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Engendering Cooperatives to Address Structural Violence Among the Maasai of Kajiado Central Sub-county, Kenya

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Abstract

Structural violence in the form of gender inequalities is reproduced by well-meaning cooperatives that fail to consider resource access and ownership dynamics in communities. In many patriarchal communities resources are gendered, creating boundaries for these genders that give them power. Among the Maasai, milk and its products belong to women as the cattle belong to the men. Rapid urbanization and climate change, seems to have led to loss of men's ability to fulfil their provider societal expectation, as their herds had become smaller and could not be sold with ease as they provided a constant income from milk sales in cooperatives. This study sought to answer the question of how engendered cooperatives address structural violence in Kajiado Central Sub-county. The study utilized descriptive survey research design which allowed for the use of mixed methods approach. The milk cooperatives were purposively sampled while the respondents were randomly and purposively sampled to describe and compare the benefits derived from cooperative membership and non-membership. It was established that women's space in the livestock production industry had improved tremendously with the introduction of the cooperatives. Women were earning a steady income from sale of milk. However, the change in the power relations between Maasai men and women resulted in vulnerable Maasai men who indirectly engaged in the milk business considered a female domain to mitigate their societal expectations. Those who felt that they could not be engaged in that space, became physically violent, neglected their duties or divorced and separated from their spouses. In conclusion, cooperatives are critical empowerment tools that need to comprehensively empower all. Engendering cooperatives should move beyond tokenism to critically reviewing gender identities, power relations and roles. This would, expose diverse agencies and vulnerabilities hence a comprehensive empowerment.

Keywords: Engendering, cooperatives, milk cooperatives, structural violence

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Introduction

For the purposes of this paper we define engendering as ensuring that the needs and interest on men and women are put into consideration when forming and

implementing the mandates of cooperatives. Cooperatives according to Majee and Hoyt (2011) are attempts by local people to control the social economic destiny of their communities. Galtung (1996) sees structural

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violence as inequalities that come from the social structure itself, between humans and set of humans (societies). This is to mean, the inequalities between men and women comes from themselves and their societies and not nature.

Kipuri and Ridgewell (2008) posit that relations between Maasai men and women are characterised by inequalities, with women more vulnerable and depended on men. This kind of analysis is based on a static analysis of similarity and difference where men are perceived as more powerful than women and the individual gender as similar which is far from the reality. As Myrittinen, Naujoks and El Bushra (2014) would argue, both men and women are diverse. Their social power varies depending on their different identity markers such as age, economic abilities, geographical location, and excetra. Rapid urbanization according to Republic of Kenya (2013) had affected the size of land units in Kajiado County. Mushrooming of towns had denied pastoralism space. Most households were therefore forced to keep small herds, as a result denying the man the opportunity to dispose livestock as often as he would have desired, which resulted in a struggle on whether to sell the few livestock available to supplement available livestock products for household use or let the household keep them for production of milk and milk products for sale. On the other hand, climate change resulted in water scarcity and less viable pasture lands making the pastoral community sedentary. Kajiado Central Sub-county has been characterised by seasonal lack of water, prolonged drought resulting in lower cattle milk producing capacity (Republic of Kenya, 2013). This frustration adds on to the already existing structural inequalities in the community where, according to Talle (2003) men control all productive and reproductive resources.

However, when Maasai women attain old age, they enjoy more autonomy and decision-making power over younger women. This therefore means that age plays a key role for emancipation of women. This argument is

supported by Myrteinen *et al.* (2014) who advocate for viewing both men and women beyond the sex categorization. Maasai women do not own livestock; they own the products, that is, milk and milk products, although, those who bear sons keep custody of livestock for their sons, who assume ownership upon marriage (Kipuri & Ridgewell, 2008). Milk is relegated to the women by men as they perceive it to have little significant value as compared to the cattle which fetches more money when sold. The men can control women by threatening or actually selling cattle at will and hence reduction of quantity of milk to the perceived disadvantage of the women. With commoditization of milk, women dairy cooperatives were on the rise in Kajiado Central Sub-county and had presented opportunities for marketing and resource pooling begging the questions: how gendered are the milk cooperatives? How has dairy cooperatives changed the lives of women? What is the difference between women who sold their milk through cooperatives and those that sold it individually? What is the men's perception towards these dairy cooperatives?

