SOCIO-CULTURAL CONSTRAINTS TO WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL DEVELOPMENT AMONG PASTORAL COMMUNITIES OF NORTHERN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on socio-cultural constraints to women’s participation in local development in Dadaab Division of Garissa County, Kenya. A review of literature on women’s participation in development revealed that women’s participation have remained substantially low despite the many campaigns globally aimed at improving their participation. This occasioned the need for an examination into the constraints faced by women that has contributed to their low participation in development. This was a descriptive survey study, which engaged 180 women respondents selected through stratified random sampling. This study used interview schedule in data collection, which were then cleaned, coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Women faced various impediments to their participation in local development, which included those relating to their marital status, level of education, family support and access to credit facilities. The present study has shed some light on the socio-cultural faced by women that heavily undermine their contributions to local development. The study hopes that its findings will broaden our understanding of women’s participation in local development and thus enable us appreciate their role in development from a point of knowledge. In view of this, this study has recommended for the need for women to come together through self-help approach to establish a revolving fund to reduce over-dependence on traditional financial institutions for credit.

KEYWORDS: Local Development, Participation, Socio-Cultural, Constraints, Women

INTRODUCTION

Participation refers to an active process by which a person or groups of people influence the direction and execution of developmental issues for purposes of among others enhancing not only their well being but also that of the society in general (Hardina, 2003). People’s participation in local development as a concept was formulated in the 1970s following the growing concern that the various approaches then employed for grassroots
development such as community development, integrated rural development or basic needs approach were not realizing meaningful and sustainable results (Burton, 2003). The failures of these approaches were largely attributed to apathy on the part of the local people due to their little or lack of involvement of local communities in local development issues (Schafft and Greenwood, 2003). While enumerating the benefits of community participation in local development, UNDP (2000) observed over two decades ago that involvement of local people and their subsequent participation in local development helps tap the energies and resources of individual citizens, while providing a source of special insight, information, knowledge and experience, which contribute to the soundness of community solutions. Within the field of development, community participation in local socio-economic activities is advocated as a means of promoting local ownership of development agenda, by challenging local people to define their own problems, create their own solutions, and initiate change through their own involvement (INNE, 2004).

Women account for about 43% of the world’s population. Precisely there are approximately 57 million more men than women in the world, yet in most countries there are more women than men. However, women’s participation in development still remains far much below that of men. It is on this basis that several efforts at the international level have been made to increase women’s participation in socioeconomic activities. For instance, the UNDP (2013) urged the world to help improve women’s participation in socio-economic activities as doing so would not only help in the improvement of women’s wellbeing but also that of the entire society. Prior to this, The World’s Conference on Women held in 1995 in Beijing implored society to among others accord women the necessary support to enable them realize their potentials in all spheres of life. Further, in the aftermath of the Millennium Declaration of the September 2000 Millennium Summit, gender issues were integrated in the many of the subsequent MDG and explicitly in the third goal, which calls for the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women. There is no doubt that the achievement of this goal is only possible in an environment where women’s participation is high.

Women constitute roughly half of the population of the world and thus potentially half of its participants in socio-economic activities. However, women’s participation in socio-economic activities is still lower despite many efforts at both the national and international levels to spur their participation in socio-economic activities. For instance, globally the average women’s labour participation is just about 30% compared to over 80% for men (ILO,
Women’s participation in labour is lowest in Latin America at 45% and highest in East Asia and Pacific at 72%, with their participation in labour in Africa standing at 60%.

However, women’s participation appears to be worse in the political sphere. Women’s participation (measured by the number of elected and appointive legislative positions held by women) is significantly lower than that of men since on average only 21.4% of the legislative seats globally are held by women, implying that men hold over 75% of the legislative positions in the world. Women’s participation in this area is highest in the Nordic countries where they hold about 42.1% of the positions. Sub-Saharan Africa has just about 21.8% of the legislative seats held by women. This is, however, better than the Arab countries, Asia and the Pacific where women hold just a mere 15.9%, 17.7% and 15.9% of the legislative seats respectively (IPU, 2013). Rwanda remains the only country in the world where women hold a higher (63.8%) number of legislative positions than men. The share of women among ministers also averages 17%. The highest positions are even more elusive: only 7 of 150 elected Heads of State in the world are women, and only 11 of 192 Heads of Government are women (The World’s Women, 2010).

