

# Social Cultural Challenges Affecting Women Leaders of Self Help Groups in Bahati Ward, Nakuru County

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## Abstract

Self-help groups aim at promoting socio-economic development among the poor especially women, yet they are often faced with challenges that affect the groups' leadership which ends up affecting the groups' performance. In Bahati Ward, for example, 7 out of 95 women groups and 2 out of 33 mixed self-help groups had gone dormant by the end of 2013. The purpose of this study was to investigate socio-cultural challenges affecting women leaders of self-help groups in Bahati ward. The study was carried out using a survey research design. The study was carried out on a population of 321 respondents. Stratified sampling purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to select 97 respondents. Data was collected using Questionnaire and an interview schedule which were validated using expert opinion from lecturers at Egerton University, Department of Community Development Studies, who examined and gave advice on the face and content validity. The Questionnaire was pilot tested in two self-help groups in the neighboring Kiamaina ward, and was used after achieving a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.78. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics of percentages and frequencies. Qualitative data collected from interviews was coded and organized into emerging themes and sub-themes. The study found out that the socio-cultural challenges that affect women leader SHGs are lack of common goals in a group, illiteracy among members, little respect for female leaders, and low social class integration. The county and national government should organize training for women leaders on business management, monitoring and evaluation, and report writing. Likewise, they should review their policies on long procedures followed by the group members to register their groups and to acquire government funding.

**Keywords:** Socio-cultural challenges, Women Leaders, Leadership

## 1. Introduction

One of the Millennium Development Goals (2010) is to build women as agents of development to reduce poverty (United Nations, 2006). Investing in women has a multiple effect on productivity, efficiency and sustained economic growth. When women are economically empowered, a country is able to build a sound economic base. Increasing women's access to education, jobs, land and other resources will result into inclusive growth, sustainable development, and long-term prosperity. Empowering women therefore increases the national income, which in turn leads to increased productivity.

Despite this expected progress women's economic empowerment is growing at a low pace across different regions and countries. This is due to different challenges facing women leaders at both family and community levels. Women are rarely accorded the opportunities that will allow them to fulfill their potential. For instance, they have limited access to land, property, housing, credit, technology, markets and extension services. According to Women Direct (2006), if we narrow the existing world gender gap in employment, we can increase per capita income by 10%–14%, by 2020. When women are healthy, educated, employed, and empowered, they are able to break the vicious cycle of poverty in their families, communities, and countries.

Self-help groups are one of the interventions in developing countries to empower women. However, not all groups have a designated leader, and their leadership tasks and roles are shared amongst a group of leaders elected by, and from members of that group. For the purpose of this study, women leaders are leaders of female gender who are in charge of self-help groups (chairladies, treasurers and secretaries of self-help groups). In India, many SHG's are micro-credits where members make regular savings through monthly contributions to raise enough capital for the group to begin lending (Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002). Funds may then be lent back to the members or to others in the village with an interest which is later shared among the group members. Leaders to these groups are affected by challenges ranging from household poverty to lack of access to financial resources required by their groups.

In Kenya, SHGs are registered under the Department of Social Development. Kenyans form self-help groups for different socio-economic purposes including; tree nurseries, horticultural farming, bee keeping, poultry keeping, cereals farming, goats keeping, dairy farming, commercial plots, fish farming, bricks making, and cereals shops and stores (Republic of Kenya, 2010). Women leaders of these groups encounter different socio-cultural challenges

To enhance success of the important role SHGs play in socio-economic development of the local communities, these groups are managed at Ward levels under Community Development Assistant (CDA). Data from Bahati Ward social development office records reveals that there were 151 registered self-help groups engaged in different income generating activities in 2013. Among them, 62% were women groups, while 13%

were mixed self-help groups. Despite their existence, some of the women leaders in self-help groups face different challenges that may prevent them from realizing their dreams. The study examined social-cultural challenges facing women leaders in self-help groups in Bahati ward.

## **2.0 Research Methodology**

### **2.1 Research Design**

The study was carried out using a survey research design. A survey was ideal for this study because the researcher conducted a study of facts as they were at the time of the study (Fraenkel and Warren, 2000).

