

Effect of Women Group Membership to Poverty Vulnerability among Female Headed Households in Yathui and Central Division, Machakos District, Kenya

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Abstract

This article examines the effect of group membership to magnitude of poverty among female headed households in Yathui and Central Divisions of Machakos District. The study adopted a descriptive and cross-sectional study design. The study was based on a sample of 80 female headed households, five key informants, four focused group discussions, six case studies and secondary data. Stratified and systematic random sampling was used to select the units of observation. The analysis of data was done using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings showed the calculated chi square value is less than the table value chi square ($\chi^2=3.2$, $df=1$ $p=0.04$), this indicates that the two attributes are independent and not associated. In general there was no statistical significance between group membership and vulnerability to famine among the female heads.

Key Words: magnitude of poverty, female headed households, non-formal rural sector female headed households in Yathui.

Introduction

FAO (1994) notes that social safety nets are support systems designed to alleviate food and financial insecurities, they are community networks that support people facing difficult times, generally they include a variety of charities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), church groups and associations that link rural inhabitants, In addition these community support systems include: government transfers that provide food or cash directly to needy population such as emergency food relief, supplementary feeding programmes and food for work programmes. Other programmes that help people without giving them direct aid are: price controls by the governments, job creation, placement and micro-credit. Maas (1986) observed that in many Third world countries, women organize themselves in women's groups, many of which are based on traditional forms of cooperation's created in response to the common position of women in the division of labor as well as their desire to pursue change in their status and prospects. In addition, Muzzucato and Niemeijer (2002) indicate that the prime determinants of social capital comprises of decisive and focus on the role of informal institutions such as land tenure systems as well as customs, norms and networks. Chitere (2004) views an organization as individuals in a given situation who mutually agree to work together to achieve certain objectives. In this case, their members would have the same interest that the group seeks to pursue. The UNDP report (2004:47) reported thus: "CBOs have mushroomed in Kenya following increased poverty and low human development.

CBO's represent the increased awareness of communities and specific groups regarding their plight as well as their willingness to take initiative to correct matters". This however highlights further the reasons for the emergency of women groups to meet their social welfare as well their economic problems. Maas (1986) noted that the mobilization of women in Kenya could be traced as far back as women's councils of the Kikuyu in the 19th century. He further observed that during the colonial period, the first half of the 20th Century women in areas like Kiambu, Muranga and Machakos formed assistance groups. Women continually used these groups as a basis to solve problems. For instance a study carried out by Mitchel (2006) on evaluation of income generating activities in Kenya, they argue that the traditional roles of women have long been recognized in the society due to the extensive division of labor. Women's dominant role has persisted despite the rapid changes that have taken place in fact the researchers argue that male migration to urban centres increased women participation in the society and the heading of families. Mbithi (1974) in his study of Muranga, Kiambu, Kisii and Baringo District found out that most of the group members appear to be from small and middle size peasant families, which formed the major part (70%) of the rural population.

This thus illustrates why poor women are more likely to join women groups as a way of coping mechanism. Masinde (1987) in his study on women groups in Kenya observed that agricultural projects could generate small but stable incomes. However, women's groups lacked marketing facilities management skills, equipment as well as capital. Masinde (1987) further echoed this. He argued that women's lack of sophistication about fundraising procedures and good proposal writing greatly hampers their performance. This was due to low levels of education, which led to avoidance of priority setting. Kamar (2001) notes that women groups' projects have played a key role in community development in Kenya, The mwethya women groups of Machakos district are best known for the role they played in soil and water conservation activities in addition, women formed women groups and addressed any problem affecting them or their community as group rather than individual.

