
Socio-Economic Factors Affecting Young Women Participation in Tea SACCOs Politics in Nyamira South Sub-County, Nyamira County, Kenya

Rachael Moraa Onyancha¹, & Charles K. Wambu²

¹Egerton University, Egerton, Kenya, e-mail: rachaelmoraa783@gmail.com

²The Cooperative University of Kenya, Karen, Nairobi, Kenya, e-mail: ckamau@cuk.ac.ke

Abstract

The Constitution of Kenya 2010, offers young women key entry points for engagement in political processes through elective and appointive positions in national, county governments and social organizations under the two thirds gender rule. In Nyamira County, various civil society organizations have been vocal through advocacy and training of young women for political participation. The principals of cooperative advocate for democracy and one man one vote women in the tea sector face myriad of challenges in vying for leadership position in the tea Sacco's thus leading to gender inequality in the management and supervisory committees. The study therefore, sought to investigate socio-economic factors affecting the young women participation in tea Sacco's politics. The study was informed by the radical feminist theory. Using a mixed methods research design, the target population of 7,392 registered tea growers in Sanganyi Tea Factory, Nyansiongo Tea Factory, Nyankoba Tea Factory, Kebirigo Tea Factory and Gianchore Tea Factory who are members of Nyamira Tea SACCO was interviewed. Stratified random sampling was used to select 110 participants from the five tea factories. All the factory managers in the five tea factory were included in the study as well as the county cooperative officer. Data was collected using questionnaires and key informant interviews. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics and while qualitative data was analysed following themes. The respondents ranked the major hindrance of women participation in tea Sacco politics as: lack of shares in the tea factory; lack of land ownership rights; fear to run against men counterparts; low level of education; gender roles and lack of experience in politics. The study therefore recommends affirmative action, advocacy and training of young women on their democratic rights.

Keywords: Socio-Economic; Young Women; Participation; Tea SACCOs Politics

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INTRODUCTION

Women constitute over 50 per cent of Kenya's population, but their presence in management of co-operative societies in the tea sector Saccos is very low (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). In Africa, in recent year women's political participation has increased however there still exists a gender disparity between men and women's level of political participation (Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women, 2020). It is noted that the share of Parliamentary seats held by women increased from 7 per

cent in 1990 to 17 percent in 2007 and 20.4 percent in 2011 and 23.7 in 2017 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2020). The increase in political participation is as a result of constitutional quotas written into law in the Kenyan constitution (GoK, 2010).

The 2010 Kenya Constitution promotes the participation of women and men at all levels of governance and makes provision for proportional representation. Article 81(b) of the Constitution provides that "not more than two-thirds of the members of elective public bodies shall be of the same gender. What the

constitution does not provide for is the methodology for ensuring implementation. Consequently, Kenya is still grappling with the strategies of implementing the gender rule (Anker, 2018). The dismal performance of Kenya in regard to women's representation in leadership, despite having pioneered and provided leadership to the post-1990 multi-party women empowerment programmes in the East Africa continues to raise concern (Simmons, 2016).

According to Gunga (2018), since independence in 1963, Kenyan women have played a marginal role in Kenya's cooperative movement even though they make up 52 per cent of the country's population. A cooperative society is a financial institution founded and funded by members of a given professional group or local community and sharing common interests, ideas and convictions of financial independence. All the members bring their individual financial resources into the organization and form a joint large financial resource base, and these resources are then lent to members within the group. Thus, the owners and customers of the cooperative society are the same people who help start this financial entity, and avail a wide range of banking and financial service activities within the group. Apart from credit related activities, cooperatives have been involved in non-credit activities such as purchase of raw materials, and marketing of products. Thus, their role in the economy is multi-faceted. While cooperatives play a major role in the rural economy of Kenya, women participation in the management of the cooperative society is very low especially in the tea sector where male dominance is the major hindrances due to land tenure system which is patriarchy in nature. In Kenya women dominate agriculture and service sector, and are more likely to be in precarious, low-waged work (Kobia, 2017).

