

Challenges of Female Headed Households in Their Search for Livelihood in Ilima Division, Makueni County, Kenya

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Abstract: This study sought to establish the challenges faced by female heads in search of household livelihoods in Ilima division, Makueni County in Kenya. The changing environment has posed problems that have put pressure on natural resource base. Although Female headed households live alongside male headed households, their dependency burden is higher than that of their male counterparts since livelihood choices are compromised by gender differences. The dependency burden worsens the status of female headed households in rural areas creating concern to the whole society. The female headed households are faced with challenges as they try to cushion their household income. Rational choice theory and sustainable Livelihood Approach model was used to support the study. The study drew a sample of one hundred and fifty five respondents from a population of 1552 using stratified random sampling. Data was collected through interview schedule, and analyzed through descriptive statistics which included percentages, and frequency distribution tables. The results of this study are expected to be beneficial to Government policy makers, to make recommendations on the income diversification strategies on the female headed household livelihoods in the future.

Keywords: Household, Female Headed Households, Female Head, Household livelihoods, Women's role.

INTRODUCTION

The number of female-headed households is increasing due to natural attrition, family conflicts and male negligence of family duties by men which include migrating to cities. Aliber [1], observes that this phenomenon has profound and far-reaching effects on female headed household's ability to cater for their daily needs. In Latin America, female heads contribute between 30 to 40% of total household income, Peruvian female headed households contribute 51% of the net income and in Mexico off-farm activities of female heads generate more than half of the household incomes. Christiansen and Subbarao [2] argue that in sub-Saharan Africa, female headed family's reliance on agriculture tends to diminish continuously due to unreliable rainfall and over utilization of land escalating the cost of living. In Ethiopia, substantial resources have been spent on research and extension on how female heads can be agriculturally empowered to cater for household needs.

In Kenya, female headed households in rural areas are faced with severe constraints due to limited access to assets that facilitate income diversification. Several challenges emanating from different pressures on the natural resource base make the female headed households to diversify into non-farm activities to ensure survival. However, Lay, Mahmood and

M'Mukaria [3] observe that despite the marginal position of female heads in the society, their role is pivotal as their contribution on-farm and off-farm activities are high in relation to the rural development.

World Bank [4] ascertains that female headed households are typically endowed with varying amounts, different types of resources as well as capabilities that equip them to respond to change and opportunities differently from male headed households. Rogan [5] supports this assertion by averring that the total income and the share of income derived from non-farm sources by female heads are often positively correlated. This raises the issue of income diversification strategies on female headed household livelihoods as well as their sustainability per household. It is for this reason that this study sought to examine challenges faced by female headed households in search of household livelihoods with special reference to Ilima Division in Makueni County, Kenya.

Female heads of many rural communities play a big role in household responsibilities including access and preparation of food for their families. This makes every female head desire to have her household's livelihoods stable throughout the year. Nevertheless, the sustainability of female headed household livelihoods of rural communities in Makueni County is threatened

by diverse challenges. Among these are constraints female household heads face on account of their unique position in the household. Although these households are living alongside male headed households, they have a higher dependency burden than their male-headed counterparts since livelihood choices are compromised by gender differences. However, there is not enough research conducted in these areas with view to establishing these challenges and the way forward. This creates a knowledge gap with regard to the challenges faced by the female heads as they strive to attain sustainable livelihoods in their families and communities. This study set out to address this gap by examining the challenges faced by female headed households in search of household livelihoods with special reference to Ilima Division in Makueni County, Kenya.

Objectives of the study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- i. To find out the cultural related challenges faced by female headed households in search of household livelihoods with special reference to Ilima Division in Makueni County, Kenya.
- ii. To establish the traditional practices related challenges faced by female headed households in search of household livelihoods with special reference to Ilima Division in Makueni County, Kenya.
- iii. To examine the challenges related to equality in resource accessibility faced by female headed households in search of household livelihoods with special reference to Ilima Division in Makueni County, Kenya.
- iv. To establish the challenges related to spousal absence faced by female headed households in search of household livelihoods with special reference to Ilima Division in Makueni County, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women's roles

Females heading their households have the role of being primary care givers in the family as described by gender norms and have a duty of giving their household a livelihood. Pratt [6] established that these include taking care of the children due to a dichotomy that exists between the genders on a biological basis. Sherbinin and others [7] further note that negative aspects of motherhood including fatigue, curtailment of freedom and frustrations in career opportunities are never mentioned nor taken care of by the society. In modern countries, Sherbinin and others [8] observe that female heads are still delegated the domestic duties and no consideration is made for those who have a career but household chores are still in their shoulders. Gender roles influence family income through the decision made by the female heads. Influence of gender roles at the household level affects

the coping mechanisms adopted by female headed households in search of a livelihood. It is in this context of exploiting assets where gender positions dictate which assets belong to who that necessitated this study.

