

# Gender- Responsive Strategies To Improve The Contribution Of International Non-Governmental Organizations To Women Socio- Economic Empowerment Makeni County, Kenya

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## Abstract:

This Study Sought To Assess Gender Responsive Strategies Used By International Non-Governmental Organizations Development Programmes On The Social And Economic Lives Of The Rural Women In Makeni County. The Study Employed Mixed Approach ( Qualitative And Quantitative) And Descriptive Research Design In Data Collection. The Study Targeted Women Beneficiaries In Self Help Groups (Shgs) Of World Vision And Action Aid And Key Informants Such As Project And Government Officials In Makeni County. The Research Sample Size Was Selected Using Various Sampling Techniques Which Included Multistage, Purposive, Snowball And Random Sampling. Questionnaires, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guides And Interview Schedules Were Used To Collect Data. Descriptive Statistics And Chi Square Tests Were Done Using Statistical Package For Social Sciences Software. The Study Revealed The Following Strategies Which Can Be Used By The Ingos To Improve Women Socio Economic Empowerment; Awareness On Women Rights And Gender Equality Capacity Building Among Women Entrepreneurs, Address Sexual Gender Based Violence, Introduce Different Types Of Collateral In Addition To Household Assets. The Study Concluded That For Women To Be Empowered Socio Economically, The Ingos Needs To Employ The Above Strategies During The Implementation Of Their Development Programmes Starting With Awareness On Women Rights And Gender Equality.

**Keywords:** Collateral, Development, Gender Equality, Ingos, Poverty

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## I. Introduction

Women empowerment and gender equality are part of the top agenda in achieving the sustainable Development Goals among many nations globally and it is also an indicator of human development ( Bhat, A and Bhatt, M, 2017). Empowering women socio economically is a key pathway to expanding their opportunities to access resources and financial services to jobs,skill development market knowledge and proactive assets. Addressing the root causes of gender inequality and harmful gender roles, power relations and gender norms is one way of enhancing women socio economic empowerment ( Plan International et al., 2021). According to Duflo (2012), International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) offer great input in

the development agenda worldwide and are generally concerned with issues relating to social and economic change of women in the society. They have sought to initiate development programmes in many parts of the world. According to World Economic Forum (2014), globally, the society and especially women, seem to be lagging in aspects of social economic empowerment. Lack of participation by women in development processes leads to problems such as high levels of food insecurity and increased poverty at household and national levels (Minh 2004, UNDP, 2010). It is for this reason that women empowerment is one of the key issues in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).In Africa, women's socio-economic empowerment is hindered by several factors including religious, cultural, and social inequalities created by gender exclusion policies and practices, as well as by the type of development programs in place. Nonetheless, women can be liberated from such impediments through intervention programmes by INGOs such as World Vision, Oxfam, Red Cross, Amnesty International, the UN, and International Monetary Fund (IMF) as noted by Dibia and Dibia (2007). Nonetheless, INGOs may also face challenges that could be

internal or external which can interfere with their initiated programs hence affect the intended outcome for the targeted beneficiaries. Despite the efforts being made by the INGOs and the Kenyan government to empower the communities, the effect is scarcely felt by most of the rural women. Gender inequality

persists especially in laws, poorly structured institutions, and mobility to access the market - due to lack of skills and capabilities (FAO, 2009; World Bank, 2008). Furthermore, World Bank (2008) contended that high rates of domestic violence and sexual assault, early pregnancies, and high school drop rates of girls are other challenges facing the contribution of INGOs towards socio-economic empowerment of women. In many parts of the world, women are limited in terms of education and training, business experience, discrimination, socialization or networking, and unwillingness to take risks (Tavershima, 2012). Ghosh (2009) reported that successive national sample surveys in India showed increased proportions of

women who perform unpaid domestic work out of compulsion rather than choice. Sen (2007) argued that women in developing countries are generally perceived as inferior by men - something that is deeply rooted in most cultures. Women are therefore constrained by lack of authority to control and make decisions on the utilization of assets. The UN Women (2011) noted that women are not able to access

microfinance resources because of several reasons. For instance, while men have the power to control the means of production such as land for access to resources, women do not have this control to enable them to access the same. Although the contribution of these INGOs development programs is expected to yield significant results in many parts of the World, there is need to ensure that there are minimal challenges.

Despite the high influx of INGOs in Makueni County aimed at empowering women socially and economically, the poverty levels in the county remain high and gender inequalities continue to persist. This is evidenced by increased poverty levels, low participation in decision-making, limited access to and control over resources, high prevalence of domestic violence, lack of income generating activities, low literacy levels, low self-esteem, and limited entrepreneurship skills. The main objective of this study is therefore to assess gender responsive strategies that can be employed to improve the contribution of INGOs on the socio-economic empowerment of women in Makueni County.