Depending on levels of informality, women are either in casual employment or self-employed in agriculture and service sector in Kenya. Cooperative societies coverage is predominantly male dominated

and creates class division among workers and women in the agriculture and service sector (Ombalo, 2016). Women face a lot of institutional and structural barriers to participate in co-operative society's management to the extent that they are absent in decision making positions within those institutions (Nkuru, 2015). Therefore, the challenge for co-operative societies is to ensure women involvement in the management of those institutions. This calls for a deliberate effort at individual and collective levels to ensure visibility of women in the management of co-operative society given that ascending to managerial positions in co-operative societies is involving, expensive and energy consuming. The answer lies in greater affirmative action in co-operative societies to enable women join the echelons of decision-making organs. A more practical move is to put institutions and mechanism in place to ensure that women practical gender needs are catered through relevant training, advisory services, mentorship, and access to leadership.

Patriarchy has undermined women autonomy acting as a barrier to ascend to leadership positions (Mwangi & Wanjau, 2012). This social system that has been around since time immemorial implies the institutions of male rule and privilege, and entails female subordination. In the twenty-first century, anti-feminism was mainly focused on opposition to women's suffrage. Other anti-feminists opposed women's entry into the labor force, or their right to join unions, to sit on juries, or to obtain birth control and control of their sexuality (Harcourt, 1994). Other anti-feminists oppose women's entry into the workforce, political office, and the voting process, as well as the lessening of male authority in families. They argue, for example, that feminism often promotes the elevation of women's interests above men's and criticize radical feminist positions as harmful to both men and women. Some scholars argue that the term "anti-feminist" is used to silence academic debate about feminism (Mohanty, 2010).

This study recognizes that Radical Feminists as an empowerment vehicle for women against any forms of discrimination as it seeks equality and equity. It also considers male participation in feminism vital as anchored by feminists and is an important strategy for achieving full societal commitment to gender equality. This study also supports proponents of gender-neutral language since the use of gender-specific language often implies male superiority or reflects an unequal state of society. Lack of Co-operative gender programmes specifically for women and in cases where they are present, they do not address women's specific needs. Sometimes, there are no direct financial and social benefits for women to form Co-operatives because they do not support direct income generating activities for women. There are also gender-blind policies, practices and services that exist within the Co-operative sector, and lack of strong Co-operative support and commitment to gender issues through gender sensitization programmes Yu, (2019), has also contributed to the scenario.

The values of self-help, mutual responsibility, equality and equity are held in common by all co-operators as envisaged by International Cooperative Alliance (Ogutu & Ogollah, 2016). But even though Co-operatives may have policies of equity and equal opportunities for both women and men, their practices may differ. True equality may not exist in them, in reality (Nzomo, 2012). For example, although women contribute much to the agricultural sector and hence to the national economy of nearly all countries in the world, the percentage of women members in agricultural co-operatives, compared to men, is notably lower. Women's participation is also practically non-existent in co-operatives at decision-making levels. In order to correct these imbalances and ensure the sustainability of co-operatives, it is necessary that gender issues are addressed. Among the gender issues of concern to co-operatives include low level of participation in Co-operative development and particularly that of women in the tea sector. Cooperative

principles stress the democratic nature of cooperatives including the principle of open membership irrespective of gender, race, political views, religion or social status. They also include the principle of one member one vote which provides women the opportunity to participate in cooperatives on equal terms with men. This way 'feminisation' of poverty can be eliminated through creation of wealth and capital owned jointly by large groups of low income earners (Inglehart & Norris, 2013). Because of their voluntary and democratic nature, cooperatives have been accepted as appropriate vehicles for promoting economic and social interests especially of marginalized groups. Being democratic in character, these institutions also offer women and youth an opening for participation in management and decision-making. Even though women constitute a great proportion of the membership in the tea SACCOs in Nyamira County their participation in management and leadership is very low. Women are underrepresented as leaders in elective office. Thus to get women to take leadership and management positions is not only an internal cooperative issue but also a challenge to society and as 2010 constitution mandate (GoK, 2010). This papers envisage to answer the following questions; Are women involved in decision-making processes in tea cooperatives? What are the constraints affecting women participation in tea Co-operatives? And whether efforts are being made to increase their membership?