Traditional beliefs and cultural practices

Traditional beliefs and cultural practices are gender biased since they disadvantage female-headed household significantly due to the socially constructed gender roles associated with the livelihood strategies of female headed households. Devereux and others [9] argue that discriminatory institutions have a direct impact on female headed household economic development.

The cultural beliefs and norms dictation of income diversification strategies that are adopted by female headed households will be explored in this research. Fernandez [10] adds that the social structure of traditional societies all over the world has undergone changes but gender has not changed completely. Sherbinin and others [11] support this by observing that when the prices are not good then the household female head struggles to bring a balance in providing a livelihood to their families. This study was designed to link gender based intra-household inequalities interfere with income diversification strategies carried out by female heads in search of a livelihood for their households.

Inequality in resource accessibility

Female headed households are understood to be vulnerable to shocks because of their unequal position in society since they have less access to productive resources. Such constraints, as Manji[12] observes, greatly affect the ability of female headed households to construct viable livelihood and lead them to experience problems that push them to disadvantaged position. Access to land by FHH could avert the strain that these household women go through in search of their family's livelihoods. If a household lacks the resources it needs, it will have to borrow and the female head is often deprived of credit, distribution networks or land rights. However, since this approach requires sufficient access to land, FAO [13] indicate that it is not possible for many female headed households to carry out income diversification strategies effectively. This study was used to ascertain whether female headed households are discriminated in matters related to mainstream economic opportunities.

Absence of male partner

The impact of losing a male figure and a breadwinner in various households prompt many households to adopt specific survival strategies to cope with the socio-economic and cultural challenges the female headship face. As Mulugeta[14] observes some households engage in diversification of their income sources in order to surmount their economic challenges

and crises of their everyday life. Absence of male partner in the family has greatly contributed to a staggering income of the female headed households since they do not reap as anticipated in the informal economy and as a result they become impoverished and live in hunger. FHH have to manage negative impressions and construct social networks that are crucial in occupational achievement that can enable them have livelihoods for their households [15]. Female headed households can have equivalent life to the one of the male headed households if the society does not attach household income to the presence of male partner.

METHODOLOGY

This study used descriptive survey design because it is a case study. The descriptive method of research is used to gather information from people through interviews. The design enabled the study to address the characteristics of the target group under investigation [16]. It collected information from the female heads that have a responsibility of getting a livelihood for their households as well as the key informants. The study targeted all female headed households of Ilima Division in Makueni County. The target population consisted of 1552 female heads from the four locations in Ilima Division. Respondents were sampled through stratified and simple random sampling procedures. First, the target population was stratified into the various administrative locations that formed four strata. Random sampling was then applied to select the final sample that participated in the study. The distribution of target population as well as samples is presented in Table 1.

Table-1: Number of female headed households

Location	Population	Sample	Per location
Kyamuoso	442	44	
Ndolo	410	41	
Wautu	380	38	
Ilima	320	32	
Total	1552	155	

Source: Makueni County Integrated Development Plan, 2013.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The study population consisted of 1552 female heads in Ilima Division in Makueni County. The study sample size was 155 female heads who were supposed to respond to the interview schedule and focus group discussion. However, 153 female heads responded to the data collection tool, resulting in 99% response rate which was considered sufficient for purposes of this research since Mugenda and Mugenda [17] argues that 50% response rate is acceptable in any study. In addition, all there was an observed 100% response rate

for key informants and focused group discussion participants.

Demographic Characteristic

Distribution of Respondents According to their Age

Age was conceptualized in clustered ranging from below 20 years to 40 – 49 years. The findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Age

Age	Frequency	Percentage
Below 20	4	2.6%
20 - 29	15	9.8%
30 - 39	67	43.8%
40 - 49	67	43.8%
Total	153	100.0%

Data presented in Table 2 indicates that 2.6% of the total sampled respondents were aged below 20 years while 9.8% were aged between 20 – 29 years and 43.8% were aged between 30 – 39 years and 40 – 49 years respectively. The study shows that most female heads in charge of their households are aged between 30-49 years.

