

ECONOMIC STATUS AND EMPOWERMENT OF MOTHERS IN BUSIA COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract: *The study conducted a household (HH) survey (n =94) to establish women's economic empowerment in Busia County in the Republic of Kenya. Out of the targeted population, the study achieved a 70% response rate. Purposive random sampling was adopted concurrently in selecting the study households. In investigating women's economic status and empowerment the study choose to dwell on a number of several variables. The household (HH) survey tool sought the independence of the women's gender in making Household Expenditure Decisions, membership to Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) such as a women's group or a co-operative society, access to an android mobile phone, access to loans, and having trade skills. The findings indicate that women are not economically empowered to an extent of 70%-80% cutting across all ages. Add it recommends the following points of intervention for economically empowering women; skills equipment and training, establishment of childcare centres and access to credit.*

Keywords: *decision making, economic empowerment, women*

1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

At the national level according to a (KNBS, 2020) report, 29 percent of women aged 15-49 years in Kenya are empowered. The report further contends that women in urban areas are nearly twice as likely to be empowered compared to those in rural areas, with incidence rates of 40 and 22 percent, respectively. And empowerment is positively associated with household wealth. While only 6 percent of women belonging to the poorest wealth quintile are empowered, in the richest wealth quintile the rate reaches 53 percent. Other socio-economic characteristics are also relevant. Single and married women are more likely to be empowered, while the opposite is true for widowed women with only 12 percent of them empowered. Women in monogamous marriages are also more likely to be empowered compared to those in polygamous marriages. The empowerment rate was the highest among women aged 15-19 years and the lowest among those aged 40-49 years. Sex and educational attainment of the household head are also relevant. The incidence of women's empowerment ranged from 10 percent among households where the head has not completed any formal education to 62 percent where the head has completed high education.

One in every 10 women is living in extreme poverty (10.3 percent). The report further contends that if current trends continue, by 2030, an estimated 8 percent of the world's female population – 342.4 million women and girls – will still be living on less than \$2.15 a day. Most (220.9 million) will reside in sub-Saharan Africa.

Women are less likely to have access to social protection. Gender inequalities in employment and job quality result in gaps in access to social protection acquired through employment, such as pensions, unemployment benefits, or maternity protection. Coverage of women lags behind men by 8 percent (34.3 percent and 26.5 percent, respectively). Globally, an estimated 73.5 percent of women in wage employment do not have access to social protection.

Women are more food insecure than men. Gender gaps in food insecurity have grown from 1.7 percent in 2019 to more than 4 percent in 2021, with 31.9 percent of women moderately or severely food insecure compared to 27.6 percent of men. This is even more acute for older and Indigenous women, women of African descent, gender-diverse persons, persons with disabilities, and those living in rural and remote areas. Women and girls suffer most from the dearth of safely managed water and sanitation. Women and girls are responsible for water collection in 70 percent of households without access to water on the premises. Menstrual hygiene management is difficult in the absence of water, soap, and gender-responsive sanitation facilities, whether at home, school, or work. Women are less likely than men to have access to financial institutions or have a bank account. The gender gap in bank account ownership has dropped in 2021 after years of stagnation, although rates vary across economies. In developing economies, the gender gap stands at 6 per cent per cent while globally it sits at 4 per cent with 78 per cent of men reporting having an account at a formal financial institution compared to 74 per cent of women. The digital divide remains a gendered one with 37 per cent of women globally not using the internet, meaning 259 million fewer women have access to the internet than men.

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

According to the 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census (KPHC), women comprise 50.5 percent of the total population in the country. Nevertheless, their representation across well-being indicators is not equal to men. To begin with, women are more likely to be poor than men. Findings of the latest Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) & United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) 2020 Comprehensive Poverty Analysis report show that 65 percent of women aged 35-59 years are multidimensional poor compared to 56 percent of their male counterparts. The incidence of monetary poverty among women aged 35-59 years is 34 percent, while that of men is 12-30 percent. Similarly, 30 percent of women-headed households live below the monetary poverty line compared to 26 percent of those headed by men (KNBS, 2018: 64).