In Kenya, women’s participation in labour, legislative institutions and decision making (ministerial level and senior civil service cadre) still remain below that of men. About 60% of women in Kenya are participating in labour compared to 85% for men. Women in Kenya occupy less than 20% of legislative positions. The same trend obtains in ministerial positions as well as senior management positions in both public and private sectors (UNDP, 2010; ILO, 2010; IPU, 2013). Women’s low participation in socio-economic activities persists despite the fact that they constitute over half of Kenya’s population and about 48% of the registered electorates. Although a significant number of women appear to be in labour market, closer examination reveals that most of them are concentrated in low-paying, low social status jobs in the public service in terms of income and decision making powers. The concentration of women decreases with the increase of the level of the job group (Nzomo, 1995). In that case, only a small percentage of women compared to men are in key positions to make and influence decisions in public service. From the foregoing, it is clear that women’s participation in socio-economic activities has remained substantially low despite the many campaigns globally aimed at improving their participation, thus suggesting the need for an examination of the impediments faced by that contributed to their low participation in socio-economic activities. It is on this basis that this study examined the socio-cultural
constraints to women’s participation in socio-economic activities, with Dadaab Division of Garissa County, Kenya being a case study.

**Methodology**

This study was done in Dadaab division of Garissa County, Kenya. The study utilized the descriptive survey research design with a largely quantitative approach. Descriptive design helps projecting the extent of the issues under examination Jackson (2003). This design helped this study is projecting the extent of impediments that undermine women’s participation in local development. Similarly, descriptive design is used when collecting information about people’s attitude, opinions and habits on any social phenomena (Orodho, 2003). This study collected data on people’s attitudes and opinions more so on what the respondents considered were the impediments to women’s participation in local development.

The study used stratified random sampling to select women respondents in this study. In this sense, women of diverse marital status, levels of education, and socio-political standing were included in the study. This stratification offered women from diverse interests and socio-cultural background a chance of constituting the study sample. This was done to facilitate the generation of information from diverse and alternative view points. The study focused on 7,820 women who were aged 20 years and above, from the study selected 180 using Taro Yamane’s formula (Yamane, 1973). Interview schedule was the main instrument for data collection, and which were administered to the respondents by the researcher.

A thematic approach was adopted in data analysis. Descriptive technique was used in the study. The researcher developed a coding system based on collected data and classifies major issues or topics that will be covered Kombo and Tromp (2006). Data for each theme and sub theme were summarized, coded and keyed into the computer. The data were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The data were presented using bar graphs, pie charts and frequency tables which will be conveniently representing the results.

**Issues**

This study sought to (1) examine whether women’s marital status was a constraint to their participation in local development, (2) assess the level of women’s education and its influence on their participation in local development, (3) establish the extent to which women’s families supported them in their engagement in local development, (4) examine
obstacles to women’s access to credit and the resultant effect of the same on their participation in local development.

Findings, Results and Discussion

The current study examined socio-cultural constraints to women’s participation in local development in Dadaab division of Garissa County, Kenya. The first section has information on the demographic profile of the respondents. These include respondents’ level of education, marital status, source of income, and areas of professional training. The second section has the results and the discussions.

Background Profile of the Respondents

The current study surveyed persons aged 20 years and above. Majority or 46.7% of the respondents were aged between 29-39 years. Persons aged 18-28 and 40-50 years accounted for about 35.3% and 13.2% of the respondents respectively. Another important age, the current study surveyed was the 51-61 years and, which accounted for 3% of the respondents. Persons aged over 61 years had the least representation in the study where they accounted for just 1.8% of all the sampled respondents.