Theoretical Perspective: The radical feminist theory, which guides this study, explains how revolution change can offer the possibility of women's liberation (Kerr, Sprenger & Symington, 2014). This theory guides how women in their sustained effort can change their situation in the society. It advocates on how women should fight for their rights and achieve their goals. The theory recognizes the pervasive influence of gender division on social life and tries to understand women's oppression and the structures in society that espouse this oppression and subordination. The feminist

perspective looks at the many similarities between the genders and conclude that women and men have equal potential from individual development. Differences in the realization of that potential therefore must result from external imposed constraints and from the influence of social institutions and values (USAID, 2012). Feminist theorists have also started to question the differences between women, including how race, class, ethnicity and age intersect with gender. Feminist theory is mostly concerned with giving a voice to women and highlighting the various ways women have contributed to society. Radical feminist theory identify physical violence as being at the base of patriarchy, but they think that patriarchy can be defeated if women recognize their own value and strength, establish a sisterhood of trust with other women, confront oppression critically, and from female separatist networks in the public spheres.

The Co-operative sector in Kenya: The Co-operative sector in Kenya is a vital player in the social, economic development and growth. Co-operative enterprises cut across all sectors of the economy and provide an important framework for mobilization of both human and capital resources. With a membership of over 10 million in 14,000 registered Co-operative societies, the Savings and Credit Co-operative (Sacco) sub sector, in particular, has mobilized over Kshs. 300 billion (KNBS, 2020). Co-operative enterprises concentration is in Agriculture and Finance. Other types of Co-operative societies cover housing, transport and other services (KNBS, 2020). In recent years, agricultural marketing Co-operative enterprises realized growth in numbers, from 4349 in 2010 to 14,471 in 2019 (KNBS, 2020). In the financial sector, the Sacco's, account for over 45 per cent of the total mobilized savings in the country (KNBS, 2020). Co-operative enterprises have a key role to play since they are expected to respond to both women's practical and strategic needs either through women only Co-operative enterprises or those made up of all genders. The sector is independent and

autonomous though the government plays a key facilitative role in the activities of the sector providing an enabling environment to ensure that the sector is vibrant, effective and globally competitive by forging close linkages with other sectors. As a result, Co-operatives are now geared to playing a vital role in the achievement of Kenya vision 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Christabell, 2009).

The Kenya Government acknowledges through Vision 2030's economic pillar that specific policy measures need to be taken to correct the glaring gender gaps in access to and control of resources, economic opportunities, and in decision making. Empowering Women to access labour markets, productive resources, education and training to exploit their potential is also an aspect of the pillar. This can only be achieved with well-regulated Co-operative enterprises. The Government believes that the *Mwananchi*-owned and managed organizations like Co-operative enterprises are helping the country to revitalize the agricultural and financial sectors and the rural economy (ICA, 2018).

Women's participation in the Co-operative sector in Kenya has been poor raising the issues of gender imbalance. Although women contribute significantly to the agricultural sector and hence to Kenya's economy, the percentage of women members in the agricultural Co-operatives management, compared to men, is lower. In order to correct these imbalances and ensure the sustainability of Co-operative enterprises, it is necessary that gender disparity issues are addressed. Co-operatives have an immense potential to deliver goods and services in areas where both the public and the private sector have not ventured (Christabell, 2009). In most cases Co-operatives are local institutions that address "local needs", employ "local talent" and are led by "local leaders" either directly or through local branches. Co-operatives have made remarkable progress in agriculture, banking, credit, agro-processing, storage, marketing, dairy, fishing and housing. Service Co-

operatives are the closest to communities and are organized on a shareholder basis formed by individual members of organizations voluntarily working in a specific geographic area. For instance, primary level sugar cane, tea, maize, Horticultural and coffee farmers form Co-operatives provide a collection point for the farmers' produce, negotiate the price for their produce.

The International Co-operative Alliance (ICA), aware and concerned that Women face constraints in their access to and control over resources e.g. credit, training and education as well as their low level in the management of Co-operative societies has endeavored to address gender disparity including promoting equality between men and women in all decision-making and activities within the sector (International Co-operative Alliance, 2018). The ICA has taken deliberate move to tackle constraints to women participation in Co-operative society's management that include social, cultural, economic and political restrictions on women, heavy workload and education. ICA, strategy is to make people aware that, democratic participation in Co-operatives means that both men and women should participate equally in Co-operative management. Hence, both genders should be afforded equal opportunities and treatment within the Co-operative sector as far as decision-making and leadership positions are concerned.

