

Feminization of Poverty and Women in Development in Africa:

The Case of Kenya

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## **Abstract**

Sustainable economic and social development of a country requires full and equal participation of women and men. Women make significant contributions towards the process of socio-economic transformation and sustainable growth. A critical analysis of the socio-economic reality in Africa shows that gender gaps exist in all spheres of development. Women are the dominant providers of agricultural labor force accounting for more than half of total farm production. Their investments in production avail food on the tables of many households and contribute to the cash economy that generates income for both domestic savings and foreign exchange from earnings of export of goods and services. For years now, their contribution has hardly been recognized let alone included in the accounting of official economic development statistics. In this paper we share experiences from Kenya to situate the role of women in the context of overall national development. We highlight the disadvantaged position that women occupy and the many constraints that they have to overcome if they have to play their rightful role in improving their lives and those of their households and communities. This will be a major step towards the realization of the Millennium Development Goals as espoused in the United Nations' MDG statements of intent.

## Table of contents

	Page
Background.....	1
The situation in Kenya.....	2
Agriculture and development in Kenya.....	4
Women and poverty.....	8
Women and agriculture.....	12
Women and access to resources and services.....	14
Land tenure.....	15
Labor.....	19
Capital.....	20
Management.....	23
Education, occupation, and exposure.....	24
Credit.....	26
Women, food security and nutrition.....	27
Concluding remarks.....	31
References.....	34

## Background

In the first chapter of his book '**Economic Development in the Third World**' published in 1985, Michael Todaro's opening remarks touch on the stark contrast between the rich and poor of the world. The latter, who by then constituted more than 75% of earth's 4.8 billion people:

...have very little or no shelter and an inadequate food supply. Their health is poor, they cannot read or write, they are unemployed and their prospects for a better life are bleak or uncertain at best (Todaro, 1985, page 3).

Today, 20 years down the road, this bleak picture has been magnified many times over; poverty has not only increased both in absolute and relative terms, but it has acquired many more new dimensions. Pain, suffering, social injustice, violence, powerlessness, apathy, despair and hopelessness are just a few of the many facets that characterize the poor people's struggle for existence. Poverty is a tragedy for it threatens the livelihoods of millions who cannot afford a humane level of nutrition, clothing, education, shelter, health, among other necessities that constitute an "acceptable" standard of living. Poverty also decimates people through many unnecessary deaths that are preventable.

Investments in collective action and social capital can bring about a change in the lives of the poor for whom a better life includes, *inter alia*, both material and psychological dimensions. It has been shown that involving the poor into the process of design and implementation of development projects enhances the production of more appropriate projects and ensures that these are targeted to reach the ones with the greatest needs (Narayan, 1997). And as Holloway (1989) observes, "... *people's movements, religious organizations, voluntary groups, universities and so on have often devised "alternative" development strategies whose programs are*

*specifically intended to empower the powerless and selectively enrich the poorest. These groups lack the funds and the political punch to make much more than a dent in the situation”.*

In the same book (*ibid*) there is a chapter by Joe Madiath of Gram Vikas, India entitled “***Siro Mallik Goes to Buy a Pair of Buffaloes and a Cart***”, a candid and illuminating account of how poverty is sustained and perpetuated among those who are already impoverished through what he refers to as “*the guillotine of apathy, corruption, indifference and total disregard of everyday life*”. There are a number of lessons pertaining to Mallik’s narrative:

- There is social, economic and political exploitation by the *nouveaux riches* which is tantamount to mortgaging the lives of the poor and incarcerating them to a state of permanent servitude, humiliation and loss of self-esteem.
- There is bureaucracy with official engagement (e.g. government departments, banks etc.) and corruption that robs the poor of money and time that is very precious to them.
- The poor have to endure anguish, frustration and indignity as they seek for opportunities to better their lives from development agencies.

### **The situation in Kenya**

By the year 2000, more than half of the population of over 28.5 million lived below the poverty line defined as an income of below US \$ 300 p.a. (CBS, 2000), the population is estimated to be around 31 million. Migration from agricultural to non-agricultural activities, rural-urban migration, the proliferation of slums and concomitant increase in the number of people seeking refuge in the streets are all symptomatic of the impact of poverty on the general population. The situation is compounded by a decline in the growth of the national economy which is currently just above 2% (CBK, 2005). The agricultural sector, which is the main cog that drives the economic wheel, is depressed, and food security is threatened. Unemployment is

high, the infrastructure is in a dilapidated state, the level of savings and investment is low while domestic and external debts are at an all-time high. The debt service to GDP ratio now exceeds 60%.

The Kenya Government, in partnership with the World Bank and other leading development assistance institutions is currently engaged in implementing the National Poverty Eradication Plan (Republic of Kenya, 2000). The central vision of this plan is recognition of how poor people experience poverty and how to meet their specific needs. The statistics quoted in the plan are indeed sobering. According to the Welfare Monitoring Survey (WMS) of 1994, the incidence of poverty in Kenya was 47% in the rural areas and 29% in the urban areas. The absolute poverty line was Ksh 11,760 [US\$ 157] for the rural areas and Ksh 17,880 [US\$ 238] for the urban areas p.a. Results of the 1997 Welfare Monitoring Survey show that the incidence of rural food poverty was 51%, while overall poverty reached 53% of the rural population. In urban areas, food poverty afflicted 38% and overall poverty 49% of the population. The overall national incidence of poverty stood at 52%. According to available estimates, over the past 25 years food poverty has increased more than absolute poverty. The number of poor increased from 3.7 million in 1972-3 to 11.5 million in 1994. Thereafter, numbers increased to 12.5 million in 1997 and is now estimated to have reached some 15 million. Income below the poverty line is insufficient to meet the minimum daily needs of food, clothing, shelter, transport and other essential non-food items. The poor tend to belong to certain social categories such as street beggars and children, AIDS orphans, unskilled casual laborers, female-headed households, the handicapped and the landless.