A significant proportion of the respondents had attained primary and secondary level of education. There were also a small fraction of the respondents with college and university level of education. Respondents with no formal education constituted 37.6% of the all the respondents, while those with primary, secondary and college levels of education accounted for 33.5%, 18.2% and 8% of all the sampled respondents. University level of education had been attained by a mere 1.8% of the respondents.

Majority of the respondents were married, where they accounted for 51.5% of the respondents. This was followed by respondents who indicated that they were single. Respondents who reported that they were single constituted 22.5% of the respondents. Persons who indicated that they had divorced accounted for 13% of the respondents. Widows were the fourth highest category of the respondents. This group of respondents formed 10.1% of all the sampled respondents. Separated individuals formed the least number of respondents, where they accounted for just 3% of the respondents.

Women of Dadaab division of Garissa County surveyed in this study sourced their livelihoods from formal employment, causal employment, business and farming. Business was the most common source of livelihood, which was pursued by about 52% of the
respondents. Casual employment and formal employment were sources of livelihood to 28.8% and 17.2% of the respondents respectively. This made casual employment the second most sort source of livelihood by the respondents. Farming was a source of livelihood to 6.1% of the respondents, thus making it the least source of livelihood in Dadaab division if respondents’ accounts are anything to go by.

Impediments to Women’s Participation in Socio-economic Activities

Issues of socio-cultural constraints to women’s participation in local development were examined in the context of their marital status, level of education, family support, professional growth and development and access to credit among other important issues. The following is thus the results of the study on the impediments to women’s participation in socio-economic activities in Dadaab division of Garissa County, Kenya.

Marital Status as a Constraint to Women’s Participation in Local Development

Constraints to women’s participation in local development were examined in the context of among others women’s marital status. When asked to state the extent to which women’s marital status influenced their participation in local development, about 21.9% of the respondents conceded that to a great extent women’s marital status influenced their participation in local development. Similarly, a significant or 38% of the respondents asserted that to some extent women’s marital status influenced their participation in local development. However, 14.6% of the respondents reported women’s marital in no way influenced their participation in local development. Whether or not women marital status was influenced their participation in local development could not be confirmed by 19% of the respondents.

Figure 1: The Influence of Marital on Women’s Participation

This study presented the respondents with a range of marital statuses- single, separated, divorced, widow and married. Respondents were then asked to indicate the marital status they would most prefer to participate in selected local development activities- electoral politics
and leadership, school board of management and management committee of Constituency Development Fund (DCF). The majority of the respondents preferred women who were married to participate in the selected activities. Respondents in this category constituted about 59.1% of the respondents. This was followed by respondents who preferred single women to participate in the selected activities. Here about 18.9% of the respondents affirmed their choice for single women’s participation in the aforementioned activities, with 11% of the respondents expressing their preference for widows. Further, 9.8% of the respondents preferred divorced women, with less than 2% of the respondents preferring women who had separated to participate in local development activities.

![Figure 2: Marital Status as an Impediment to Women’s Participation](image)

Individual’s social status such as marital status has been found by scholars such as Wall et al. (2005) to enhance or undermine them not only in their choice of livelihood opportunities but also their access to the decision-making process in the community affairs. The current study indeed concurs that individuals’ social status such as marital status may determine the outcome of individuals’ participation and involvement in local development initiatives. Marital status as this study has established remains one of the social statuses that significantly influence individuals’ social position in society including the extent to which their participation in community’s activities is permissible.

The findings of the current study which suggests that community prefer married women to participate in local development issues concurs with that of Gina et al., (2012), which found that married women were more likely to participate in local educational initiatives than single parents. Married women were being appointed in schools boards of management and PTAs than single parents. Similarly, Kohl et al., (2000) reported that single women status was negatively related to participation in local development initiatives more so those relating to education. The author observed that single women tended to focus their energies towards issues that benefit them individually rather than those that stand to benefit the wider society.
It is indeed by marriage that membership is increased through childbearing. It is assumed generally that marriage comes with added responsibilities to an individual as a wife/husband, mother/father and in-laws since she has to provide basic needs to his family and maintain the extended relationship. Those who take care of their families are accorded respect and status in society. Married women are thus favourably viewed in society, a situation that enhances their social standing in society. It is for this reason that the study attributes community’s preference to married women to participate in local development activities over and above their counterparts. It should also be recalled that most of the residents of the study area profess the Islamic faith. Islam like other mainstream religious practices has not fully embraced liberal practices such as singlehood and associated practices. This may have further reinforced the position of married women among the residents leading to its favourable rating and subsequent preference in participation in local development activities. In a sense therefore women who were divorced, separated and single were being treated differently from their counterparts who were married, with the former not getting due recognition and attention on communal issues.

