

Women constitute a large number of illiterates in developing countries. In Kenya, most women are illiterate, for example, a rural literacy survey conducted in 1980-81, found that only 38.4 per cent of rural development. They produce more than 70 per cent of the Nation's food. Women's household chores are enormous and therefore some of them have formed women groups through which their collective efforts are channeled. Most illiterate women in Kenya both in the rural and urban areas feel that what they need is practical education and training. They believe that an opportunity to learn health and nutritional skills will benefit their families and that if they learn a marketable skill they will contribute to the family's income, and therefore improve its health, nutrition, and general well being.

The study therefore set out to examine the educational and socio-economic background of women in groups in order to establish the calibre of women in groups. It was necessary to investigate into the calibre of women because in terms of development and equitable distribution of resources women groups are a target group since they represent many families. It is also very essential for policy planners to determine the composition of women groups in order to avoid tendencies of assisting only the well to do in the society at the expense of the poor women in society. The study also focused on factors which influence women's choice of non-formal education activities and acquisition of relevant skills. Organization of women group activities and problems which hinder proper functioning of groups was considered.

Four research questions were addressed: 1) what is the educational background of women in-group? 2) What is the socio-economic background of women in groups? 3) Why women decide on certain forms of non-formal education activities and how do they acquire relevant skills 4) How do women organize non-formal education activities and what problems do they experience in groups?

The analysis and interpretation of data comprised descriptive analysis where simple means and percentages were used. In some cases, the responses were reported verbatim and discussed accordingly. The results were presented in tabular form for clarity and comparison.

There were a number of important findings. It turned out that women in Mombasa North were generally literate. About 40.3 per cent of the respondents had primary education, 8.1 per cent secondary education, 34.7 per cent illiterate and only 16.7 per cent had attended adult literacy classes. It also found that formal education is very necessary for the effective operation of non-formal education.

The socio-economic background of women in groups revealed that group affiliation tends to be ethnically homogenous. Religion is an important factor which tends to influence group affiliation. The majorities of women are married and have children. Some women are middle aged, while others are advanced in age. In most groups women are generally poor.

The choice of non-formal education activities is determined by priority needs of particular groups. A number of factors, including, geographical location of the area, availability of resources, availability of market and profit-making prospects influence priority needs of different groups. Non-formal education involves acquisition of relevant skills. Women are taught how to set up beehives, poultry keeping, goat-rearing, block-making, handicraft, gardening skills and

many others. They acquire relevant skills by visiting similar projects in other areas. They also attend workshops, demonstrations, exhibitions, visual aids, and discussions. Extension workers from both the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Health play an important role in facilitating non-formal education.

The organization of groups involves selection of leaders, maintenance of membership and planning of activities. It was found that effective organization of the group influences the maintenance of group membership. Education also influences the quality of leadership.

Women face a number of problems. One important problem is lack of money to facilitate progress of their projects. A related problem is lack of market for handicraft products (baskets, mats, chairs, ropes and table-clothes). Most groups produce similar products which compete for the limited market.

In the light of the findings, recommendations were made which would assist in solving some of the problems raised in the study.