Women's Leadership in Kenya: The future of gender equality in Kenya is linked to the successful implementation of the Constitution. The new legal framework seeks to break down the barriers women face to realizing their political, civil, economic and social rights. It also ensures women are involved in decision-making at all levels of government. In an effort to fulfil constitutional requirement, in 2013 elections a number of positions were created for women. There were positions reserved for women both at parliamentary and civil levels. As Kenya works toward the promise of gender equality embodied in the Constitution, it is the country's hope that

enough women will be elected without having to create additional positions. In 2013, the state fulfilled this gender requirement, naming six women to an 18-member Cabinet. Parliament, however, fell short of this rule (Kamau, 2016). Despite this shortcoming a record eighty-seven women were chosen for Parliament. The process of forming 47 new county governments and getting the national and county governments to work in tandem for the betterment of Kenya is a huge task. It creates an opportunity to shape and improve the role of women in leadership positions. It creates a more equitable, just, transparent and accountable Kenya. These changes will only take root when women have a voice.

Impediments of women participation in politics: There are several barriers that keep the Kenyan woman from participating fully. Female participation in political processes is limited in several ways, mostly through voter registration processes and voting rules. The high level of illiteracy makes it difficult for women to understand their voting options. Family voting is a practice where women are led to the voting booth by their male relatives or husbands. This hugely constricts their freedom to vote for whomever they please (Biegon, 2016). In some communities husbands retain woman's National identity cards (a prerequisite for voting) and only hand them over on voting day, when they would accompany their wives to the polling station.

Raising sufficient resources to fund a campaign for office is extremely difficult, particularly for women who often lack established funding networks or collateral. In Kenya, women who run for political posts face societal opposition, from both male and female citizens. Most opt to drop out of the political race.

In 1979 the General Assembly adopted the historic Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This landmark treaty entered into force in 1981 and by early June 2006 had been ratified by 183 countries. The CEDAW agreement was adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly and entered into

force in 1981. To date, almost all countries have ratified CEDAW - 187 out of 194 countries (CEDAW, 2009). Only seven have not ratified including the United States, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Iran, and two small Pacific Island nations (Palau and Tonga). CEDAWs Article 2 states that it is the Country duties to eliminate discriminatory laws, policies, and practices in the national legal framework, while Article 3 notes that women are fundamentally equal with men in all spheres of life (CEDAW, 2009). Countries must take measures to uphold women's equality in the political, social, economic, and cultural fields Government institutions including Co-operative societies should take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making. Governments agree to establish gender balance in governmental bodies and committees, all governmental and public administration positions. Protect and promote the equal rights of women to engage in political activities and to freely associate and recognize that shared work and parenting between women and men promote women's increased position in public life.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted mixed methods research design. Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected. The target population was 7,392 registered tea growers in Sanganyi Tea Factory, Nyansiongo Tea Factory, Nyankoba Tea Factory, Kebirigo Tea Factory and Gianchore Tea Factory who are members of Nyamira Tea SACCO. Stratified random sampling was used to select 110 participants from all the five tea factories. All the factory managers in the five tea factory were included in the study as well as the county cooperative officer. Data was collected using questionnaires and key informant interviews. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse the quantitative data while qualitative data was analysed in themes. The data is presented using tables, pie charts and bar graphs and narratives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the study results 6% of the respondents were of the age bracket 18-35 years while 67% were of age bracket 36-53years and 27% were of the age bracket 54 years and above. Majority of the respondents were males 73% while females were 27%. Majority of the respondents 60% had secondary school education level and above while 40% had primary level and below. About 89% of the respondents received tea bonuses of Khs 50,000 and below.

From the study results youthful tea farmers were very few at 6% while majority 94% were middle age and above. This is an indication that the youth have not gotten a chance to venture into tea production activities thus affecting their chances of becoming members of the SACCO. This could be attributed to cultural issues of inheritance and property ownership. One of the key respondents reported that few youths owning tea bushes is as a result of land ownership, inheritance issues, migration to urban areas for white collar jobs, lack of interest to venture in tea production activities". Old age is often associated with wisdom, maturity and fitness to lead as such the more advanced one age is, the more likely is one to get into leadership positions thus affecting the youth participation in leadership. These findings relate with Ninsiima (2018) who discusses that most products and policies in cooperatives target adults and therefore the youth do not relate nor find the importance of joining cooperative societies. The middle age corresponds to the age group in which a majority of the men and women are undertaking heavy financial responsibilities such as educating their children and constructing their houses and thus the high likelihood of joining Co-operative societies. The age factor could have affected young women participation in leadership positions in the tea SACCO's. Similar studies by Ngeywo, Basweti and Shitandi (2015) on participation and management in coffee cooperative societies in Nyamira found that the average age for the members was 57

which shows that the dominance by older men affected young women ascending to leadership in agricultural cooperatives.