Women’s Level of Education as a Constraint to their Participation in Local Development

This study established that the majority of women had no formal education and primary levels of education. It was only 18.2% and 8% of the women covered in this study that had attained secondary and college education. University level of education had been attained by a mere 1.8% of the respondents (refer to profile of the respondents). Given the fact that majority of women had either no formal education or primary level of education, the study found it important to understand from the respondents the extent to which they considered women’s level of education as an impediment to their participation in local development. About 34.9% and 38% of the respondents noted that to a great extent and to some extent respectively women’s level of education was an impediment to their participation in local development. It was only 6.6% of the respondents that reported women’s level of education least undermined women’s participation in local development. However, 3.6% of the respondents felt that women’s level of education did not affect women’s participation in local development, with 16.9% unable to discern whether or not women’s level of education undermined them in local development.
When presented with a range of women’s levels of education including no formal education, primary, secondary, college and university, and then asked to indicate the education level they would most prefer women to have for them to participate in selected local development activities - electoral politics and leadership, school board of management and management committee of Constituency Development Fund (DCF) -, the following were their verdict. Majority or 38% of the respondents preferred women with university level of education to participate in the selected socio-economic activities. This was followed by 31% of the respondents who insisted that women’s participation in the selected activities should be those with college education. About 22% of respondents preferred women participating in the selected activities to be those with secondary level of education. No respondent preferred women with primary and no formal education to participate in the selected activities. The implications of these results is that over 70% of women stand excluded in the management of CDF, local schools and electoral positions in the area given their inferior level of education.

The current study concedes that education level of women’s can indeed be an impediment to their participation in socio-economic activities since reasonable levels of
education may provide its beneficiaries with a better conception of issues and therefore better insight and solution to local development issues. It thus understandable when most respondents asserted that women’s level of education was to a great extent and to some extent was an impediment to their participation in local development. Given several decades of marginalization of women, it is clear that even with current efforts to improve girl child education in Kenya, a higher proportion of males still remain more educated than females. Exacerbating this is the migratory nature of community inhabiting the study site, which renders provision of education a bit difficult. While recent years has seen the use of mobile schools to boost the education of pastoralist communities such as those in the study site, a number of them still remain lowly educated. The low level of education of a significant number of women in the county implies that they have limited opportunities and success chances in many socio-economic areas.

The current study argues that higher levels of education, advanced and specialized training would greatly enhance individuals’ performance in their respective offices including the selected ones above. From this perspective, it is this study’s submission that community’s belief that there is higher works output from individuals with higher levels of education may have influenced their desire to have women seeking participation in the selected activities to have higher level of education. But these responses also underscore the lack of knowledge from many members of the community with regard to constitutional and legal requirements for level of education required of various persons seeking participation some activities. For instance, in Kenya it is only the contestants for the office of president and governor that training up to university level is a requirement. The rest of the electoral offices require just secondary level of education. Therefore, placing high educational demands on women in areas that require modest levels of education is either bone out of dishonesty or complete ignorance on the part of the respondents in particular and community at large about constitutional requirements on electoral contests. It is even more dishonest on the part of the community to demand that women seeking participation in some of these activities to have higher levels of education yet the same community has massively contributed to the marginalization of women leading to among others their low levels of education.
**Importance of Family Support to Women’s Participation in Local Development**

The family is an important social institution in the life of an individual. Individuals often seek family support in what they want to do and even seek solace from their families wherever they are in distress. It is this significance of the family that its role in women’s participation in local development was explored. When asked to state about the importance of family support in women’s participation in socio-economic activities, over 75% of the respondents considered family support as being important. In particular, 23% and 54.5% of the respondents felt that family support in women’s participation in local development very important and important respectively. A total of 4.8% of the respondents believed that family support was least important and not important in women’s participation in socio-economic activities. But the study also established that about 11.9% of the respondents could tell whether or not family support was important in women’s participation in local development.

