THE GENDER BARRIER TO LAND CONSERVATION IN KURESOI LOCATION, KENYA

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1.0. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Kenya's economy is mainly dependent on agriculture, and 90% percent of the total population lives in the rural areas deriving their livelihood from land. Therefore land is the most important resource in Kenya (K.L.A, 2002). Since only 17% of Kenya's total land area is suitable for rain fed agriculture (K.L.A, 2002) use of the resource should ensure that it is sustainable so that it can provide to meet the demands of the current and the future generations (Sharma, 1992).

Gender discrimination is one of the factors that constraint sustainable use of land in Kenya. Kabutha and Humbly (1996) explain that in many of the societies, there are differences in responsibilities, user rights, legal status, division of labour and decision making between men and women and this includes ownership and use of land. In many African societies, women do not own land (Christiane, 1999) and therefore they do not have some user rights, which improve the land and make its use sustainable. Such uses include planting of trees in farms, terracing to reduce soil erosion and planting of cash crops like tea and coffee (Young, 1989).

Kabutha and Humbly, (1996) report that women manage as much as 74% of Kenya's small holding farms either as full time managers or on behalf of their husbands who are away. This implies that women hold the power to sustainable production of Kenya's land resource. Therefore it is necessary that barriers that inhibit the women from full control of land be removed so that the resource can provide on a sustainable basis.

1.2. Problem Statement And Justification

1. The land adjacent to the Mau forest reserve is being degraded as indicated by the declining crop production over the last 10 years, the siltation of dams downstream

due to eroded materials, and the degradation of the Mau forest in search of forest products (Kinyanjui, 2004).

2. In this rural set up where intensive cultivation is practiced by the peasant farmers, women are the main managers of the farms. The subsistence lifestyle expects the woman to provide foodstuffs and fuel wood to prepare food for the enlarging family. Such a lifestyle requires that the sustainability of the resource be secured.
3. The sustainability of the land resource is threatened by social and cultural factors that do not allow women to own land and initiate long-term projects on the farms, which would make the resource more productive.

This study therefore looked at the position of women in Kuresoi location in terms of land ownership and use. The study sought to identify the proportion of women involved in land conservation activities like planting of trees and tea, and also terracing. The findings of the study would help in devising methods to eliminate the barriers that limit women from fully using the land and therefore make the resource more productive and ensure that it provides on a sustainable basis.

1.3. Objectives Of The Study

1. To find out who owns land – the woman or the man in nucleus peasant families of Kuresoi location.
2. To find out the proportion of women in the society who are involved in land conservation activities like tree planting, planting cash crops and terracing.
3. To compare the proportion of women involved in land conservation activities among the ethnic/tribal groups.

2.0. CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

2.1. Geographical Location

Kuresoi location is in the highlands of Kenya West of the Rift Valley at 0^0 35' South 35^0 40' West, and altitude range of 2000 – 3000 m above sea level (G.O.K, 1997: 42). Being on the windward side of L. Victoria, the area receives high rainfall (< 2000 mm) with about 120-150 rainy days per year. The fertile soils derived from volcanic parent material make the region of high agricultural potential (Somroek, *et al.*, 1980:60). However, the volcanic ash soil is easily eroded by the high rainfall.

2.2. Crops Grown In The Location

Kuresoi location is divided into 3 administrative sub locations each holding a population of about 750 households of peasant farmers who own about 1 hectare of land per household. Farming is mainly subsistence because of the small size of land and crops like maize, potatoes, kales, cabbages and peas are grown. Tea is the main cash crop growing in the area.

The location is adjacent to the Mau forest complex, which is the second most important water catchment area in Kenya after Mt Kenya forest. This forest is being degraded mainly because the farms do not produce enough to meet the developmental requirements of the communities and hence the need to improve and sustain their productivity.

2.3. Sample Selection

Stratified random sampling (Zar, 1984:15) was used. The location was stratified into 3 administrative sub locations to cover the 3 ethnic groups (Kikuyu, Kipsigis and Kisii) In each sub location, 25 peasant households (owning [1 hectare) were randomly selected. These are farmers with small portions of land, small amounts of farm income and would be expected to maximize the productivity of their land.

Only nucleus families were involved because these are the ideal families of the society and would give the best information on the gender discrimination that exists in land ownership and rights of use.