## **II. Research Methodology**

### **Introduction**

The study was guided by the theory of change (Weiss, 1995) and gender analysis framework by Sara Hlupekile Longwe (1990). The theory provides a framework which ensures that programs are delivering the right activities for the desired outcomes. It illustrates how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a context. It is focused on mapping out what has been described as the "missing middle" between what a program or change initiative does and how these lead to desired goals being achieved. The framework helps planners to understand the practical meaning of women's empowerment and equality, as well as evaluate whether a development initiative supports this empowerment. The basic argument is that women's development can be viewed in terms of five levels of equality: welfare, access, "conscientisation", participation, and control.

### **Study area**

The study was conducted in Makueni County which is located in semi-arid lower regions of the former Eastern Province and it is boundared by Machakos, Kitui, Kajiado and Voi counties. The county has 29 active NGOs operating in different sectors including WVK and AAK. The tools used were questionnaire, personal interviews and Focus Group Discussions. Below is a map showing Makueni county and its sub counties where the researcher conducted the studies mainly in Mbooni and Makueni sub counties.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

The target population comprised of 193 SHGs of the women's INGOs' funded development projects, key informants and INGOs officials of WVK and AAIK in Makueni county and the total sample size was 162. The study employed purposive method to get the number of sub- counties, wards, and key informants from the county and INGOs. Multistage was used to get SHGs while snowball was used to get men respondents and simple random was used to get the total number of women beneficiaries. Questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data from the 162 respondents because the area covered was vast. The researcher distributed a total of 114 copies of the questionnaire to the women beneficiaries and interviewed the rest.

Out of the 114 copies distributed, more than 80% were returned. The questionnaires were administered to the women beneficiaries from the two INGO, namely WVK and AAIK at three places namely; Kanzokea, Kalawa and Kithuki. The interviews, which were semi-structured with open- and closed- headed questions were used for key informants, WVK and AAIK officials. The FGDs

comprised of twenty-four women leaders from the four locations from each of the sampled SHGs. The FGD guide had open-

and closed ended questions on the study objectives to allow in-depth discussions and explore aspects of concern in the study with the beneficiaries. Further, the FGD was administered in *Kikamba* to enable the researcher gather information from beneficiaries in a language they (the respondents) understood. Data was also obtained from secondary sources which included books, WVK and AAIK reports, journals, theses, and dissertations. This was done from several libraries including Kenyatta University Library.

### **Data Analysis**

The study generated both qualitative and quantitative data. The quantitative data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 21. Qualitative data was processed and analyzed through identification of main themes from the in-depth interviews as per study objectives. The next step was the classification of responses according to objectives. The responses were then integrated into the themes then presented in narrative and verbatim form.

## **III. Results and Discussions**

### **Demographic Information**

The demographic characteristic for the respondents who had accessed the INGOs projects that were analyzed included gender, Age, Education level and occupation. The survey involved 162 respondents who were the main beneficiaries of the INGOs programs, drawn from various sub counties in Makueni County, whereby 81.8% were female respondents and 18.2% were male respondents. This group was drawn from various age group whereby a majority 44.2% were from the 41 to 50 years age bracket. In its quest to empower women who otherwise wouldn't get a chance in the formal sector due to their low education qualification the INGOs have enrolled majority of members/beneficiaries who have primary level education qualification i.e. 57.1% and 84.4% of respondents were involved in farming as their main occupation.

This cluster of respondents' presents set of characteristics that will help clearly manifest how the INGOs are playing a role in empowering women in Makueni County through the various empowerment programs. For example by having a higher percentage of respondents being females as INGOs program beneficiaries, it's a clear evidence that the INGOs have the intentions of empowering women in the county. The study found out that the following strategies were key to promoting women socio economic empowerment in Makueni county.

### **Awareness on women rights and gender equality**

Majority of the respondents (93.9%) felt that awareness raising on women rights and gender equality (as shown in Table 1) was one of the strategies that can help them to access and control resources. The same respondents expressed that having awareness and training meetings was the best way that INGOs can do to ensure that men are involved in household chores. Awareness on women rights at the grass root levels would ensure that the women groups are strengthened and enlightened on their rights, especially on land inheritance and property ownership. This calls for more awareness on men also to allow women more access to and control of resources to enhance women socio economic empowerment (Duflo, 2012).

As indicated earlier, women have limited access to and control of resources Which hinders them from accessing financial assistance from the MFIs, and their full participation in INGOs' development activities. Empowering the WSHGs' members to have more access to and control over resources is a positive step towards socio- economic empowerment. This can bring change as per the Longwe framework. The framework stipulates that development programs should lead women from welfare and access to conscientization to participation and control (Longwe, 2001). This can be achieved through encouraging women SHGs to participate more in decision- making at all levels of community development and empowerment programs to bring about socio-economic empowerment (Mehta et al., 2011). This concurs with Njuki's (2009) argument that partnering with local communities could help strengthen the women groups and improve the women's socio-economic empowerment.