Majority of the participants were males 73% which is an indication of gender disparity in the membership of Nyamira tea SACCOs. The factory manager of Nyansiongo indicated that since the land is owned by majority of men they constitute the largest membership of the tea SACCOs. A few women members have become members of the SACCO through the fact that they have inherited land from their parents or from the deceased husbands. This could be the most hindering factor of women participation in leadership as there are few women to vie and support them for the available positions in the tea SACCOs. This is confirmed by Kivoi (2014) who discusses that cultural beliefs on women as homemakers and not leaders continue to affect their participation in leadership positions. In African societies, traditional inheritance laws tend to favor men. Property and resources in the family are controlled and shared out by men. Women rarely inherit property from their parents. This puts women in a disadvantageous position economically which affects their decisions to vie for leadership positions (Kasomo, 2012). Education levels was not a limiting factor to both men and women as the results indicate that 60% of the respondents had secondary school level of education and above, an indication that literacy levels are high and individuals can make independent choices in terms of democratic rights and decision making without influence. If education was used a criteria for being elected or appointed in leadership position both men and women had equal chances of becoming leaders in Nyamira tea SACCO. This is ascertained by studies on female leadership in education by Lopez and Rugano (2018) who found that female principals were capable and significantly impacted especially in encouraging more girls to study and seek leadership positions. About 89% of the respondents received tea bonuses of Ksh 50,000 and below. This could have contributed to low influence to be elected as

leaders in Nyamira Tea SACCOs. The key informants indicated that amount of tea supplied to the tea factory affects the amount bonus earned and the monthly share contribution in the tea SACCO. The county cooperative officer indicated that the bonuses are determined by the amount of tea supplied, quality and ability also to buy from other small-scale farmers in the locality.” The factory managers unanimously indicated that the amount of shares saved in the SACCO is one of the major factor affecting one to qualify to be elected in the SACCO leadership positions. Also Nyamira tea SACCO bylaws stipulates that one need to have ksh500, 000 worth of shares as requirements for vying a position in the tea SACCO leadership position. This could be a major hindrance of women participation in the leadership position since elections in SACCOs is democratic and fair to all thus the low numbers of women meeting the criteria of Ksh 500,000 to qualify to be elected in leadership positions.

Mode of ascending to leadership: The most popular mode of ascending into power in all the tea SACCOs was democratic elections at 94% and through appointment or secondment at 6%.

The mode of vying for office bearers is of critical importance. Women’s chances of ascending to leadership positions in Nyamira tea SACCOs have been affected by the principal of democracy and fairness. The respondents indicated that the mode of vying for office was through democratic elections in which 94% of the respondents reported that leaders are elected through democratic elections and through appointment/secondment at 6%. According to Kamau (2016) democratic elections affect a significant number of women ascending to leadership positions as some of them may not have the financial muscle to mount serious campaigns and sometimes threat of electoral violence contributes to lesser women in elective positions. All these factors lead to miserable performance of women in comparison to men in formal democratic elections. The formal democratic elections

have challenges that may prevent women from either contesting or contribute to women performing dismally when they context elective posts. Kamau, (2016) notes that “lack of resources works against aspirations of many women to run for political office. This is also attributed to the requirement of Ksh500, 000 as requirement for vying the leadership position. The key informants reported that for women to participate effectively in the political process, substantial amounts of resources are required this includes; finances, time, infrastructure and people. Of the resources required, finances are the most difficult to access. The elective environment is perceived as threatening and discouraging to women. It is also perceived to go against the values and attributes that women have been brought up to embrace. In this context, Lawless and Fox (2010) make the following observations: Entering the electoral arena involves the courageous step of putting oneself before the public, often only to face intense

examination, loss of privacy, possible rejection, and disruption from regular routines and pursuits. This decision, even for experienced politicians, requires traits such as confidence, competitiveness, and risk-taking - characteristics that men have traditionally been encouraged to embrace and women to eschew. Similar studies on challenges facing cooperative societies in Nyamira were conducted by Munene and Makori (2013), who argues that the management and governance of this SACCOS is often faced with interference from the political class. This means that cases of corruption and nepotism are on the high affecting the chances of women into leadership and decision-making organs because majority of the political class are men.