METHODOLOGY

This study was guided by a descriptive cross-sectional research design. This study aimed to answer what, who, how much and how to indicate the influence engendering of cooperatives had on structural violence. 384 respondents were randomly selected from four milk collection centres, namely Enkorika, Nkoile, Ibisil and Kajiado town. 10 respondents with key information regarding dairy cooperatives in the sub county were purposively selected. Data was collected through survey and interview methods with a questionnaire and interview guide administered. The quantitative data generated was analysed through descriptive and correlation analysis and qualitative data was analysed through content analysis. Engendering cooperatives to address structural violence is enshrined in the International Cooperative Alliance's

BluePrint for Cooperative Decade (2013-2023) that advocates for cooperatives to promote gender equality. It argues that cooperatives give individuals a space to participate, voice and influence within the enterprise (Mills & Davies, 2013). In their study on how cooperatives advance gender equality McMurtry and McMurtry (2015) established that there was a strong link between women's involvement in cooperatives and poverty reduction. Cooperatives established the status of women through access to employment, improved conditions of work and social benefits. Better organizing positioned women to address personal and communal needs such as freedom from violence. Although Indian women as Agarwal (1994) argues largely did not have access or control of productive resources as the culture in the patrilineal society advocates for male ownership and in the matrilineal close family marriage to keep productive resources within the family. This would therefore mean that, membership and participation based on the assumption that households are congruent units where resources are equitably share would further marginalise women. Seemingly membership into cooperatives has considered this factor since in India the poor and self-employed can make contributions to the economy and society visible in regular employment and affordable services (McMurtry & McMurtry, 2015). Although in Africa there are strides in promoting participation cooperatives with 40% households belonging to a cooperative (Mill & Davies, 2013) majority being in agriculture and credit cooperatives, little strides seem to have been made in a continent characterised by gendered resources as Hamasi (2017) argues everything is gendered such as trees, animals, food etc. Carr (2008) argues there are male and female crops. Male crops such as rice, sorghum, tobacco, coffee, cocoa, maize and yams whereas cocoyam, plantain, onions and egg plants are considered female crops. Crops that have lower capital value are considered female and the person who keeps the revenue determines the gender of the crops.

In Kenya as Wanyama (2009) asserts 80% of its population derives from income either directly or indirectly through cooperative activities. There were over 20,000 registered cooperative movements, the greatest contributor to social and economic development being savings and credit cooperatives (SACCOs). Although most cooperatives in the agricultural sector had been on the decline, the dairy cooperatives had stabilized. Kenyan society being patriarchal, there were largely few cooperatives that focused on the needs of the marginalised based on gender.

In Kajiado County, there were 30 registered cooperatives. Dairy cooperatives were engendered as they dealt with access and control to resources in the Maasai spaces considered feminine. Economic Theory of Social Change by Karl Marx and Gender Relations Approach by Myrntinen, *et al.* (2014) guided this study. Economic Theory of Social Change, proposed that changes in the economic activities that communities engaged in could radically change their social status, hence by studying the dairy cooperatives, would predict social changes in the communities they were situated. Dairy cooperatives such as Maasai Kajiado Dairy Cooperative Ltd, a dairy cooperative in Kajiado Central Sub-county, had a membership of 7 women groups, with eight collection points across the Sub-county (Muiruri, 2014). Cooperatives according to Vieta and Lionais (2015) were important organizational tools for development and revival of local communities. Cooperatives empowered women, but from a Gender Relations Approach, other power relations markers such as economic ability, geographical location had not been put into consideration as climate change and rapid urbanization had changed the economic situation of the Maasai men who owned the livestock as they could not keep large herds of livestock. This meant that men had become vulnerable as they did not have adequate livestock for sale as well as to keep for their significant wealth. This would be worst for men whose income came entirely

from livestock keeping. On the other hand, with the commoditization of milk, women were getting more empowered through the dairy cooperatives as they had guaranteed market for their milk hence a consistent income.