### **2.2 Area of Study**

The study was carried out in Bahati Ward in Nakuru County, 0<sup>0</sup>3' N and 36<sup>0</sup>15'E. It is a rural area housing the middle income earners especially small scale farming and businesses. It is preferred by residents because of its efficient transport and communication being along Nakuru – Nyahururu road. It has a population of 44,891 in an area of 160.8 Km<sup>2</sup>. The poverty index of the area is 38% and is characterized by a huge wealth gap between the poor and the rich people (Republic of Kenya, 2007). It is bordered by Rongai to the south, Subukia to the East and Nakuru town to the west.

Being a sub-urban rural area, women in the area require forming and joining women groups in order to finance small scale businesses like shops, open markets, bars and restaurants. The sub-urban nature of the area also demands food, and SHGs are a good intervention for women to establish horticultural units, vegetables and dairy farming especially zero grazing. The study was carried out in the area since it attracts different economic activities that promotes micro-financing hence, SHGs.

### **2.3 Population of the Study**

The accessible population for this study was 151 self-help groups in Bahati Ward. The study was carried out on a population of 321 respondents composed of 285 women leaders of women self-help groups and 36 women leaders from mixed self help groups. The women leaders included 95 chairladies, 95 secretaries and 95 treasurers from 95 women groups; and 3 chairladies, 18 secretaries and 15 treasurers from 33 mixed self-helps groups. Bahati Ward Community Development Assistant (CDA), Ward Forest Officer (WFO), and Ward Agricultural Officer (WAO), were interviewed as key informers so as to get qualitative data that was used as explanations on quantitative data collected using the questionnaire.

### **2.4 Sampling Procedure and Sample Size**

A sample is a subset of the population of interest in a given research exercise. As long as a sample is properly constituted, it is capable of capturing the salient characteristics of the defined population (Mbeche, 2004). The study was carried out on 97 respondents who were selected using purposive sampling, sampling women leaders in SHGs. The leaders were then subjected to stratified sampling to get two strata of women leaders from women SHGs and mixed self-help groups. The two strata (women and mixed SHGs) were further stratified into type of leadership. In each case 30% of the chairpersons, treasurers and secretaries were randomly selected as recommended by Mugenda & Mugenda(1999). The sampling matrix for the study is illustrated in Table 3.

### **2.5 Instrumentation**

Data was collected using a questionnaire and interview schedules. The questionnaire with closed ended (forced choice) questions was administered to collect data from women leaders. The questionnaire for self-help group leaders was organized in three sections. Section A dealt with background information, section B had items intended to collect responses on economic, socio-cultural and political challenges facing women leadership of self-help groups; while section C had questions that sought information on women leadership. Respondents gave their responses to each of the given items by marking with a tick in the appropriate boxes at the end of each statement. The boxes were arranged into five Likert scale indicators in the table's key. The key guided the respondents to indicate their appropriate responses, for instance (S.A) for statements they strongly agreed with, (A) for agree, (N.C) where they had no comment, (D) where they disagreed, and (S.D) where they strongly disagreed. Interview schedules were administered to Bahati Ward Community Development Assistant, Ward Forest Officer and Ward Agricultural Officer to seek information on the challenges facing women leaders in the ward.

### **2.6 Validity of the Instruments**

According to Sarantakar (2005), validity of an instrument refers to the ability of the instrument to be what it purports to be. A valid instrument must therefore be able to measure what it is intended to measure. The questionnaire was prepared based on objectives of the study and then taken for expert opinion from lecturers in Egerton University, Department of Applied Community Development Studies who examined and gave advice on

their content and face validity.

### 2.7 Reliability of the Instruments

Reliability refers to the extent to which a measuring tool produces consistent measurements over time (Best JW and Kahn JV, 2006). To test the reliability of the study, a pilot study for the questionnaire was conducted on two self-help groups on a population of six women SHGs comprising of two chairladies, two treasurers and two secretaries from the neighbouring Kiamaina ward of Nakuru County; and interview schedules were conducted on the Community Development Assistant, Ward Agricultural Officer and Ward Forest from the same ward. The results of the pilot study were then analyzed using cronbatch alpha coefficient. When the instruments achieved a correlation coefficient of 0.78, they were administered in the main study.