Position held in the SACCO: The results indicate that 80% and above of men held leadership positions as compared to women below 20% (Figure 1).

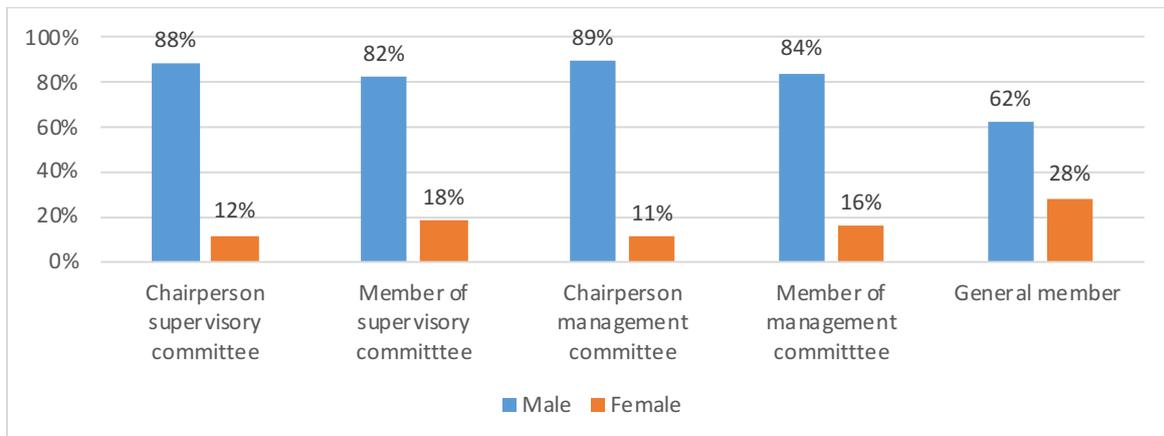


Figure 1: Position held Source: Field data source, 2020

The disparity in leadership positions between men and women is evident in Nyamira tea SACCO societies as the study results indicate. Their low participation in leadership position could be attributed to their few numbers in the SACCO membership. This is an indication that Women are often marginalized in leadership positions at all management levels in Nyamira tea SACCOs. The key informants reported that the glaring gender disparities in major decision-making

levels in the tea SACCOs can be attributed to various factors including, lack of resources, supportive legislations and patriarchy. This may be a major barrier to bridging the gap of two thirds gender rule which is stipulated in the Kenyan constitution. Results from this study show that women are more as members rather than in leadership position. This relates with literature that women are socialized to be passive participants especially in any public spheres. In his findings on factors

affecting women participation in elections in Kenya. Kasomo (2012) states that in African cultures women are expected to stay in the domestic sphere and take care of their homes as subordinates of the male leaders. In addition, he notes that majority of the women are fearful of engaging in male dominated spheres and therefore will also not support fellow women into leadership because they fear altering the status quo. Similarly Ngeywo, Basweti, and Shitandi (2015)) on studies about coffee production which is practiced alongside tea, notes that gender and marital status affected women's engagement in such products. The findings stated that tea and coffee production was a male venture especially because of its commercial benefits. Women on the other hand could only gain access through marriage or inheritance from their parents or deceased husbands. The limited access and control of the tea farmers limits women's engagement in its leadership structures and decision making levels because it affected their economic dependency. This is further affirmed by Kivoi (2014) who states that in African communities, women's access to resources and opportunities such as power and leadership was affected by the existing patriarchal structures.

Challenges faced by women seeking leadership position in tea SACCOs

The results indicate that lack of land ownership rights is a major challenge of women participation in vying for leadership position with a mean of 4.26 followed by lack of shares with a mean of 4.08 and the least factor was policies that do not favor women with a mean of 1.88. It emerges that though women till and weed the land, plant tea, harvest the tea and transport it to the factories or tea collection points they gain very little in the tea value chain. All family land and other property is legally owned by the men who dictates how the proceeds are shared or distributed and women are passive actors in the context of adding value. The factory tea managers indicated that in Nyamira married women have very little say concerning proceedings from tea sales. They also

indicated that family members from the man's side or family set-up has a bigger say than the women who is formally and legally married to the man. It was revealed during the interview that "The status quo on issues of patriarchy are not about to go away despite national and international legislations, since it is considered part and parcel of the culture therefore held in high esteem."