Data analysis: Data analysis was carried out to answer the following questions: How gendered are the milk cooperatives? How have cooperatives changed the lives of women? What is the difference between women who sell their milk through cooperatives and those who sell individually? What is the men’s perception towards these dairy cooperatives? The analysis was both quantitative and qualitative with the findings merged during the discussion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

McMurtry and McMurtry (2015) argue that cooperatives are gendered when representation of both men and women in the decision-making position is equitable. Most of the times less than 10 percent of women

are represented on the board. There is no significant relationship between gender and membership in dairy cooperatives with significance value of -.049 and a p-value of .337 (Table 1). This meant that gender did not determine who was a member of the dairy cooperatives regardless the fact that dairy cooperatives were a female domain for the Maasai. Although from an interview, one female respondent said:

‘in our community milk and its products are a woman’s affair, all the people in the milk value chain are women. Actually, the milk that I sell to the cooperative belongs to me and the money I am paid, I use it to buy necessities at home...’ (Respondent A, 2019).

From this quote it is observed that dairy cooperatives strive at promoting gender equality but their exclusivity to focus on women marginalised men who may have lost livestock in the many droughts experienced in the sub county.

Table 1: Gender inequalities in dairy cooperatives membership in Kajiado Central sub-county

		Gender	Age	Education	Membership in dairy cooperatives
Gender	Pearson Correlation	1	-	.111(*)	-.049
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.144(**)	.030	.337
	N	384	384	384	384
Age	Pearson Correlation	-	1	-.087	-.022
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.144(**)	.	.090	.672
	N	384	384	384	384
education	Pearson Correlation	.111(*)	-.087	1	.162(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.030	.090	.	.001
	N	384	384	384	384
membership in dairy cooperatives	Pearson Correlation	-.049	-.022	.162(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.337	.672	.001	.
	N	384	384	384	384

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The assumption that only men in patriarchal societies were hegemonic was false and in this case the cooperatives in Kajiado Sub-county were yet to address structural violence adequately. The statistics suggested otherwise that men were represented by proxy in these women only cooperatives, as some had their wives as members. It was education that had significant relationship with the membership in these cooperatives with a significance level of .162 and a p-value of .001 (Table 1). This meant that age was visible in the dairy cooperative membership with women age between 18-23 years constituting a 17.2% of the respondents.

Dairy cooperatives and women’s lives

Majee and Hoyt (2011) in their study insinuate that cooperatives promote democracy and people-centred development strategies. While the study is gender blind it still points at the benefits of cooperatives. One woman said, *‘before the cooperatives were formed it was difficult to continuously sell two hundred litres of milk in two days. I let the calves suckle. Now I am reaping the benefits from these cooperatives. I have been able to use the money I have been paid to buy water tanks for my home’* (Respondent B, 2019).

This quotation points at how women’s need for financial independence had been promoted by formation of cooperatives in the sub county. This agreed with Majee and Hoyt (2011) as women were at the centre of development with their milk value chain engagement. The statistics go further to indicate that besides the financial independence, the dairy cooperatives had

also reproduced violence where families had dissolved as a result of divorce and separation (Table 2). This could be attributed to the shift in the balance of power where women were supposedly no longer be subordinate to their husbands.

Table 2: Effect of dairy cooperatives on women’s lives (N=384)

<i>Effect</i>	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>%</i>
Increased household income	159	41.4
Improved diet for the family	151	39.3
Increased divorce	63	16.4
All of the above	11	2.9

Source: Researcher 2019

Women’s membership in cooperatives vs. non-members

The statistical presentation highlights that cooperatives were preferred to selling milk individually as they guaranteed market for the women at 60.4% (Table 3), although the higher milk price by non-members would have drawn them out of the cooperatives if the milk market was stable. One woman said, *‘Those that sell to the cooperatives sell their milk at a lower price compared to the market price. But the demand is constant and reliable. Those that individually sell their milk, they sell it at a higher price but the demand is unreliable. Those that have little milk sell individually. Some of us we would incur a lot of losses were we to sell individually’* (Respondent C, 2019).