THE CARE ECONOMY

The care economy entails the production and consumption of goods and services necessary for the physical, social, mental and emotional well-being of care-dependent groups, such as children, the elderly, the ill and people with disabilities, as well as healthy, prime working-age adults. Care-related economic production activities are wide-ranging, including both direct and indirect services and production of goods. Direct care provisioning entails one-to-one relational tasks between the caregiver and the care receiver, such as breastfeeding a baby, helping a child with homework, tending to a bed-bound elderly person or giving emotional support to someone diagnosed with a terminal illness.

RELATED STUDIES

The economic status and empowerment of mothers in Kenya is a multifaceted issue that intertwines various social, economic, and cultural dimensions. Economic empowerment is crucial for enhancing women's access to resources and opportunities, which in turn can significantly affect their decision-making capabilities and overall well-being. Basnet (2023) emphasizes that economic empowerment encompasses access to jobs, financial services, property, and skills development, which are essential for women's participation in the formal economy. This is particularly relevant in Kenya, where women's involvement in economic activities remains limited due to systemic barriers, including inadequate access to credit and technology (Basnet, 2023).

Research indicates that women's empowerment is closely linked to maternal health outcomes. For instance, Anderson et al. (2020) found that empowered women are more likely to seek skilled assistance during childbirth, which is critical for reducing maternal mortality rates. The barriers to accessing maternal health services are often compounded by economic constraints, as women from lower economic backgrounds tend to have less access to healthcare facilities (Byford-Richardson et al., 2013; Kawakatsu et al., 2014). This underscores the importance of economic status in influencing health-seeking behaviors among mothers in Kenya.

Moreover, the role of cooperatives and community-based organizations in promoting women's economic empowerment cannot be overstated. Olabisi (2015) study highlights that cooperative membership can significantly enhance women's economic status by providing them with resources and support networks. Similarly, the Women Enterprise Fund in Kenya aims to empower women through financial support and capacity-building initiatives, although challenges remain regarding the effective management of these funds (BARASA, 2022). This indicates that while initiatives exist, their implementation and impact on women's empowerment require further scrutiny.

The intersection of education and economic empowerment is also critical. Diiro et al. (2018) demonstrate that women's empowerment in agriculture leads to increased productivity, which is vital for economic growth. Furthermore, educational programs that promote gender equality can enhance women's skills and livelihoods, as noted in the study on women-led NGOs in Kenya ("Assessing the Contribution of Women-Led NGOs to Gender Equality and Empowerment in Kenya: Challenges, Successes, and Future Prospects", 2023). This suggests that empowering women through education not only benefits individual families but also contributes to broader economic development.

In addition, the impact of microfinance on women's empowerment has been documented extensively. Fwamba et al. (2015) assert that microfinance institutions play a pivotal role in enhancing the economic empowerment of women entrepreneurs, providing them with the necessary capital to start and sustain their businesses. However, the effectiveness of such programs often hinges on the financial literacy of the participants, as highlighted by Lee and Huruta (2022), who argue that understanding financial concepts is crucial for maximizing the benefits of microfinance.

In conclusion, the economic status and empowerment of mothers in Kenya are influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including access to resources, education, healthcare, and community support systems. Addressing these factors holistically is essential for fostering an environment where mothers can thrive economically and socially. Future policies should focus on enhancing women's access to economic

opportunities, improving maternal health services, and promoting educational initiatives that empower women and girls.

METHODOLOGY

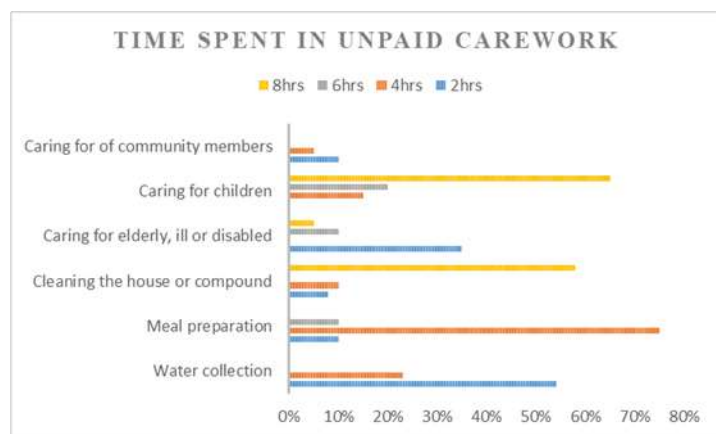
The study combined elements of quantitative research and qualitative research to achieve its objectives. The quantitative part used a household survey questionnaire and the qualitative part used Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Individual In-depth Interviews (IDIs) as well as Key Informants Interviews (KIIs). The geographical scope covered 4 villages in Ango’rom Sub-County of Teso South constituency; namely Alupe, Amerikwai, Amoni/Ojamii, and Amagoro. In addition, key informants were interviewed at Alupe Sub-County Hospital and with other government institutions. The unit analysis of the study was the household members (Mothers and Fathers) and selected Key Informants as well. Using Yamane Sampling Model $n = \frac{N}{(1 + N(e)^2)}$ (Yamane, 1967) where n= sample size, N = population size e= margin error, therefore with N= 7311, e= 10%, n= 99.5 approximately = 100 households. A non-response rate of 35% was expected as some households would had to attend to their daily jobs hence the sample size must be adjusted to take care of the non-response from some households as follows; $100 + 35 = 135$ households.