If poverty is to be tackled effectively, the first sensible step is to of course own up and acknowledge that it is a real problem deserving urgent and serious attention. We can then think

of what kind of intervention programs and projects could be used to reach out to a greater segment of the poor. The next step then is to consider the types of resources needed, their availability and access. Since resources are critically scarce internally, these types of programs may need to rely on external sources in the short run but based on plans that are self-sustaining in the long run. The private and the NGO sectors can play a significant role in complementing and supplementing efforts of the government to alleviate the status of poverty in Kenya using a participatory approach that involves proactive participation of the target groups. The rationale of this is that poverty alleviation cannot succeed until and unless there is collective responsibility involving all stakeholders at all stages; problem identification, prioritization, program formulation, implementation, funding, decision-making, management, responsibility-bearing and accountability.

### **Agriculture and development in Kenya**

In Kenya, the greatest potential for raising the standard of the people lies in the rural areas where about 80% of the population lives and depends mainly on agriculture for their livelihoods. Apart from being the primary source of food, agriculture generates employment and incomes that are spent on other consumption items such as clothing, health care and shelter. At the macro level agriculture creates the demand for input markets and the services that go with them. On the supply side it generates outputs that find their way into different markets in different forms and at different stages of processing. And primary processing industries depend on agriculture for the supply of raw materials. In smallholder farming areas the bulk of labor, capital and management are derived from within the farm households. The major portion of the

food produced on the farm is consumed within the home and any surplus<sup>1</sup>, which is often not the result of deliberate planning, is traded in relatively small quantities at the local market places.

Kenya's Sessional Paper No.1 of 1986 on *Economic Management for Renewed Growth*, (Republic of Kenya, 1986) had envisaged that farmers would continue to lead the country in economic development for the rest of the country. Projected targets were that agriculture would:

- a) Provide food security for a population of almost 35 million in the year 2000;
- b) Generate farm family incomes that grew by about at least 5 per cent per year up to the year 2000;
- c) Absorb new farm workers at the rate of over 3 per cent a year with rising productivity;
- d) Supply export crops sufficient for a 150 per cent increase in agricultural export earnings by 2000; and
- e) Stimulate the growth in productive off-farm activities in the rural areas, so that off-farm jobs could grow at 3.5 to 5.0 per cent a year.

The paper further recommended three broad strategies to be pursued in order to achieve these goals for agricultural development. First, within existing crop patterns, farmers would be encouraged to adopt more productive practices, use fertilizers, and practice disease and pest control, the main instruments of this encouragement being pricing and marketing policies, institutions and extension services. Second, farmers would be encouraged to re-organize and accelerate research into new varieties especially of maize and other grains in order to generate new high-yielding crop varieties that would be essential to keep pace with consumption. Third, to a limited extent, the production pattern would be diversified in favor of crops such as tea,

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<sup>1</sup> What is seen being traded may in fact not be surplus production but output that is sold to generate money to buy other consumption items that the farmer is unable to produce in sufficient quantities or is not able to produce at all. Some of the purchases may contain items that are imported from outside the region and which are substitutes for locally produced foods.

coffee and vegetables that produce much higher income and generate considerably more employment per hectare than other crops and livestock activities. Small shifts in land use yield relatively large gains in income, employment and export revenue where these crops are involved. As we gather here today, no formal analysis has been undertaken to quantify and qualify the extent to which these targets were realized and recommendations implemented.

And being the mainstay of Kenya's economy (35% of GDP), agriculture is expected to continue being the leading contributor of a large share in economic growth and development through improving the distribution of income with faster rural development and faster growth in employment opportunities. The highest priority is to develop the smallholder farming areas where the small farms have over the years contributed over 50% of the output both for subsistence and commercial purposes. Considering that some output is retained at home for domestic consumption while large-scale farms have mainly been engaged in production for the market, it is apparent that small-scale farming plays a big role in the employment of resources in agriculture. In addition the adoption of cultural practices and of land policies that favor the subdivision of large farms that were hitherto collectively owned into individually claimed pieces further increases the proportion of small farms.

The catch, however, is that such practices may compromise on productivity. Yet agriculture must be seen and evaluated against what it could contribute to Kenya's goal of attaining industrial status by the year 2020. Our bet is that this takeoff must involve agriculture as the main cog that will drive this wheel by providing high quality raw materials for processing to add value to farm products through cost-effective technological processes. On the demand side, the process must be seen to respond to a desire for consumers in other parts of the world to access final products that are in tune with their current tastes. Technology is only a *sine qua non*

and not a sufficient condition to achieve this; synergy and information symmetry must play the leading role to ensure that consumers and producers are in touch with each other's realities. Previous approaches to agricultural development have focused on increasing agricultural production with little consideration of markets and consumer demand. Experience has shown that productivity increases and investment in value-adding enterprises only take place when driven by market forces. Small-scale producers are strongly market orientated (see Box); the challenge is to strengthen their capacity to seize new market opportunities for products for which they have a particular competitive advantage, such as labor-intensive horticultural and livestock goods.