Methodology

This was a descriptive and cross-sectional study. It describes the situation as it is of the female-headed households and cuts across the population. The population in this study consisted of married female household heads living in Yathui and Central divisions in Machakos District for the last 10 years and provide for the welfare of their families. Stratified sampling was used in selecting the divisions for the study. The divisions were stratified into two, namely the high density ecological zones. They included: Kangundo, Matungulu, Kathiani, Central and Mwala divisions while others fell below low ecological zones includes Kalama, Masinga, Athi river, Ndithini, Yathui, Katangi and Yatta. Central division was randomly selected from among the high ecological zones whereas Yathui division was randomly selected from among low ecological zones. Central division has 9 locations and 31 sub-locations. Yathui has 6 locations and 27 sub-locations. Random sampling was used to select two locations from each of the two selected divisions. The locations were Kiima Kimwe and Mumbuni in Central division whereas in Yathui, Miu and Muthetheni were selected. Systematic random sampling was used to select the study participants among the selected administrative division from the low and high ecological zones. A total of 80 adult female headed households were sampled. The formulated hypothesis was tested using the chi-squared test and logistic regression at 5% level of significance.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of how group membership uplifted the female headed household socially or economically. Membership to a group refers to any women group or organization that female household heads had joined that enabled them to be uplifted either socially or economically. Most of the female household heads (70%) were members of women groups referred to as "mwethia". Some of the benefits realized from the groups included financial gains (75%), knowledge (21%) and fellowship (25%). The majority (60%) of the female household heads had little access to credit facilities yet women are reputed as efficient in repaying their loans (Mann 2001). Ironically, 90% of the female household heads have hard times when it came to securing loans because of lack of collateral, male consent. In the light of this, these women's inaccessibility to credit facilities denied them the exposure to and control of new technologies that would have helped them out of mire poverty. In general, income generating projects have been used widely in development programmes to address issues affecting women such as: lack of access to food, primary economic access and as a major poverty reduction strategy (Mutangadura, 1995).

Relationship between group membership and famine

Ho: Female heads who are members of a group are less likely to be vulnerable to famine

Ha: Female heads not members of a group are likely to be vulnerable to famine

The dependent variable was famine while the independent variable was group membership of the female heads. Information was collected from 80 female heads to find out if there was a relationship between group membership and famine, as evident from table 10.

Table 1: Observed and expected frequencies and deviations of the relationships between group membership and famine.

Observed frequencies	Expected frequencies	Deviations	Deviations squared	Calculated chi square
20	16	4	16	16/16=1
20	24	-4	16	16/24=0.6
12	16	-4	16	16/16=1
28	24	4	16	16/24=0.6 3.2

In the above table, the calculated chi square value is less than the table value chi square ($\chi^2=3.2$, $df=1$ $p=0.04$), this indicates that the two attributes are independent and not associated. In general even though there was no statistical significance between group membership and vulnerability to famine among the female heads. In the study, 70% of the female heads were members of women groups called “mwethia” though the group membership did not influence their vulnerability to famine. In essence income generating projects have been used widely in development programmes to address issues affecting women such as lack of access to food, primary economic access and as a major poverty reduction strategy (Mutangadura, 1995) hence being a member of a group among the female heads does not have any impact on their vulnerability to famine. In the study the majority (60%) of the female household heads had little access to credit facilities yet women are reputed as efficient in repaying their loans (Oroda, 2001). Ironically, 90% of the female household heads have hard times when it came to securing loans because of lack of collateral, male consent. In the light of this, these women’s inaccessibility to credit facilities denied them the exposure to and control of new technologies that would have helped them out of mire poverty. Women face a variety of economic and social disadvantages, which restrict their ability to acquire land and productive inputs, such as pesticides and fertilizers, and access to credit facilities. This limits their potential contribution to the overall rural economy.

Thus, if they enjoyed the same level of inputs as men, they might produce even higher yields than men, leading to potential benefits for themselves and rural economy. The as yet untapped nature of this potential is an opportunity cost and demonstrates the importance of gender equity measures not only for women’s welfare, but also for developing rural economies at large. According to Coleman (1988) social capital facilitates individual or collective action generated by network of relationships, reciprocity and social norms, It promote social cooperation for instance if FHH comes into contact with women groups there will be accumulation of social capital which may immediately satisfy her social needs and which may bear a social potentiality sufficient to the substantial improvement of the living conditions of the lives of FHH, they will find help, sympathy and fellowship. Adoption of new ideas such as improving of social networks and social capital among the female headed households has benefits of improving the lives of the FHH and their families. The more the social networks, the more the people the FHH have to move into when in need hence enabling the female head solve her problems. Just as a screwdriver (physical capital) or university education (human capital) can increase productivity both individual and collective so do social contact affect the productivity of individuals and groups.

Conclusion

Group membership enabled the female head out of poverty though majority of the women’s group lacked technical assistance in terms of management and finances hence access to credit facilities was limited.

Recommendation

Women groups and Self-Help Groups sometimes were assisting the poor with periodic grants (the so-called Merry-Go-Round) to start business, and sometimes with livestock (a cow or some chicken). Government should assist this process with credit loans to formally registered self-help groups. Female headed households as a particularly needy group would be greatly assisted by such a program.

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