STUDY FINDINGS

TIME-USE ANALYSIS

The time spent by women members in the surveyed households is a key indicator of women economic empowerment.

Figure 1; Time spent in Unpaid Care work



The less time women spent in unpaid care work the better they turn out to be economically empowered. Figure 1 represents time-use analysis across various tasks in the households ranging from 2 to 8 hours. The carework categories include caring for community members, children, the elderly/disabled, cleaning, meal preparation, and water collection.

The largest proportion of time is spent on caring for children, with a notable percentage of individuals dedicating 8 hours. This suggests that child-rearing demands the most extensive time commitment among unpaid carework activities.

Meal preparation is the second most time-intensive, with a significant number of individuals spending 6 to 8 hours. It reflects the critical role of food preparation in unpaid household labor.

Many individuals spend between 4 and 6 hours on cleaning activities, showing the consistent but slightly less time-consuming nature of this work compared to childcare and meal preparation.

Caring for the elderly, ill, or disabled sees a wide distribution of time spent. A sizable group spends 4 to 6 hours on this task, indicating that it is another time-intensive responsibility for those providing care.

While fewer people seem to spend 8 hours on water collection, it is clear that it takes a notable amount of time for those who engage in it. The variability may depend on geographic factors and access to water resources.

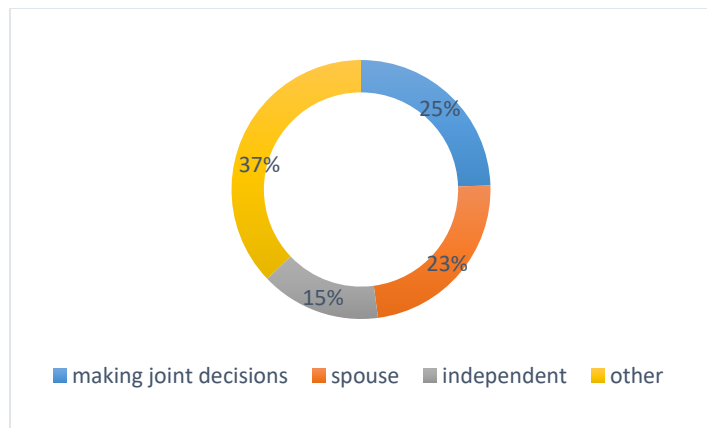
Caring for community members shows the least time commitment across all groups, with most people spending no more than 2 hours. This suggests that caring for others in the community, while important, is typically a more occasional or supplementary task compared to household duties.

From the analysis, Figure 1 highlights the unequal distribution of time spent in unpaid carework, with caring for children and meal preparation requiring the most hours on average. Cleaning and caring for the elderly/disabled also require substantial time, while water collection and community care seem to be less time-consuming tasks. Overall, unpaid carework is a significant and time-intensive part of daily life for many individuals, particularly in activities that are essential for the maintenance of households and the well-being of dependents. The data underscores the importance of recognizing and addressing the burdens of unpaid carework, especially as it is often overlooked in economic metrics but vital to societal functioning.

HOUSEHOLD DECISION MAKING

On household decision making respondents reported to be making the decisions themselves or jointly with their spouse across all the households explored.

Figure 2 ; Household Decision-Making



The largest portion of decision-making falls under the "Other" category. This suggests that a significant number of decisions may not fit traditional categories, possibly indicating influence from extended family, community members, or other factors outside the individual and their spouse.