2.4. Data Collection

A questionnaire was prepared to be filled by each of the households selected. Only women were supposed to answer the questions. The women were visited in their farms and requested to give accurate answers to each of the questions. Due to illiteracy, oral interviews were preferred. The questionnaire sought to identify answers on who owns the family land as indicated in the Title Deed, the user rights that the woman has on the land and which land improvement activities she has a right to practice.

3.0. CHAPTER THREE: RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. Ownership Of Land

The results indicate that most of the land is registered in the husbands name (Fig. 1) and the woman just accepts the responsibility of guarding her husband's property. Among the Kikuyu, a few women own land but this was mainly small plots outside the family farm that

are meant for commercial purposes. No Kipsigis woman admitted to have any Title Deed in her name. There was high level of illiteracy among the women and they are ignorant of any consequences that may befall them incase of a divorce. This agrees with Maria (1995) that women tend to take skills that reflect their reproductive role and unless they are given higher education, they will always lag behind men.

K.A.L (2002) defines the legal owner of land in Kenya as the person whose name appears in the Title Deed and it is the same name that is in the land registry. In this case where the man's name appears on the Title Deed, the man has full authority to decide on what to do with the land. Marjolein (2002) explains that such situations are unfair to the woman because most of the rural marriages are customary and also allow polygamy. Such arrangements constraint the woman from taking full control of the land and she can not initiate long term projects to conserve the land. This is one of the reasons why attempts in Malaysia have been done to transfer the Title Deeds from the man to the woman so that the women feels that she is in full control. (I.L.C., 2003).

3.2. Land improvement activities

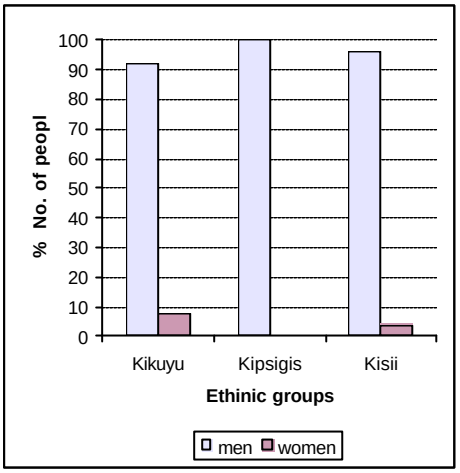
The activities considered here were planting of trees, which helps to conserve the soil and provide basic facilities for the family like sawn timber and firewood (Katherine, 1993), planting of tea which is a perennial crop that provides the family with a sustainable source of income, and terracing of land to reduce erosion. Most women are not involved in any land improvement activity (Fig. 1). Only 20% of the Kikuyu women plant trees and these are mainly the fruit trees like Avocados that supplement the family food requirements. The Kipsigis women are least involved in tree planting activities and only do so for medicinal tree species.

Tree planting in the farms would diversify the productivity of the farm making the ecosystem more resilient and sustainable therefore improving the standard of living for the family (IFOAM, 2002). In addition it would reduce the time taken by the women to go to the forest to collect firewood and reduce the strain and dangers that they are exposed to while in the forest. (Kinyanjui and Njenga, 2002).

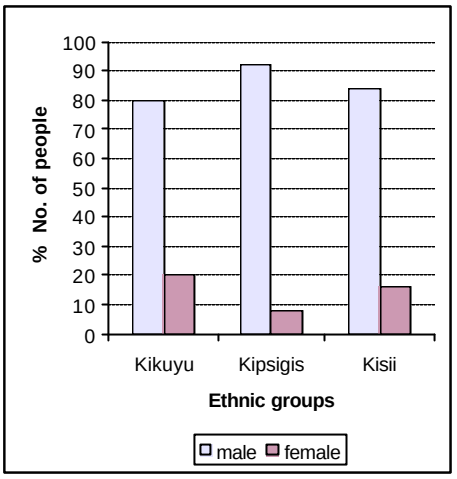
Tea, which is a perennial cash crop, is mainly planted by men. Figure 1 shows that the Kisii have the biggest number of women planting trees (20%) while a negligible number of Kipsigis women participate in the activity. The Kisii plant Tea in their ancestral land and this

could be one of the reasons promoting their involvement in the activity. Since Kenya is a leading producer of tea in the world (Daily Nation Newspaper, 20th February 2005) planting of this crop in the farms assures the family of a consistent income and the crop also helps in soil conservation.