### 2.8 Data Collection Procedure

An introductory letter from Egerton University was taken to the National Commission for Science and Technology Innovation (NACOSTI), to secure a research permit. The permit was presented to the Community Development Assistant and the chiefs to allow the researcher meet the respondents. The questionnaires were self-delivered to the respondents in their respective locations. Respondents were given two weeks to respond to the instrument. After the expiry of the two weeks deadline, questionnaires were self-collected in preparation for data analysis. The Community Development Assistant, Ward Agricultural Officer and Ward Forest officer were then visited on appointment to collect data using an interview schedule.

### 2.9 Data Analysis

Quantitative data collected from questionnaires was summarized in frequency distribution tables and the responses analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and percentages with the help of SPSS computer package. Qualitative data collected from interviews were coded and organized into emerging themes and sub-themes. These themes were used to explain the quantitative data analyzed earlier.

### 3.0 Results And Discussion

*Table 1: Socio-Cultural Challenges Facing Women Leadership of Self-Help Groups in Bahati Ward.*

Challenge	Responses in %		
	Agree	NC	Disagree
The group lacks a common goal.	59	14	27
Group members have divergent interests.	59	12	29
Illiteracy among members affect their performance/ commitment	68	3	29
Members have little respect for female leaders	57	12	31
Members from different social classes have low integration	55	11	34

The table shows that respondents reacted differently to the items given to measure socio-cultural challenges facing women leaders of self-help groups in Bahati ward. In the first statement “The group lacks a common goal”, 59% of the respondents agreed while 27% of them disagreed. This means that the many groups in the ward do not have a common goal they pursue.

This can be attributed to the fact that apart from monthly contributions that are common in all the groups, majority of the self-help groups pursue any project that comes their way in time so long as it appeals to the members at that time. A group leader will therefore find it difficult to steer a group that is not focused. According to Sema Kenya (2007), there are high illiteracy levels and ignorance among rural SHGs that make people have different scope to life. For example, if they had high literacy, then members would join professional groups more in line with their interests.

Respondents were also required to respond to the item ‘Group members have divergent interests’. Among them, 59% agreed and 30% of them disagreed. This means that members also differ at their personal level, on their interests in joining self-help groups. As found out at the group level, as members join a group with a certain interest, they are loyal to the group so long as their interests are met. This presents group leaders with a difficult task of merging their interests. Just like having a common goal in a group, personal interests among members influence success in a group. IDS (2004) attribute this to different levels of education among group members. Almendariz & Morduch (2004) says that in such groups, mistrust may crop in.

Respondents also gave their opinions on the statement ‘Illiteracy among members affects their performance/ commitment’. Among them, 68% agreed and 29% disagreed. This means that illiteracy among the group members as perceived by the leaders affect their performance. Bahati CDA, WAO and WFO identified lack of adequate information on development issues among group members especially women. This make some members fail to participate in group discussions and activities. According to Maliti (2010) SHGs members require training and skills for them to excel in their group activities. However, the impact of training will be highly affected by the literacy levels of members who constitute the groups.

Respondents also reacted to the statement “Members have little respect for female leaders. In this case, 57% of them agreed while 31% of them disagreed. This means that some group members disrespect women as leaders. This can be attributed to gender stereotypes that exist on women as leaders. According to Eagly and Carli (2007) many communities in Africa still uphold gender stereotypes against women leaders.

Respondents were expected to react to the statement “members from different social classes have low integration”. Among them, 55% agreed with the statement, while 34% disagreed. This means that social classes affect cohesion among groups making it hard for self-help group leaders. This can be attributed to the fact that while members from different socio-economic classes join groups, their aspirations and socialization differs disintegrating the groups. Leaders find it hard to make such a group grow in the long run. In India, social classes just like the socio-economic classes in Kenya leads to different goals in life. Similarly, majority social class always overshadows the minority social class (Khanka, 2007).

#### 4.0 Conclusion

The main socio-cultural challenge facing women leaders of SHGs in Bahati ward is illiteracy among members which may have contributed to lack of common goal among group members, having divergent interests, little respect for female leaders and low integration among members from different social classes. This may lead to lack of understanding among group members as well as lack of cohesion within the group which may hinder the success of the group.

#### 5.0 Recommendations

The study recommends that; the local government should organize classes for adult women in self help groups to acquire knowledge and skills in business management and public relation. These skills are required for successful contribution in development of self help groups.

#### 5.1 Suggestions for Further Research

Further research should be carried out on effect of domestic violence on women in leadership of self help group

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