Age was one of the demographic profiles examined in this study since among others it determines ones execution of income diversification strategies. Execution of income diversification strategies is only possible among adults who are strong and are capable of having a family. It is for this reason that the youngest respondents engaged in this study were aged at least 20 years old, with the oldest one being 49 years old. This explains why respondents from this age group are sampled as the respondents. These findings are in line with [18] who established that in many developing countries women are left at prime age to head households as men die due to various circumstances. This has increased the phenomenon of adoption of income diversification strategies by female headed households in search of a livelihood for their households.

Distribution of Respondents According to their Level of Education

Respondents' level of education was derived from the respondents self report on their highest academic institutions which they successfully completed. The findings are presented in Table 3.

Table-3: Distribution of Respondents by Level of Education

Level of education	Frequency	Percentages
Primary	79	51.6%
Secondary	74	48.4%
Total	153	100.0%

Table 3 indicates that 51.6% of the sampled respondents were primary school graduates and 48.4% had attained secondary school education. Education is believed to be influential to the individual's participation in income diversification strategies. However in this study the findings showed that there is no much difference between women who have secondary education and have no formal employment and those that have primary education since there is no impact on the female headed households economically. Previously studies done by Steady [19] showed that minimal education among women is a deficiency representing underdevelopment prevalent in many African countries. Although education is a tool of empowerment and has a mentally liberating and emancipating effect to all, lack of it could mean that women are not involved in complicated and well paying businesses [20] However, since most female heads have attained primary and secondary education which has no much impact on income diversification strategies, then it is evident that female heads in Ilima division find themselves being relegated to diverse activities in order to give their households a livelihood. This explains why a significant portion of sampled respondents reported that they derived their livelihood from micro-business as well as unspecified sources

Distribution of Respondents According to Reason for FHH Status

Respondents were asked to indicate the reason that made them female heads in their own households. The findings are presented in Table 4.

Table-4: Distribution of Respondents by Reason for Female Head Status

Reason for Female Head Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Single	35	22.9
Divorced	4	2.6
Widowed	74	48.4
Separated	40	26.1
Total	153	100.0

Table 4 indicates that 22.9% were female household head by virtue of being single mothers while 48.4% indicated that they were widows. It was also observed that 26.1% of respondents indicated that they were separated and 2.6% were family heads on account of being divorced. Marriage remains one of the most adored institutions in the world generally and among African societies in particular. This study defined marital status into four categories. There were single, widowed, divorced and separated. Study findings revealed that a great number of female heads in Ilima Division were widowed due to the death of their husbands which was followed by separation. This could partly contribute to the accentuation of insufficient livelihood at household level. Due to lack of a man figure in the female headed households, the female heads remained the main decision makers in their households. This scenario is not only a feature of Ilima Division since most female heads in Africa play this role due to the absence of their spouses through death and separation if not single [21].

Distribution of Respondents According to Number of Dependants

Respondents were asked to indicate the number of dependants in the female headed households. The findings are presented in Figure 1.