### **Responding to markets in Kenya**

Poorer households in Embu District, Kenya, cannot meet food needs because of their small land holdings. Instead, they tend to specialize in the production of high value commodities that they trade for staple foods produced more cheaply elsewhere. A livelihoods study found that:

- Wealthier farms are relatively specialized enterprises that focus on staple food crops (mainly maize and beans) sold onto local markets. These farms can afford levels of technology (such as fertilizer) that maximize efficiency.
- Most medium-sized farms pursue a traditional strategy of food production for home-consumption, with occasional surpluses sold into the market. These farms struggle to compete with the 'technology-rich' farms, and are increasingly dependent on off-farm sources of income.
- Poorer farmers are unable to produce sufficient food for their own consumption. They are

forced to take risks by diversifying into unconventional but high value agricultural products such as milk, flowers, French beans and snap peas. These goods are sold to middlemen who offer a better deal than the collapsing marketing parastatals. Most food needs are met through purchases from the local market, using cash obtained from the sale of high-value agricultural produce.

Source: Thorne and Tanner, 2001

### **Women and poverty**

From a demographic perspective, it is a fact that “women carry half of the sky” as they constitute more than 50% of the total population (CBS, 2000). And it is also said “poverty has a woman’s face”. It is a fact that a disproportionate number of women are overburdened by poverty and its associated maladies. The situation is aggravated, as more women become heads of households, either *de facto* or *de jure*. In Kenya, over 30% of households are headed by women who function either as the sole or primary economic providers (World Bank, 1989). Many studies on the contribution of women to the process of economic development assert that **time** is the primary resource for women (Boserup, 1970; Ogutu, 1990; Suda, 1991; Todaro, 1985; Word Bank, 1989). Women’s dual role in the economy overburdens them as they have to work inside and outside the home; the chores and tasks they have to perform are drudgery and a lot of time and effort is expended in performing the activities. Yet, the rewarding system is not always commensurate with the contribution that goes into it. Their contribution is often ignored and undervalued in national income accounting. Limited education confines them to job opportunities with poor pay. In the labor market, women will be paid lower wages even when they perform the same tasks as their counterpart men. Access to resources of land, credit, to

markets, and information is greatly curtailed; the window of opportunity for self-reliance and enhancement is further diminished. In education, illiteracy rates tend to be higher among females than males.

Here we give an example of the women living in the streets of Nairobi (the capital city of Kenya) who are part of the humanity described above. The street is the only place they can call ‘home’. Their basic concern is to get some food for a day and this is nothing close to what we call a “decent meal”. Many are involved in illicit trade since, being powerless and lacking the financial wherewithal, they do not have the means to conduct legitimate business. They are exposed to violence from their counterpart men and are literally on the run trying to avoid harassment from security organs of the local authorities. And when they are nabbed they have to pay dearly; they are not only physically molested, but they may have to “buy their freedom” by advancing sexual favors, most often through intimidation. Peddling of their bodies for monetary exchange is a common phenomenon, the amounts earned are scanty and the indignity of it all is dehumanizing. This lifestyle exposes the women to a severe range of sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS is taking a heavy toll on them. Death stalks them every moment of their lives. They get trapped into the deadly vicious cycle of poverty, hunger and disease. To them, life is only for today and tomorrow is not in their planning calendars.

The children of street mothers are not spared the agony; the families are often disjointed and children are exposed to a life of squalor at very tender ages. If they are boys they usually end up abusing relatively cheap drugs such as glue and marijuana, begging and stealing are their means of livelihood. If they are girls they are vulnerable to sexual abuse by not only older street boys but also members from upper classes in society. They tend to get involved in commercial sex activities even before they reach the teen age. In the process they are also exposed to abuse

of hard drugs which are not only more expensive, but have a stronger hooking effect. And “marriages” among children fifteen years and below is also common in Nairobi streets. Like their mothers, street children cannot escape the dehumanization, debilitation and indignity of poverty. As these people go about looking for morsels to eat from refuse dumps and garbage mounds strewn all over the city and its environs, one can almost never distinguish them from scavenging vermin. What they find is what they eat yet this could be poison.

If one truly wants to understand what it means to subsist on the kind of life endured by the poor (women), perhaps a reference from Dennis Goulet’s book, **‘The Cruel Choice: A New Concept in the Theory of Development’** is revealing:

...the squalor, the disease, unnecessary deaths and the hopelessness of it all! No man understands if underdevelopment remains for him a mere statistic reflecting low income, poor housing, premature mortality or underdevelopment. The most empathetic observer can speak objectively about underdevelopment only after undergoing, personally or vicariously, the “shock of underdevelopment”. This unique culture shock comes to one as s/he is initiated to the emotions, which pervade the “culture of poverty”. The reverse shock is felt by those living in destitution when a new self-understanding reveals to them that their life is neither human nor inevitable.... The prevalent emotion of underdevelopment is a sense of personal and societal impotence in the face of disease and death, of confusion and ignorance as one gropes to understand change, of servility towards men whose decisions govern the course of events, of hopelessness before hunger and natural catastrophe, chronic poverty is a cruel kind of hell, and one cannot

understand how cruel how that hell is merely by gazing upon poverty as an object (Goulet, 1971, page 23).