### **Capacity building among women entrepreneurs**

Majority (87.9%) of the respondents indicated that the strategy was good, while only 12.1% did not support the strategy (see Table 1). This shows that it is important for the INGOs to embark more on capacity building for the women groups. The study findings revealed that women respondents needed more capacity building on IGAs skills on saving and borrowing of loans from MFIs, and marketing and

leadership skills. Women felt that this would enhance more participation in decision-making and minimize group conflicts. The findings also showed that it was important for the INGOs to embark more on capacity building for the women groups.

Low awareness of women on their rights entitlement was identified at the baseline which contributed to low participation in development. It is therefore important for the INGOs to increase the capacity for the women to demand for more accountability and transparency on the use of public resources for equity and equality in the distribution of resources. This will ensure that the projects started in the community are well implemented and sustained.

Capacity building would also enable women to become successful entrepreneurs who can run sustainable businesses, build an entrepreneurship culture, have increased self-confidence, and enhance their capacity to take up or access loans and other resources. Moreover, literature has suggested that human capabilities can be improved through better education and training (Tavershima, 2012). The respondents expressed that this was a very powerful weapon against poverty reduction in the region. These findings align with Lewis and Kanji's (2009) observation that empowerment of women through capacity building is one of the strategies of enhancing socio-economic empowerment, hence poverty reduction.

### **Addressing Sexual Gender Based Violence (SGBV)**

Majority of the respondents (84.8%), as depicted in Table 1 suggested that addressing SGBV was one of the strategies that can be used by INGOs in collaboration with the county and national governments, as well as religious leaders to address the challenge. One of the INGOs' officials expressed the following concern during the interview:

*I also suggest that SGBV can be addressed using local community-based structures, such as clans, council of elders, to address the vice. This would promote more gender awareness on issues of rape and women battering and curb the vice. It is therefore a collective responsibility to cooperate and address the menace jointly. OI,19/7/2018.*

During interviews, men raised the issue of participation by urging that the developers from all sectors including the INGOs, the county government, and faith-based institutions should be involved in the development agenda. The findings established that most of the SGBV cases were not being reported to the relevant authorities because of the existing poor administrative structures as revealed also during FGD. Women beneficiaries expressed displeasure on the manner the cases were handled to an extent of threatening the SGBV victims and destruction of evidence. This made it hard to pursue the cases and get justice. Key informers also concurred that SGBV could be addressed by using local community-based structures, such as clans, council of elders, and family members. The INGOs have a key role to play through influencing such structures as noted (Luciano, Esim, & Duvvury, 2005). This is also supported by Handy & Kassam (2007) who held that INGOs have been on the forefront in exposing violence against women. This, therefore, would promote self-confidence, self-esteem, and more participation - which would lead to socio-economic empowerment of women.

### **Introduce different types of collateral in addition to household assets.**

Lack of assets for collateral hindered women from accessing resources. Thus, 63.6% of the respondents ( Table 1) proposed that INGOs through MFIs should introduce additional collaterals that are easily accessible to women. This would enable women in Makueni County to access resources without asking permission from spouses or to use household assets for resources. The women suggested introduction of use of collaterals, such as personal individual guarantors outside the group members. These suggestions identify with the position taken by Wainaina, (2011) that the government, civil society, INGOs, private sector, and other relevant organs should step up awareness campaigns on empowerment of women

and hence enhance awareness on the policy interventions already in place targeting women and women groups.

From the above discussion, it is noteworthy that there is similarity on the suggested strategies and that there are challenges for both the INGOs and women beneficiaries. To address the challenge of limited access to and control over productive resources, a lot of awareness and capacity building needs to be done. The INGOs should find ways of implementing the suggested strategies, so that their development programs can have high impact on the socio-economic empowerment of the women beneficiaries. Training women more on entrepreneurial skills would lead to their independence as reliance on INGOs would be reduced. The result would be more self-confidence, and mobility and economic freedom for the women. As noted in the theory of change, any development intervention program must leave the

beneficiaries better than before. According to Hancock (1981), involvement of the beneficiaries is very important; they must be involved in defining their own needs, and in designing, implementing, and evaluating their own projects. This will promote self-reliance and encourage participation of the recipients at each stage of the project work. This study holds that the INGOs' programs should deal with the issue of patriarchy and involve men in their programs as early as possible for the success of socio-economic empowerment of women. Cultural practices and ignorance among the women beneficiaries should also be dealt with. This can be achieved through more awareness on the rights of women. Action Aid Kenya has tried this strategy and the fruits are evident, but a lot of financial and psychological support is needed to the survivors of GBV. There is also more need for increased community awareness through forums and publicity of the topic to build a critical mass challenging GBV (AA, 2018).

### **III. Conclusion**

The study consequently concludes that there is still need for the INGOs' development programs to work towards empowering women by working out the best gender responsive strategies that the INGOs can employ to empower women socio economically so as to reduce much dependence of women on INGOs programs hence improve their overall socio- economic empowerment. Overall socio-economic empowerment of women would translate to reduced poverty levels hence actualization of Sustainable Development Goals.