A quarter of the decisions are made jointly, indicating a collaborative approach where both parties (presumably spouses or partners) participate equally in the decision-making process. This reflects a more balanced and shared responsibility in certain contexts.

Decisions made primarily by the spouse account for nearly a quarter of the cases. This could suggest that, in these situations, one partner (likely the husband or wife) holds more authority or control over decision-making.

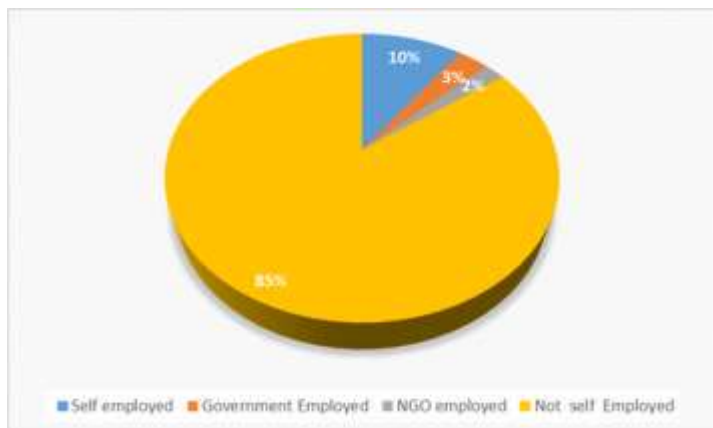
A smaller percentage (15%) reflects independent decision-making. This means some individuals take full control of the decision process without input from their spouse or others.

In summary, Figure 2 highlights that decision-making in households or relationships can be varied. A significant number of decisions are made in non-traditional ways ("Other"), indicating possible external or culturally specific influences. Joint decision-making accounts for a sizable portion, showing the importance of cooperation between spouses in many cases. However, in some households, one spouse tends to dominate decision-making (23%), while a minority of individuals make decisions independently (15%). This chart underscores the complexity of decision-making dynamics, showing that factors such as cultural norms, personal preferences, or relationship power structures play significant roles in how decisions are made.

HOUSEHOLD OCCUPATION & economic empowerment

Household occupations inform the status of women economic empowerment. It is a source of income to the households and more so economically empowering the them. It is in this backdrop that the survey findings indicate that the vast majority of individuals fall into the "Not self-employed" category, making up 85% of the total population represented in this chart. This indicates that most people rely on employment provided by others, whether through businesses, the public sector, or NGOs.

Figure 3; Household Occupation



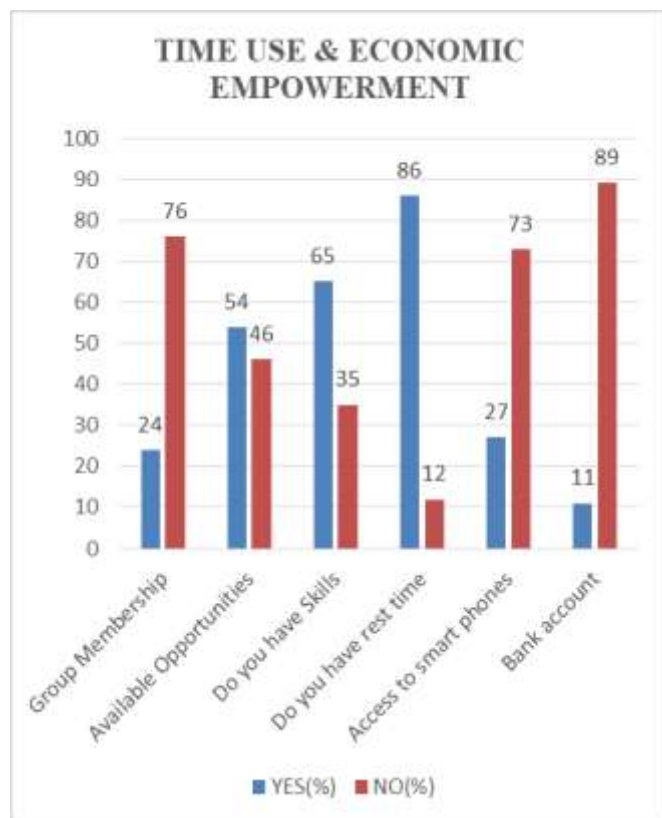
Only 10% of the population is self-employed. This relatively small portion suggests that entrepreneurship or working independently is not as prevalent compared to those employed by others. It could point to various factors such as limited opportunities, resources, or the perceived risks of self-employment.

