Kenyan constitution promulgated on August 27, 2010, has many beneficial provisions for women. The constitution recognizes equal rights of women and men in areas of citizenship, equal rights to own property including land and rights to inheritance. The new bill of rights now provides that all marriages shall be registered under an act of parliament. This means that even customary law marriages will be certified protecting women's interests in disputes between a widow and her in-laws over the property. The new structure on devolution should also benefit women as no more than two-thirds of the members of representative bodies in each county government shall be of the same gender. This means that women will now be elected to decision making positions.

Micro-finance Institutions (MFIs) in Kenya are dedicated in assisting small enterprises, the poor and households who have no access to the more institutionalized system. Through microfinance, women have been able to run small businesses which constitute a significant share of economic activity in developed and transition economies. To meet the unsatisfied demand for financial services to women, a variety of MFIs have emerged over time in Kenya. They range from nongovernmental organizations, savings and credit co-operatives, commercial banks and regulated specialized providers. Access to savings and credit facilities strengthens women in economic decisions. It improves their skills, knowledge and enhances their status in the community. Increasing women access to microfinance has led to social and political empowerment. Poverty alleviation and women empowerment are seen as two sides of the same coin and it is the only way to bring wider changes in gender inequalities.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

This study concludes that women economic empowerment is one of the most important factors that can contribute to gender equality between women and men. Evidence shows that gender equality and women's economic empowerment contributes to economic growth, poverty reduction and the fulfillment of human rights and social justice commitments. However, women in development activities are faced with social, political and economic impediments due to socialization process that influence the kind of economic activities women find themselves in. For instance, women are perceived to be homemakers and therefore they are socialized to care for the home and children. This contributes to low self-esteem for women who are made to believe that they are inferior to men and can therefore not

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stand up for themselves. Despite the fact that women represent 51% of the Kenya population, their representation in post-primary education, wage employment, enterprise ownership, and decision-making processes is limited. They are also adversely affected by such factors as traditional and social practices, poverty and domestic violence, among other challenges.

Although women economic empowerment should involve programs that seek to improve the living standards of women which can be achieved through education, access to credit, employment and control of economic resources, low literacy levels among women has hampered their ability to acquire vocational skills for self-employment where rural women are the most disadvantaged in terms of access to education and other forms of formal and informal training programs. Given such limitations, rural women are mostly engaged in mainly subsistence farming activities, and low-income generating activities, while poor urban women operate marginal enterprises in the informal sector. These activities yield little or negative returns on investment because the enterprises experience little growth during the lifetime of their owners.

The approach to economic empowerment by Sida, (2009) advocates eliminating structural gender inequalities in the labour market, reducing women's unpaid work and improve access to services. Women need to access remuneration for their work in agriculture, an example of their often unpaid productive work. Furthermore, redistribution of unpaid care work between women and men is essential, as is a shift from 'women's unpaid care responsibility' to 'collective shared social responsibility'. Also, working with men to challenge and change gender stereotypes and expand men and women's social roles beyond narrow conceptions of the meaning of gender in today's societies is fundamental to achieving women's (and men's) full empowerment. Finally, women's economic empowerment also requires increased accountability on the part of institutions and systematic transformation so as to actively promote gender equality and women's rights.

### **5.1 Recommendations**

To achieve economic empowerment in Kenya, this study recommends that policies should be created and implemented to promote a more equal sharing of unpaid care work between men and women including childcare options for young mothers by creating programs that gradually increase the provision of affordable childcare and basic infrastructure to women to enable them compete with men at the job market.

At education level, women's time poverty should be addressed by increasing women's access to quality primary and post-primary education and increase enrolment of boys and girls in early childhood education. Vocational training programs should be made more efficient by aligning courses with market demand design them in a way that decreases occupational segregation; and provide women with skills in emerging areas such as ICT.

In agricultural sector, efforts should be made to mainstream gender in policies and programs as a long-term strategy to address gender inequalities in the rural sector in access to land and key inputs and redress the situation of women's unpaid work in the sector. In addition, women's access to and control over land and property rights is required to analyze the interface between law and customary regimes to provide practical solutions to women's weak rights to the property.

As a social protection measure, a legislative change should be promoted to make pension schemes gender and age aware and promote conditional cash transfers and other non-labor linked social protection mechanisms specific to women.



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In credit access, efforts should be made to develop gender-aware women and youth economic empowerment programs, which work with multi-phased approaches building capacity and social support and establishing links with credit facilities.

Efforts should be made to remove barriers to female entrepreneurship and promote inclusive financial services and trade policies. Sector policies should continue to support business training, start-up services, mentorship, and woman-to-woman support for women linked to micro-finance while promoting measures that set the foundations for a more business-enabling environment and inclusive financial systems.

At the community and household level, efforts should be made to engage men in women's economic empowerment, especially in relation to the sharing of unpaid work and equitable household decision-making.

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