This study findings relate with Kabeer (2015) who in her studies on gender roles highlights that indeed women have limited access and control of resources in most societies. She notes that in Agriculture for instance women were only in control of subsistence farming which has little or no commercial benefits unlike in large scale and cash crop farming. The respondents reported that issues of inheritance of land by women is a sensitive issues that even the local administrators or leaders majority who are men appear or seem to encourage the scenario. Women's dual gender role of reproduction and production militated against their attempt to seek leadership positions in Nyamira tea SACCOs. According to Maeri (2014), the Gusii community is highly patriarchal and women are not allowed to own property or participate in positions of power or decision making. Economic resources such as land were owned by men and decisions concerning its utilization and subsequent generation of income was made by men. This was felt even in leadership because women lacked the financial independence to run for political positions. This means that even policies and laws especially in the agricultural sector had a male perspective and women would not access the leadership positions because of the unfavorable laws. The respondents hoped appropriate laws and policies would be enacted to ensure that women enjoy equal privileges and there is a situation that they negotiated with men without undermining family values for sustainable growth and development both at family, community, national and global levels. The key informants reported that women are subjected to second class status in family set

ups due to patriarchy that something that has contributed to eschewed growth and development. This has also contributed to women failure to take up leadership positions in Co-operative societies due to lack of resources which are controlled by men. Women cannot stand violence that proceeds democratic elections that decides who manages Co-operative societies which are sources of economic and social empowerment.

Solutions to low participation of women in tea SACCO leadership positions

The respondents reported that several possible solutions to bridging the gap of women and men participation in SACCO leadership. Affirmative action through preservation of set positions for either women or men was the most popular action and the least was change of SACCO bylaws.

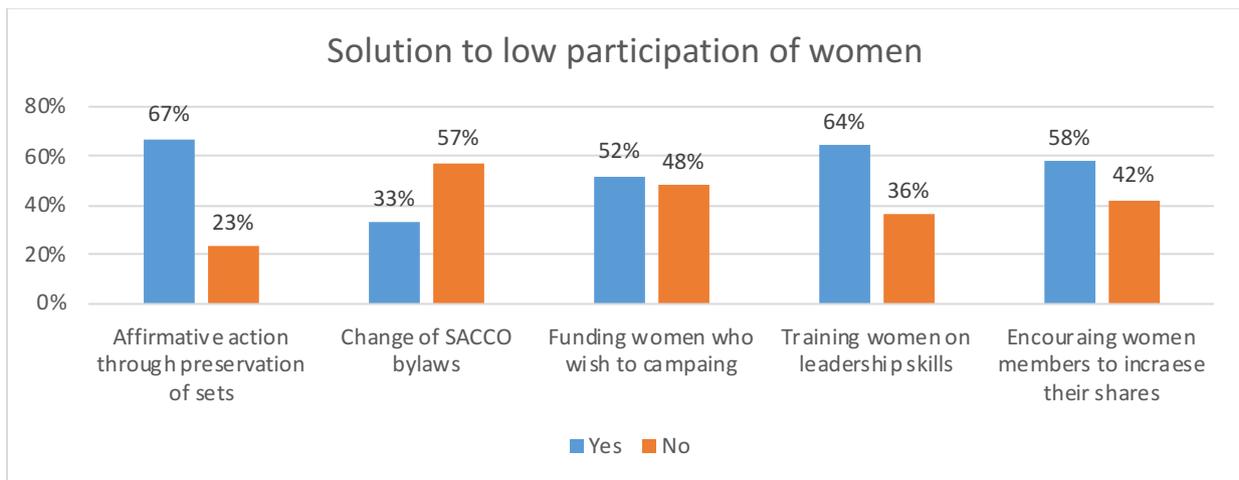


Figure 2: Possible solutions to leadership challenges in Tea SACCOs.