Employment by the government accounts for 3%, indicating a small portion of people work in public sector jobs. This might reflect a limited number of available government positions relative to other employment sectors or a preference for other forms of employment.

A very small percentage (2%) is employed by NGOs. This could suggest that while non-governmental organizations play a role in providing employment, their impact in terms of employment opportunities is minimal compared to other sectors.

The figure also reveals a strong concentration of employment in the "Not self-employed" category, with a large majority of people depending on external employment sources. Self-employment is relatively uncommon, at just 10%, while government and NGO employment make up even smaller portions of the labor market. This distribution may suggest a workforce heavily reliant on traditional employment structures rather than entrepreneurship or alternative sectors like NGOs. It could also indicate that barriers exist to self-employment or government jobs, while opportunities in the public or NGO sectors remain limited.

Figure 4; Economic Empowerment variables



Women have limited access to government schemes and credit in comparison with their male counterparts and this restricts their agricultural productivity. This was affirmed by the survey results indicated in figure 2 that about 80% of the women members of the households do not access credit. On trade skills and being members of a civil society organization the results are almost the same. About 70% to 80% of respondents were neither members of Civil Society Organizations nor had been equipped with trading / entrepreneurship skills.

CONCLUSION & RECOMENDATION

The trends in the three images offer insights into the economic status and empowerment of mothers in Kenya, particularly as they relate to unpaid carework, decision-making, and employment opportunities.

A significant portion of time is dedicated to unpaid carework, with mothers primarily engaged in tasks such as caring for children and meal preparation. These activities are crucial for family well-being but are often undervalued economically. The heavy time commitment suggests that many mothers may face barriers to entering the formal labor market or engaging in self-employment due to their responsibilities at home. This reflects a lack of economic empowerment, as their substantial labor contributions are not compensated or recognized in financial terms.

The figure on decision-making shows that many mothers in Kenya are involved in joint decision-making (25%), while a considerable percentage (23%) depend on their spouses' decisions. Only 15% make decisions

independently, which indicates that many women lack full autonomy in household decision-making. The prevalence of external influences (37%) also suggests that cultural or societal norms may shape their decision-making power, potentially limiting their ability to make independent financial or personal choices. This reflects a limited empowerment in terms of autonomy and agency in their households.

The employment chart highlights the limited economic opportunities for many women in Kenya. With 85% of individuals not self-employed, most rely on jobs provided by others, and only 10% are able to pursue self-employment. Government and NGO employment account for very small shares (3% and 2%, respectively), further showing limited opportunities in public or non-profit sectors. This indicates that for many mothers, economic empowerment through self-employment or career opportunities is restricted, as they remain dependent on jobs that may not offer financial security or flexibility to accommodate their unpaid carework duties.

The data collectively reflect that economic status and empowerment of mothers in Kenya are constrained by the demands of unpaid carework, limited decision-making autonomy, and scarce opportunities for self-employment or career advancement. Many mothers are tied to traditional roles within the household, and their potential for economic independence is diminished due to their responsibilities and the lack of supportive employment opportunities. Addressing these challenges requires policies that recognize and value unpaid carework, provide more opportunities for autonomous decision-making, and promote economic empowerment through access to self-employment, flexible work arrangements, and supportive social systems.

Drawing from the survey results it is sharply clear that women have not been economically empowered on all fronts. As supported by the survey results women lag behind in terms of skills empowerment, access to finance, being members of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and access to information. This paper recommends that the reduction of unpaid care work have to involve reducing the burden first of all for women and second for society as a whole but without compromising on the principle of access to universal quality care. This can be achieved through the uptake of the following proposed strategies:

- i. Public investment in social care service infrastructure, such as imbedding childcare services in all public primary schools
- ii. Public investment in physical rural infrastructure, which reduces the unpaid work time re such as roads to reduce of assessing health care. The establishment of public childcare services and improvement of access roads will economically empower women.

Inferring from the results of time use analysis it was found that women spend more time childcare and meal preparation. Hence this paper recommends the establishment of public childcare homes that can free mothers to engage in economic activities. Furthermore a lot need to be done in terms of training women to have on-demand market skills that can empower them.

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