Another respondent observed thus, *‘cooperatives have promoted our sense of*

Table 3: Difference between women dairy cooperatives members vs. non-members (N=384)

<i>Difference between women in dairy cooperatives and those not in dairy cooperatives</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Inconsistent income for non-members	38	9.9
Higher milk price for non-members	68	17.7
Guaranteed market for milk	232	60.4
Less domestic violence for non-members	35	9.1
All of the above	11	2.9

Source: Researcher 2019

organizing. We are now in a position to approach even the county government to support our projects. We are have started thinking beyond supply milk to how we could add value to our milk so as to increase our income' (Respondent D, 2019). From the quotations the cooperatives seem to benefit most women whose milk production is higher. This, in my opinion reinforces inequalities as those women in the periphery continue being marginalised. Emancipation becomes a mirage for these women. However, non-cooperative women members were said to be less likely to experience domestic violence related to perceived male control loss due to women empowerment from milk sales.

Men's perception towards dairy cooperatives

The respondents believed that men felt that the milk cooperatives helped reduce the household burden for the men at 39.1% and that power had shifted in the household at 35.7% (Table 4).

Table4: Men's perception towards dairy cooperatives (N=384)

<i>Men's Perception</i>	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>%</i>
Reduced household burden	151	39.3
Has shifted power in the home	137	35.7
No impact, women income is none of their concern	51	13.3
Not concerned as milk is feminine	45	11.7

Source: Researcher 2019

Further from the interviews, one woman said *'Although men appear unbothered about milk proceeds, further interrogations may reveal otherwise. Since most of them have sold land sometimes without involving us. There is little land to keep large heads of cattle which can be disposed like before. Our*

heads have become smaller, we don't have adequate pasture to graze and we are preoccupied with other forms of employment. When I got paid for the milk I delivered to the cooperative. My husband stopped giving me money to buy my clothes and for the children. I buy food too' (Respondent E, 2019).

One responded said, *'Men support this project, some are indirect members, their wives are their scapegoat since they do not want to appear like they have taken to engaging in activities exclusive for women as our culture ascribes. This milk business is lucrative particularly if you have large heads of dairy cattle'* (Respondent F, 2019).

From these two quotations we can argue that, the more things change the more they remain the same. Men seem threatened by the levels commoditization of milk. Milk seems to have increased in capital value and cultural traditions do not seem to change to give the man the control of this resource whose economic value seems to increase. The only option left seemingly is to be indirectly active in the dairy cooperatives through their wives to ensure their control or being violent to ensure the financially empowered women continue being subordinate.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study are corroborated by McMurtry and McMurtry (2015) whose study showed that women across the globe were benefiting from the cooperative movement with a strong link between women's involvement in the cooperative movement and poverty reduction. Their findings however disputed Kipuri and Ridgewell (2008) who argue that membership into dairy cooperatives among the Maasai, was based on the dairy cow gendered ownership, which was male. Hence men were collecting the proceeds from milk sale in cooperatives.

Maasai women who were members of dairy cooperatives were empowered in terms of improved household diet, increased

income, a relative shift in social power where they were empowered enough to lobby the county government of Kajiado to support them in adding value to their milk and milk products. However, as characteristic of many engendered development, dairy cooperatives focused on women as marginalised without acknowledging the men too are marginalised in a patriarchal society. Kajiado Central Sub-county is characterised by rapid urbanization and sporadic drought which has put pressure on pastoral system of livelihood, marginalizing men whose households entirely depended on livestock and its products for their livelihood. As a result, these men largely do not meet the societal expectation of providing for their families making them abandon their responsibilities, turn violent or even divorce and separate from their spouses. Some men, who couldn't give into the frustration, used their wives to become cooperative members to ensure that they controlled the household income hence status quo. It becomes pertinent therefore not to cheer on women only cooperatives as vehicles that leave out the other gender which is also marginalised. The community in Kajiado Central Sub-county should change their attitudes towards access and control of resources, relating to changing geo-economical conditions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Engendering cooperatives in our opinion should be based on gender relations where prior to the development of cooperatives, an analysis of gender identities, roles and power relations of these communities is carried out. This would enable a comprehensive understanding of the gender diversities based on identity markers such as age, class, geographical location and education which make individuals (regardless of either being male or female) vulnerable or give them agency. As a result, specifically targeted engendered cooperatives would be developed ensuring, less structural violence and an empowered community.

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