The most popular solution highlighted among the respondent’s was affirmative action by setting aside specific sets for women and men at 67% (Figure 2). The constitution of Kenya (COK, 2010) in article 81(b) provides that not more than 2/3rd of members of elective and appointive bodies shall be of the same gender. This principle applies in both public and private spheres. Several studies have found that in several countries such as Rwanda and Uganda, the affirmative action as propelled more women into leadership positions. The underlying motive for affirmative action is the principle of equal opportunity, which holds that all persons have the right to equal access to self-development. According to Kaimenyi, Kinya, and Chege (2013) in analysis of affirmative action in Kenya confirm that despite the slow implementation process, women have more advantage of getting into leadership including in cooperative societies but more efforts have to be put by relevant

stakeholders. Training women on leadership skills at 64% indicates that indeed the respondents’ believed that with relevant training women had the opportunities to gain skills and knowledge that would propel them into leadership. These findings relate with Beeson and Valerio (2012) in their studies on development of women leaders who discuss to some extent especially in the cooperative and business sphere women will require training. Specifically, they highlight that training on communication skills and professional development gives women the poise, confidence and interpersonal relationship skills that can increase their chances of being leaders. The least popular solution was to fund women who wish to campaign for particular positions declared in the SACCO management and supervisory levels at 52%. There are still very strong patriarchal tendencies in societies in Kenya that extend to work life and leadership positions in economic entities including Co-

operative societies according to answers given by the respondents. The key informants indicated that patriarchal tendencies are discriminative, oppressive and autocratic in nature that can best be dealt through legislations and formal policies. The patriarchal tendencies refer to beliefs, cultural practices and attitudes that propel men to leadership positions at the expense of women, although they may have similar professional and educational qualifications. The respondents reported that there is need for deliberate efforts to put in place Co-operative training and education programmes that address women needs especially in leadership.

CONCLUSION

Though Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, mutual responsibility, equality and equity, honesty, openness and social responsibility in all their activities it is not practiced hence denying the sector the credibility of Co-operatives as a democratic people-based movement. From the study results age could have affected youth women to participate in the leadership position as most of them do not own tea bushes due to lack of land rights, while those who already own tea are disadvantaged by the electorate who see age as a key factor in decision making and influencing others. The financial muscle from tea bonuses could also have affected women to participate in election campaigns since they lack the financial empowerment. With regards to the mode of ascending to power, 94% of the respondents agreed that it was democratic election. However, representation of women still remained minimal. This is because most of the women feared due to violence and campaigning experience and dominance by men in the cooperatives who do not support female leadership. The respondents have advocated for affirmative action as well as gender mainstreaming policies that take cognizance of women's and youth unique characteristics. This would be geared towards stimulating, streamlining and enhancing gender issues in Co-operative societies for equality and equity. On the positions held by

women, the Co-operative societies sampled did not have high women membership composition (28%) since they do not own tea and land rights thus affecting their participation in leadership position. This is as indicated by the study results whereby men dominated as chairpersons (88%), members of supervisory committee (82%), chair of management committee (89%) and members of management committee (84%). Lack of access and control of resources which is the land and number of tea bushes in this aspect, limits women from participation in leadership which affects their influence in decision making and policy action. Thus, cooperative societies in the tea sector should put in place structural and policy measures such as affirmative action in recruiting SACCO members in order to increase the female numbers and reduce male dominance in the operations and management of tea SACCOs since women are also contributors in production, supply, and generation of income in the tea sector. Women face a lot of challenges as discussed in the study findings affecting their level of participation in Co-operative development and quality of participation. The constraints highlighted by respondents included lack of land ownership (4.26), lack of share (4.08) and unfavorable policies (1.88). In addition, the constraints to women participation in Co-operatives such as social, cultural, economic due to heavy workload, access to and control over resources such as credit, education, training, production inputs and marketing outlets limit women's participation in leadership.

The study found that the most practical solution to women's participation in leadership is through affirmative action (67%). This is specifically on membership whereby requirements that limit women from joining such as on land ownership and number of tea bushes can be revised to cater for women who despite the absence of such requirements are actively involved in tea farming and trade. In addition, special leadership seats should be set aside for women. 64% of respondents agreed that training was a possible solution because any

form of education, improves women's literacy and increases their confidence in vying for leadership positions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Co-operative societies should address equality issues and make a firm commitment in their by-laws to correct imbalances that exist. Workers in the tea farms majority of whom are women should be allowed to join the SACCO in order to increase women membership in the tea SACCO. There must be deliberate move to recognize and create space for women in Co-operative society leadership other than entirely relying on legislation and policies that might not be forth coming soon. There is also a need to address the essential structural dimensions of gender inequality at this level to transform and deepen the normative framework for women's human rights and achieve them through effective implementation of laws and policies along key dimensions.

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