Goulet's sentiments go beyond invoking emotions and suggest the need for action. This is also shared by many men and women of goodwill who see the alleviation of poverty as a major thrust in moving towards a more rewarding, stable, prosperous, just, and peaceful socio-political and economic global environment in which people can stand up and be counted as rightful members of the same humanity. Conscience is effectively and legitimately pricked. Action needs to be taken and taken now. The World Bank Group is a good example of an institution that is devoting resources to poverty alleviation and has a wealth of information on a diversity of issues relating to poverty. Many others continue to invest in a diverse range of micro-level projects that target very specific groups. Investments in poverty programs and projects are a feasible means towards achieving sustainable development initiatives. It would be prudent, therefore, for *all* stakeholders to come on board and contribute what they can towards this noble endeavor.

### **Women and agriculture**

Majority of the people who live in the rural areas and subscribe to agriculture for their day-to-day requirements are women who have to work for long hours to support both the productive and reproductive spheres of life. The pioneering work on women in development was reported by Boserup (1970) where she cites evidence of transformations in gender roles and relations during the development of agrarian economies in the Third World countries. In many African societies women are the main producers of subsistence crops while at the same time they take care of children, the sick and the elderly (Young, 1980). Recent development planners and scholars have been concerned with women's roles and differences in the sexual division of labor

as a result of the increased awareness of the economic potential and needs of more than half the world's population. Van (1974) sees the development of the African export economy as being dependent on women. His analysis of the effects of modernization on African women stresses the way export industries have managed to maintain low wages and make huge profits due to women's contribution to family's subsistence from agricultural production.

In Kenya the scenario is not any different; majority of the Kenyan rural population is composed of women who inevitably have to provide the bulk of the labor on farms in addition to playing other reproductive roles that fulfill other household activities like fetching water and fuel, nursing babies, cooking, entertaining guests among others (Ayiecho, 1990; Suda, 1990; 1996). There is a strong link between migration, agriculture and rural livelihoods. Migration within and outside the agriculture sector involves more men than women who are engaged more in activities not directly linked to their farms. Thus the proportion of women further increases. This translates to increased responsibilities for women to fend for themselves and their families who are resident on the farms for immediate needs. This however does not translate into commensurate leeway to make decisions independently.

Studies have shown that one of the commonest effects of introducing cash crops in rural areas is the relegation of women to subsistence or food production while men are said to concentrate on cash crops. But men's interest is mainly with respect to appropriating the incomes from the commercial crop while women (and children) have to contend with an increased workload for harvesting and delivering the crop to the market. A study by the World Bank (1989) showed that it is women who provide about three-quarters of the labor force and it is they who primarily produce Kenya's food and much of the country's cash crops. Elsewhere, it has been shown that 91% of the rural women perform strenuous agricultural operations

compared to 87% of men (Republic of Kenya, 1991) and that they spend an average of 13 hours a day on household and agricultural activities compared to 9 hours by men.

A study by Njiro (1990) examined the sexual division of labor and its impact on gender relations among smallholder tea farming households of Embu District, Kenya. The results showed that agricultural activities before adoption of commercialized tea production had initiated socio-economic differentiation among households and this had intensified with tea production. Women's increased engagement in tea harvesting, ferrying to the collection centers and taking care of the green leaf to minimize losses leaves women with little time to participate in other equally useful farm and domestic activities. They will often get back home late, tired and hungry while there is still more waiting for them to accomplish. This situation is further exacerbated during the peak harvesting seasons commonly known as "flushes".

### **Women and access to resources and services**

Farmers operate their farms as systems of mixed enterprises and as such there is an opportunity cost involved in allocating a resource to a given enterprise. Land, labor, and capital are the basic resources employed in production. By using skills and knowledge with apt managerial capacity, these resources are organized in a way that ensures maximum returns to the producer while complementary services (research, extension, and training) provide an enhancing capacity to achieve producers' objectives. The emphasis on efficiency in agricultural production is based on the logic of improving technical efficiency that allows the producer to obtain a higher output from the same outlay of resources or the same output from a lower outlay. The outcome of increased returns with constant costs or constant returns with reduced costs of production is an increase in the returns *ceteris paribus*. Access to and control over resources, complementary facilities and/or services influence the choice of production patterns and practices adopted by

farmers. Where the access and control are limited, the result is translated to reduced factor productivity, consequent lowered returns, and a decline in the overall welfare of the farm families.

Our attention is now focused on how women fit into the patterns of resource use and how this is likely to influence their productive and reproductive roles. Hornby and Gibson (1974) define production as the process through which goods are manufactured, crops grown or living things born while reproduction is defined as the breeder and feeder roles of women (Beneira, 1980).

### **Land tenure**

Land tenure and land tenure relations define the way people own and/or rent land to others if they choose not to cultivate it themselves. In smallholder agriculture, land is undoubtedly the farmers' most important asset as it is often the only means of livelihood they possess. Ownership of land is therefore important in explaining differences in farmers' resource endowment, the types of production technologies they adopt and the types of investment undertaken. In Kenya, one of the major constraints women face in agricultural production is their limited control of land resources. They usually have access to land use largely by virtue of their position either as wives, mothers or other relation in the communities they live. Because they do not have control over land, it's rare to find women being holders of title deeds. This in turn limits the ability of women to engage in agricultural investments because of their lack of collateral to secure investment resources including finance. It is also a disincentive to productive agricultural activity because of the ever looming risk of loss of land in the event that the matrimonial relationship breaks.