![Figure 5: Importance of Family Support](image)

Family support in women’s participation in local development is very important according to the people surveyed in this study. But such family support must also be sufficient to enable women to participate effectively in local development. When asked to state the adequacy of support women received from their families, about 6.6% and 38% of the respondents considered family support given women as very adequate and adequate in that order. About 33.7% and 6.6% of the respondents felt that family support to women was inadequate and very inadequate respectively. Whether family support to women was adequate or inadequate could not be discerned by 15% of respondents.
It is clear from the results that a significant proportion of women participating in local development activities were not fully supported by their family members. This study thus concludes that lack of adequate family support was one of the constraints faced by women participants in local development. Therefore, the inability of women to participate meaningfully in local development could be attributed to among others factors the indifference of family members to such participation.

**Access to Credit and its influence on Women’s Participation in Local Development**

Most of the women considered business as one of the areas they were engaged in. Financing is one of the greatest challenges faced by people engaged in business. This study thus offered to understand the extent to which inadequate financing was a constraint to women’s participation in local development more so business. About 40% of the respondents concurred that financing was a major hindrance to women’s participation in socio-economic activities. Specifically, 13.3% and 30.9% of the respondents concurred that to a great extent and to some extent financing was a major hindrance to women’s participation in local development. About 13.3% of the respondents felt that it was neither a hindrance nor an impetus to women’s participation in local development. But business financing as an impediment to women’s participation in local development was not supported by all the respondents as about 28.5% and 13.9% of the respondents reported that it was least extent and no extent respectively an impediment to women’s participation in local development.
It is clear from the results above that over 70% of the respondents cited inadequate finance as one of the impediments to their participation in business and other socio-economic activities. This is against the backdrop of the availability of credit from financial institutions that women could take to boost their businesses. It was thus necessary to seek from the respondents whether women have considered credit from financial institutions as a possible source of business. When asked how often they have sought credit from financial institutions as a source of business finance, over 50% of women reported that they had either rarely or never sought for credit from financial institutions as a source of finance. Specifically, 48% and 10% of the respondents reported that they rarely and had never sought for credit respectively from the financial institutions. However, about 33% of the respondents indicated that they often sought for business credit from the financial institutions. However, some women often sought for financial assistance through credit from the financial institutions. This position was held by 9% of the respondents.

The fact that up to 90% of women had sought for business finance through credit yet most of them still cite inadequate finance as one of the greatest obstacles to their participation in local
development through business occasioned the need for further examination on the sufficiency of credit obtained from the various financial institutions. Results on the sufficiency of credit advanced reveal that it was far much insufficient. For instance, it was less than 20% of the respondents who said that credit given to women were sufficient. In particular, 7.3% of the respondents described the amount of credit advanced to women as very sufficient, with 12.2% of the respondents describing such amounts as insufficient. On the same vein, 38.4% of the respondents were forthright that the amount of credit advanced to women was least sufficient, with 1.2% of the respondents declaring the same as insufficient. However, 40.9% of the respondents could not accurately describe the sufficiency or insufficiency of the amount of credit advanced to women to aid their participation in local development.

![Figure 9: The Sufficiency of Credit Advanced to Businesswomen](image)

**Requirements for Credit Access/Acquisitions**

As has been mentioned earlier, credit as source of business finance has helped a number of people to have a meaningful participation in local development more so those in business. The fact that many women who sought for credit from various financial institutions received amounts that they described as insufficient begged the questions whether the conditions attached for credit access were too high to be met by most of the women credit applicants. This prompted this study to establish some of the conditions that women were required to meet when they sought for credit. The following are some of the credit conditions that were cited by women engaged in this study. As table below shows women cited collaterals, cash flow statement, audited financial statements and business. Business plan was the most sought requirement for credit advancement. About 33.1% of the respondents reported business as a requirement. This was followed by cash flow statement, which was a requirement according to 31.3% of the respondents. Collateral as a requirement was
mentioned by 18.4% of the respondents, with audited financial accounts being the least requirement.