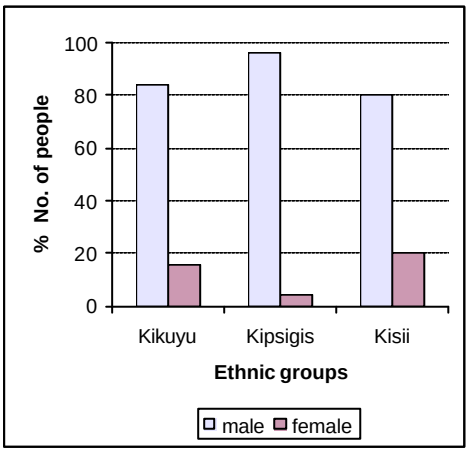
Terracing is an activity proposed in steep land so that the soil can be protected (Young, 1989). Somroek, *et al.*, (1980) state that the soils of the study area are vulnerable to soil erosion and this calls for activities like terracing in the farms. The Kisii women are most involved in this activity, a tradition they have borrowed from their ancestral land- the kisii highland where steepness and susceptibility of soil to erosion are common. Terracing was the most commonly practiced in the farms among the land improvement activities because of the great campaign by the Ministry of Agriculture officials who are always on the farms pushing the farmers to terrace their land.



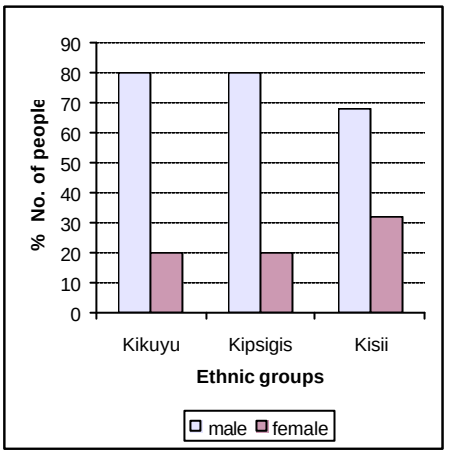
Title Deed



Planting trees



Planting cash crops



Soil Conservation practices

Fig1: A comparison of men and women involved in 4 land improvement activities

3.3. The Need For Women To Conserve Land

Land, being the most important resource in Kenya (K.L.A., 2002) should be managed well. If its sustainability is not ensured, then the future generations will not benefit from it. The

women, who manage about 74% of Kenya's small holding farms, therefore hold the future of Kenya's economy. These women should be active stakeholders in conserving the land. Their participation calls for concerted efforts from all other stakeholders including the government, the Kenya land alliance and other non-governmental organizations and most of all the husbands who deny them rights to own the land.

3.4. The gender barrier to land conservation

The gender concept is defined as the asymmetrical relationship between men and women in the spheres of production and reproduction inside and outside the household (Asenath, 1995). It is just an organising principle in the society that assigns each group its role and it is not biologically determined (Kabutha and Humbly, 1996). Therefore barriers to land conservation among the women can be removed. Women with higher education have the power to demand for their rights and also seek a higher standard of living (Maria, 1995). They would therefore be ready to make the resource on which their livelihood depends sustainable.

The findings of the study indicate that prior exposure to some land improvement activities give some women power to participate in tree planting, cash crop planting and terracing. The Kikuyu women who seek to improve the family diet plant fruit trees while the Kipsigis women who want to reduce medical costs plant medicinal trees. Similarly the Kisii women who have participated in tea growing in their ancestral land are ready to do the same in the area of study.

Therefore it is possible to break the gender barrier to land conservation through education of women and exposure to such activities. Exposure can be given through seminars and tours. The role of the Ministry of agriculture in empowering the communities to make terraces was also significant and it is hoped that the other ministries will also encourage farmers to participate in other land improvement activities.

4.0. CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Conclusions

1. Women do not own land as indicated in the Title Deeds of the respondents

2. There are gender barriers that limit women from fully participating in land conservation activities and this limits the productivity and sustainability of the land resource.
3. The gender barrier that limits women from conserving land can be broken through education, seminars and exposure tours.

4.2. Recommendations

1. Women should be educated so that they may have the power to demand for their rights especially rights concerning ownership and use of land.
2. Exposure tours should be organized so that women can learn from other people/areas.
3. Men should be educated on the rights of women so that the women who manage their farms can have full power to conserve the land.
4. The government should give communities more information on their rights to ownership and use of land resources so that their sustainability can be enhanced.
5. All the ministries concerned with land resources should work together with the communities to enhance the sustainability of the land resource.

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