Farm size is influenced by the size of the population in the sense that an increase in population often leads to further sub-division of land. In areas where perennial crops (e.g. tea and coffee) are integrated into the farming system, the practice of sub-division diminishes the amount of land available for production of food crops and other annual crops. It may also lead to farm sizes that are too small to be economically viable. In addition, competition for land by a large variety of crops and other uses (e. g. livestock, agroforestry) tend to limit expansion of the area under food crops. Food production cannot therefore be increased unless factor productivity is increased. And how does this affect women? Because food production is in their domain, it is women who are more likely to suffer from the undesirable effects of declining food production. It means that they cannot produce surplus that they could dispose of in the market as a means of generating income to finance other household requirements. As a consequence the stereotypic notions about the roles of men and women are further reinforced. For example as Mead (1950) so rightly and succinctly put it, it is so readily assumed that men bring the food and women prepare it (in Boserup, 1989).

To correct this situation, the government as recommended in the Sessional Paper No. 1/1986 should appoint a high-profile *Land Use Commission (LUC)* to review land tenure laws and practices with a view to recommending legislation that would bring the law into conformity with Kenya's development needs. The terms of reference for the LUC should either be expanded to address gender specific issues of land ownership and control, and/or sections of it be modified to incorporate gender dimensions.

### ***Special Case of Pastoral Women Regarding Land Rights***

Pastoral women live and largely subsist in the arid and semi-arid (ASAL) regions which form about 80 per cent of Kenya's land area. ASALs generally have fragile environments which

have lately been subjected to degradation due to immigration from the over-crowded medium and high potential areas of the country. Nevertheless, ASALs represent a potentially important eco-zone which if prudently managed, can help this country to meet its national income, employment and food self-sufficiency objectives espoused in the Sessional Paper No.1/1986 and other policy documents. Livestock production is the basis of the ASAL economy although recent trends show that a number of pastoral communities in Kenya are increasingly undertaking agro-pastoral ventures as a means of livelihood owing partly to the diminishing acreage of grazing land. In the past, purely traditional pastoral systems allocated to women the role of mainly looking after small stock. Therefore, problems of ownership, access and control over land was not a big issue. However, their access to and control of livestock resources were limited and there is no indication that this has changed today. On the other hand, ownership or control and access to land by pastoral women is now important in Kenya in the face of marked contemporary changes or shifts from traditional purely pastoral land use to agro-based land use systems and the consequent conversion of purely pastoral acreage to crop production.

With regard to the broad issues and problems of land, pastoral women face similar constraints as other Kenyan women. Consequently, land use policy (ies) which may arise out of the recommendations of the LUC should necessarily address women's needs across-the-board. However, pastoral women have idiosyncratic constraints which in essence call for specific measures for example:

- The clarification and strengthening of pastoral land tenure systems, in particular by seeking a harmonization of statutory and customary tenure rules through the decentralization of decision making and protection of tenure rights of (pastoral) women,

- Challenging the biases in gender production relations to create awareness on the plight of (pastoral) women. Fundamental questions of ownership and control of key factors of production and related problems should be the priority issues of concern in the crusade of increased empowerment of women,
- Move towards legal and institutional capacity building to safeguard (pastoral) women in ASALs in Kenya. This should indeed be one of the specific terms of reference of the LUC, and
- Review and/or repeal of the prevailing legislation with a view of facilitating compulsory ASAL land use planning, focus to be specific conditions, constraints and needs of pastoral women.

The current plan is, however, silent on gender dimensions of the pastoral economy.

Consequently, it is submitted that the policies for ASAL development during the period 1994-1996 and thereafter should be modified during implementation to address specific constraints and problems facing pastoral women in order to achieve meaningful development of the pastoral economy in Kenya.

## **Labor**

Labor refers to the effort of human beings into production, be it skilled or unskilled. It is an important human resource through which people secure their means of livelihood. The total labor is dependent upon the number of hands available and their effort, which is a product of quality and the rate of working. In turn the actual labor input depends on the family structure, number of hours worked by family and hired labor, and rate of work per hour. Studies suggest that women provide up to more than 75% of the labor force in smallholder farms (Suda, 1990, Ayiecho, 1990). Suda (1996) contends that although gender roles are changing, the overall

structure of the division of labor is still lopsided. Women, in particular those who function as *de facto* household heads assume disproportionately more responsibility than men do. Also involvement in off-farm activities is likely to exacerbate the labor situation. Elsewhere, Nkwi (1987) observes that the introduction of cash cropping, urbanization and migration have disrupted the complementary characteristics of the traditional division of labor. In her study, Njiro (1990) observes that among many problems faced by women in tea production include increased workload which is not accompanied by commensurate remuneration.

Much of the labor in cash crop production goes into harvesting with demand going up during peak harvesting seasons. For crops such as tea and coffee, harvesting is predominately done by women (and children during weekends and school holidays). Women have limited leeway in making decisions regarding the recruitment of hired labor and so their workload tends to increase with the rising demand. Giving priority to cash crops means that other activities are undertaken when there is no crop to be picked. Otherwise they are done late in the afternoon after women have delivered the cash crop. In essence labor productivity goes down, as the women are already fatigued. The problem of discrimination against women and exploitation in agriculture and related developments stem from the limited access and control women have over productive resources and is reinforced by deeply entrenched socio-cultural gender relations which have evolved over long periods of time. Men have always had control and disproportionately privileged access to resources; they have alone made decisions in farm households and consequently have had the final say on which labor roles are played by members of the household in the farm.