Table 1: Requirements for Credit Access/Acquisitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conditions</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaterals</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash Flow Statement</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audited Financial Statements</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Plan</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>33.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>163</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
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Most of the requirements cited above are ideally beyond the reach of most women in the study area. For instance, insistence on business plan cannot be fulfilled by most women given widespread low levels of education in the district. Writing a winning business plan requires technical skills that most women do not have. It should be recalled that only 1.8% of women covered in this study had attained university education, the only level that prepares them to write technical papers such as business plan. Similarly, the general low level of women’s education means that they are not prepared to have clear business transactions and even appreciate the significance of maintaining clear financial records from upon which documents such as audited accounts can be developed. This observation in concurrence with that of Haque (2009), who argue that women’s general low levels of education often limit their access to the decision-making process, including areas that require high levels of skills for effective participation. This study concurs that education is a critical element in people’s participation in socio-economic activities including their access to credit. Education disseminates knowledge, provides necessary skills, and helps in forming attitudes.

Land has been one of the most used collateral among the rural communities. However, land among many African societies is owned by men. Although several African countries have developed policies and laws to improve women's access to land, such policies have been inhibited by traditional customs (Gawaya, 2008). An example from Mozambique points out that customary law protects single-women and widowed women in access to land. However, there are customs that constrain women's access to land. Single-women can gain access to land through their fathers, brothers or uncles. But, upon marriage in patriarchal communities women's access to land held by these relatives is lost, as they are expected to have access to land through their husbands. Generally, women tend to have smaller land
holdings and less fertile plots. By being restricted to access land, women’s participation is undermined in quite a number ways. Control over land is an important factor which explains the large differences in investments on land made by men and women. A woman who may have obtained land through her husband may be hesitant to invest in technology if she perceives her marriage to be unstable (Doss, 2003). For example, in Zambia, the dissolution of marriage means that the land reverts to the lineage and woman has only a limited claim on the land. From the foregoing, it is clear that very few women (if any) would raise the collateral needed by banks, and more so if land is the only asset that can be used as collateral to secure credit from the financial institutions. This therefore explains why most women were unsuccessful in accessing credit despite being regular applicants of such credits.

Conclusions

Interpretation and analysis of data collected from interview schedules and informal discussions show that women faced numerous constraints, which tended to undermine their participation in socio-economic activities. However, closer examinations of these impediments reveal that they are largely products of socio-cultural practices that have over the years undermined women through deliberate exclusion. Low levels of education, inadequate family support, women’s marital status and inadequate finance are products of deeply rooted patriarchy that have denied women education, significant recognition and disinherited them of property such as land, which they could use as collateral to secure bank credit.

Recommendations

Despite the positive contributions of women in development, the study established that a number of women are still excluded in influential positions in various public organizations. There was clear evidence that many people still felt that women of certain levels of education or marital status were unsuitable to serve in some public institutions. This was against the backdrop of constitutional provisions at the national and county levels that require women’s representation at influential positions in various public organizations. It is important that resources are identified to mobilize to adequately educate the public about these provisions in addition to enforcing and ensuring that women get their rightful share in public enterprises as is advocated by the constitution and other legislations. As already noted, there was low uptake of credit from financial institutions despite many women conceding that
they had often sought funds from the financial institutions. Although certain funds such as Women Enterprise Funds and the recently established Uwezo Fund are there to ostensibly support women entrepreneurs, the study noted that these funds were unknown to the women engaged in this study, since none has considered them as a source of business finance. This study recommends for the public education on these and related funds especially in the far flung areas so that the public can make better use of them in advancing their livelihoods.

REFERENCES