Commercialization of agriculture exacerbates women's position in as far as control of labor is concerned. For instance Young (1990) has shown that while there may not necessarily

be a marked ratio of increase in the percentage of female work time in cash crop production in relation to the time spent on food production, there is a constant flow of labor between self-provisioning sectors of the economy and the more capitalized sectors producing for the market. Thus the relegation of women to subsistence cultivation is equivalent to the marginalization of women, which potentially raises the level of poverty. Dealing with issues of labor should therefore be seen in the context of the broader advocacy for reduced discrimination based on gender, the empowerment of Kenyan women and the recognition that they are equal partners in the development process of this country.

## **Capital**

Capital refers to the resources which are a product of past human effort. Types include liquid capital (money), fixed capital (tools, assets, equipment), and working capital (inputs used up in production). So it can be gainfully argued here that much of the capital accumulated on smallholder farms is substantially due to the past effort of women, who, however have little say in influencing how this capital is re-invested in agriculture or expended elsewhere. If complementary inputs have to be purchased so as to raise agricultural productivity, it often becomes necessary to offer surplus produce for sale or to produce a commercial crop that can generate income required to meet the expenditure on this working capital. Thus cash crop production may play a complementary role in enhancing the adoption of improved technology which is often more expensive than the existing one. But again the underlying decisions are largely in the domain of men. As such, women's lack of capital hinders the use of labor-saving techniques, recommended seed, fertilizers, and disease control chemicals. All these limit the scope to adopt improved farming techniques that could improve productivity and lower the workload on women. And in spite all the limitations, research has shown that increases in female

earnings have a larger impact on improving family welfare than similar increases in male earnings (Manda *et al*, 2002) as such income is spent on improving nutrition, childcare, and food security at the micro level. Empowerment is therefore essential to ensure that women have say and a right to part of the income generated by their effort.

## **Trade**

Women lack skills in export management and marketing. Problem areas include unfamiliar procedures in export management, issues relating to lack of skills in quality control, packaging, import management and techniques. Inadequate access to trade information and market research are also a key barrier to women's participation in trade. Study has shown that women are likely to be inadvertently excluded from the benefits of a Free Trade Area due to complicated procedures such as adherence to rules of origin in order for goods to be excluded from customs duty charges. Most women may not be aware of these requirements due to illiteracy and lack of information while the majority may not qualify for certificates of origin due to the simple production processes used by them. Inadequate access to credit and finance is a major barrier to effective participation in regional and international trade. Collateral requirements disqualify many women, who have limited access to and control over property, from effective and adequate borrowing. The low quality of goods produced by women is another main barrier to their participation in regional trade. This contributes to their inability to compete effectively under the liberalized economy. Further, despite the launching of the Free Trade Area, women in various parts of FTA are still subjected to harassment, including unwarranted searches and confiscation of goods by custom officials who are gender insensitive. This tends to discourage many women from undertaking activities beyond their borders. One of the major factors that contribute to inadequate participation by women in international trade is lack of

participation in policy formulation and decision-making structures on trade at the national, regional and international levels. Because these structures are male-dominated, women's concerns are rarely integrated in the policies on trade.

In order to address gender issues and concerns and to mitigate the negative effects of trade liberalization on small and medium scale enterprises, the following measures should be put into consideration:

- To promote the access of women to regional and international markets,
- To promote skills in export management and marketing especially for women,
- To enhance the dissemination of information regarding regulations and procedures in export and import management in the Free Trade Area for access by all members of the business community,
- To ensure effective participation of women in trade decision making both at national and international levels,
- To lobby member states to review their trade policies to incorporate Gender concerns,
- To lobby member states to facilitate the sensitization of customs officials on women's rights.

## **Management**

Management is the process of decision-making in the organization and coordination of resources to obtain results. It deals with the effective organization and skilful operation of a farm for the purpose of securing the maximum continuous profit and other objectives consistent with the welfare of the family (e.g. food security, risk minimization). It requires the use of knowledge and skills which enhance the farmer's ability to make decisions on how to combine the factors of production to meet their objectives. Managerial ability varies from person to person and also

with the scale of operation. It is influenced by such factors as age, level of formal education and general exposure to the interactions in the production environment. And there is nothing that makes women intrinsically less of good managers than men. In smallholder farms men are often non-resident players as they are mostly engaged in off-farm activities. Even when present they are likely to assume the role of overseers and supervisors. The incidences of women managing farms are therefore high and increasing. A major constraint is that this phenomenon is not matched by a commensurate participation in decision-making. In addition, institutions that offer training on farm management target the land owners and are therefore biased against women. Thanks to NGOs and civil society, there are now programmes in place that specifically target women as the primary beneficiaries of new information to build capacity and improve their ability to make rational management decisions. This approach reduces the chances for delays and distortions in information flows and has enormous potential to improve the efficacy, effectiveness and efficiency of management decisions made by women.

### **Education, occupation, and exposure**

Education enhances the farmer' ability to plan and control their production while occupation influences the amount of time available for other activities and opportunity to generate additional income. Education can help overcome impediments in traditional practices of farming. Limited education, a characteristic of majority of rural women, does make the execution of planning and control a more difficult task. In addition, differences in levels of literacy and in access to other sources of information do create gaps among farmers and women in particular as regards accessing the stock of knowledge available. Some of these constraints do arise as a result of cultural considerations that give priority to male children in accessing education. While boys go to school, girls are left at home to help out and work alongside their mothers. And when

parents are faced with difficulties of paying for education due to poverty, it is girls who are first withdrawn from school. Lack of education also limits women's opportunities for gainful employment in the non-traditional sectors of the economy. Even when employed, they are restricted to job markets with poor pay and will be paid lower wages than men even when performing tasks that require the same effort. Women are therefore caught up in a vicious circle of illiteracy, ignorance, disempowerment, powerlessness, and therefore, poverty. More women, being the custodians of agricultural production should be trained in agriculture oriented disciplines including agricultural extension. Community mobilization campaigns and extension services are useful in enlightening the agricultural population. Informal communication networks, especially among women farmers can often be quite effective in alleviating their disadvantaged position.

There are a number of institutions and fora through which women farmers could be exposed to new farming techniques by way of advice, training, and participatory demonstrations among others. These include farmer training centers, agricultural shows, field days, and farm visits. Exchange visits between groups of farmers provide an opportunity for face to face learning where farmers can share first hand experiences. The extension service has been an important avenue through which information is shared between research and farmers. It was once referred to as "*the only logical scientific and successful way of bringing knowledge to farmers to help them farm their land more efficiently*" (Bradfield, 1966). But as Ayiecho (1990) contends, there exists inadequate and biased extension services which are often in favor of cash crops and which target men. In addition there are cultural factors that militate against direct contact between women and male extension agents who are the majority in the service. Also, in some communities, women are not at liberty to divulge certain kinds of information without approval

from either their husbands or some senior member of the community. As such women become non-participants in the research and extension process or they become third party recipients of information which is often delayed, inadequate, inaccurate or distorted by the time it reaches them. And this happens when women have a big role to play in the day to day management of the farms either because they are single or they are *de facto* household heads.

It is also important to note that the traditional approach to extension assumed that farmers did not know and therefore the best way was to teach them how to do things. It has since been recognized that farmers have a repository of knowledge that they can share with those in research. A participatory approach therefore allows farmers to identify their problems, priorities and possible solutions. Researchers can therefore work more effectively with farmers to design experiments that intend to evaluate different types of technologies under the prevailing farmer circumstances. This is in line with what Salomon and Engel (1997) refer to as *facilitating networking for information* change in viewpoint which shifts the focus of extension from 'transferring technology to a passive farmer'.

### **Credit**

The adoption of new technology requires complementary inputs which require a greater outlay of expenditure on the part of adopters. Income generated within the farm may not be adequate to finance the additional expenditure. Applying for assistance from credit institutions could fill such a gap. Lending policies differ from one type of institution to another; some will provide cash while others advance credit in the form of working capital. For cash advances, many institutions require collateral, which, for most farmers is the title deed to their land. This requirement disadvantages women, who, customarily do not have rights of ownership of land and they cannot therefore raise a title as security. A possible way to alleviate this constraint is to

have a group of women farmers pool some resources together and apply for credit through a group. If one wishes to apply for individual credit consideration, other members of the group become the guarantors. Some credit institutions now recognize this collective action approach as one way through which poor and disadvantaged women farmers can access resources. Through this collective action effort it is also possible for a women group to build up some savings and convert these to a revolving fund for its members. The advantage of this approach is that it empowers women by placing the control of financial resources and decisions regarding their utilization in their hands. Such investments in social capital (Narayan and Pritchett, 1997) have been shown to have a much larger effect (5–8 times) on household incomes than investments in human capital such as education for example in rural Tanzania. But lack of funds is a major constraint that limits women's participation in collective action activities that can help them get out of the quagmire of poverty through pooling resources and sharing benefits accruing to groups.

### **Women, food security and nutrition**

Food security refers to a guarantee of enough food throughout the year for every member of the household in order to maintain a healthy and active life. Food can be produced by either the household through agricultural activities or generated through purchases. The consumption of adequate food both quantitatively and qualitatively is the sure way of guaranteeing sound nutrition for the household. Determinants of nutritional status which are related to access to food include:

- Purchasing power of household,
- Demands on a women's time and energy,
- Skills and knowledge in preparing safe and nutritious food,

- Family size and child spacing,
- Women's education.

The Kenyan woman plays multiple roles in production and reproduction. She is in the home nurturing her children, in the fields cultivating, in the market buying and selling, all with the aim of enhancing the well being of the family, often at the expense of her own health. The traditional role of men as “bread winners” has changed over the years. Today, most able-bodied men have migrated from rural areas in search of employment in distant towns. This has thrust the women squarely into the food production role, quite apart from her traditional ones. The change however does not reflect in the area of resource entitlement and allocation. She still has no ownership of the land she tills, leave alone the food she produces and the livestock she keeps. They belong to the man who can starve her or throw her out of the homestead at will. It is interesting that although female headed households experience greater economic stress than male headed ones, female headed households pay more attention to food security and food needs of children in particular. Growth, menstruation, pregnancy and lactation place high demand on adequate nutrition for the woman. Many women in Kenya suffer from both marginal and trunk malnutrition. Despite this they will still be required to fulfill their multiple roles – often hard labor that puts further nutritional demand on the women. Food consumption practices differ from one area to another in Kenya. The same applies to food taboos. A good example is eggs which are prohibited for women and children in many cultures. Often the prohibited foods are the very ones which contain the micronutrients needed for the fine tuning of a woman's nutritional well-being. The nutritional problems of the women are most pronounced in rural areas and among the urban poor but not necessarily restricted to these groups. It is ironical that while women

contribute so disproportionately highly to food production, they are the ones who suffer disproportionately from food insecurity and inadequate nutrition.

### **Policies and Strategies**

Gender awareness is important for policy makers and decision-makers at different levels of public and private institutions. The process of policy formulation has to incorporate gender mainstreaming strategies.

Although most governments have been introducing new gender-specific laws of a general nature, gender issues are not considered in all the other laws of relevance to women's development. It has also been observed that many support institutions are not aware of the gender-specific constraints of women entrepreneurship and therefore unable to address them adequately when providing the necessary services.

Ministries in charge of the enhancement of the status of women, ministries responsible for SME development, NGOs, women organizations and technical cooperation projects and programmes should play an important role in emphasizing gender issues in the creation of a more enabling policy and legal environment.

In this connection, the importance of the systematic collection and analysis of gender specific data and information for gender-sensitive industrial policy formulation and implementation cannot be overemphasized. This is necessary in order to identify the specific constraints and needs prior to the formulation of any development programme targeting women.

Public and private sector institutions often lack the capacity to develop and apply the necessary methodologies to implement existing gender-sensitive policies, laws and regulations. There is a need to strengthen their capacities in terms of both the development of methodologies and tools, and the skills to implement them.

Women thrift programmes should be redesigned to keep up with changes in the global environment. In addition, women should be given the support and training needed for them to move away from a mere survival level of production and income generation, and to achieve growth and competitiveness.

Business and industry networks for women are key elements in facilitating access to the information, technology, markets and raw materials relevant to the development, sustainability or expansion of their businesses. Women in general have limited exposure to outside contacts. One of the weaknesses of women's business organizations and associations, as well as individual businesswomen, is the lack of networking, which could considerably facilitate their access to economic opportunities and resources. Accordingly, networking of women with national, regional and international business associations should be facilitated. Specific attention should also be paid to North/South and South/South networking. Business and industry associations, women's associations, support institutions, and the international community are all important actors to assist women entrepreneurs in accessing business and industry networks at national, regional and international levels. This assistance should also include the networking of women entrepreneurs and their organizations with banks, credit and investment institutions and marketing facilities. Women's desks should play an active role in facilitating the access of women to various services and networking possibilities, while technical cooperation projects and programmes should play a facilitating role in networking.

Women initiatives in developing countries need assistance in identifying opportunities for investment and /or technology transfer through investment forums, formulating and screening project profiles and proposals, promoting proposals, identifying partners, negotiating investment projects and technology transactions, and assisting with the implementation phase.

## **Concluding remarks**

This paper, using Kenya as an example, has highlighted the key issues affecting rural women as farmers in smallholder sector where agriculture is commercialized through cash crop production. It echoes the concerns of those involved in the debate on gender issues that focus more attention to women's role in the process of rural development. It once again brings to fore the stereotypic notions of the roles of men and women. It is often argued that the division of labor along sexual lines is a strongly ingrained human trait which characterizes all human societies. And that since gender roles are determined more by culture and not by biology, the actual pattern of male and female activities is devised by each society according to its beliefs about the productive and reproductive functions of its members.

The evidence is overwhelming; women are the primary force that drives the primary agricultural sector and by extension the secondary processing sector. And while there are indices that could be used to estimate women's contribution to the gross domestic product, no effort is made towards this end such that this contribution remains unaccounted for. As players in the economic arena, women remain largely invisible and their contribution is unjustifiably undervalued. To achieve a balanced division of farm labor, and to increase women's participation in cash crop farming, the current advocacy for gender balanced development should be encouraged by incorporating:

- Education for increased awareness among the largely illiterate rural women. This would no doubt enable them to appreciate the economic benefits of cash cropping and the advancement of their rights as individuals and women,

- The right of women to exercise control over resources and benefits accruing from their efforts. This calls for advocacy for increased empowerment of women to give them a higher stake in decision-making,
- Targeted policy interventions aimed at women and in particular, the identification of an appropriate package of incentives to encourage women to engage in more productive activities (including cash cropping) which compensate their labor according to their productivity,
- Review and/or repeal of legislation which encourages discrimination of women in all spheres of development,
- Mobilize resources for access by women entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector,
- Advocacy for appropriate techniques of agricultural production so as to increase productivity and incomes of and reduce the burden of rural women, and
- An assessment of the bottlenecks rural women face: e.g. lack of collateral which in effect limit their access to productive resources such as credit for investment and thus hamper general improvement of the life of rural women.

A re-orientation in views and beliefs is needed whereby men and women are seen as equal partners in the business of poverty alleviation, food security and protection of the environment for sustainable development. There is need to open avenues that provide equal opportunities to all to develop and exploit their potentialities. At the macro level there is need to evolve a new commitment in political will that puts in place a policy framework and institutional mechanisms that equitably address the interests of women in all spheres of their lives. For them to have the desired impact, poverty alleviation programmes must take into account the special and unfavorable circumstances facing women. Creation of awareness about women and

development requires the adoption of a development culture among potential women and among youth in general, as the future actors. There is a need to create awareness in families and local communities so that they would support women's attempts to start businesses. This could be done if local support institutions, professional associations, governments, media and women's associations put emphasis on creating awareness about women and development. Media and school campaigns, exposure to role models and targeted training could also be used for this purpose. This is expected to feed into the strategies for creating an enabling environment to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. But this hope must hinge upon the commitment of the rest of humanity to recognize that the women have equal rights to a wholesome life and that theirs is not subordinate to that of any other class of people.

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