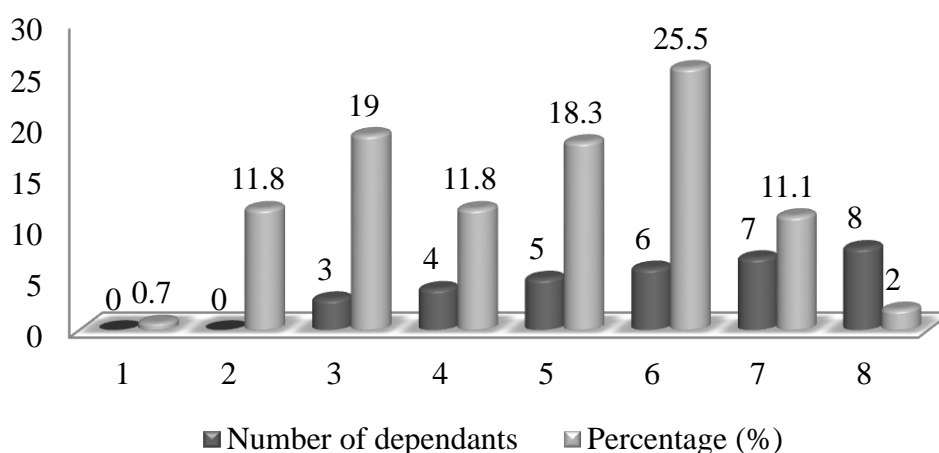


Fig-1: Distribution of Respondents by Number of Dependants

According to data provided in Figure 1, the highest number of dependants per household was found to be 8 as reported by 2% of respondents and the least were 1 as accounted for by 0.7% of total respondents. It was also observed that the modal number of dependants was 6 as indicated by 25.5% followed by 3 dependants as accounted for by 19 of respondents. It was established that 11.8% indicated they either had 2 or 4 dependants respectively and respondents who had 7 dependants were 11.1% of the total sample.

Common sense has it that all families including female headed households need support to keep them going. Consequently, this study observes that families headed by females have dependants who need support. The number of dependants in a particular family determines the strain that the female head faces in relation to the household livelihood. The research findings are evident of a conclusion that the insufficient

livelihoods greatly affected the households with more dependants, especially those with little or no stable income. A larger family largely contributes to economic difficulties, low income levels, education costs, high costs of living, and immense household poverty [22].

Challenges Faced by Female Headed Households

The objective was to establish the challenges faced by female headed households as they employ income diversification strategies in search of a livelihood. The findings are discussed in this section.

Engendered Challenges Faced by Female Heads which is Related to the Role of Women

Respondents were asked to indicate what challenges they face as female households as they carry out income diversification strategies to get a livelihood from their households. These challenges are related to women roles. The findings are presented in Table 5.

Table-5: Engendered challenge faced by female heads as they carry out income diversification strategies

Engendered challenge faced by female heads as they carry out income diversification strategies	Frequency	Percentage (%)
I am usually tired and have no strength for other activities	10	6.5
Lack of time for other activities	27	17.6
Negative labeling	34	22.2
People undermine my effort because I am a woman	40	26.1
Waged labor discrimination because of my gender	42	27.5
Total	153	100.0

Table 4 indicates that 27.5% suffered waged labor discrimination on account of their gender whereas 26.1% indicated they were discriminated against because of their gender. It was also observed that 22.2% suffered negative labeling, 17.6% indicated that they had no time for other activities and 6.5% indicated that they were usually so tired after their work that they had no strength for other activities.

Engendered Challenges Related to Absence of Male Partner Faced by Female Heads

Respondents were asked to indicate what challenges they faces as female households as they carry out income diversification strategies to get a livelihood from their households. The findings are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Effect of Male Partner Absence on the FHH Livelihoods

Effect of male partner absence in the FHH on their livelihoods	Frequency	Percentage
His absence increases female responsibility	35	22.9%
I am usually discriminated by villagers	5	3.3%
I feel vulnerable without him	24	15.7%
I usually feel incapacitated without him	37	24.2%
Lack of his support strains my family resources	52	34.0%
Total	153	100.0%

Table 6 indicates that 34% of the respondents felt that family resources were strained by the absence of their male partner support. It was also observed that 22.9% the absence of their male partners increased their female responsibilities while 24.2% usually felt incapacitated without their partners. In addition, 15.7% of the respondents indicated they felt vulnerable without their male partners and 3.3% indicated they were actively discriminated by their village colleagues on account of their status.

Traditional Beliefs and Cultural Practices affecting Female Heads as they diversify their income

Respondents were asked to indicate whether their traditional and cultural practices allow female head to use family property as collaterals for any financial assistance. The findings are presented in Figure 2.

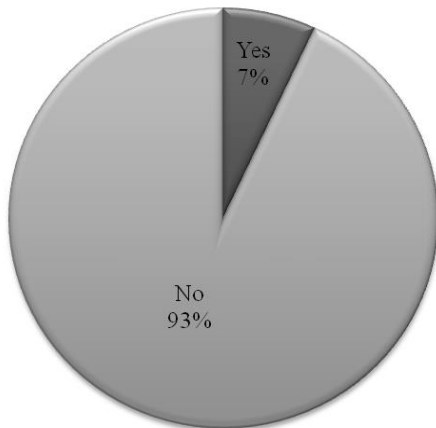


Fig-2: Cultural Practices allow FHH to use Family Property as Collateral

As indicated in Figure 2, 93% of respondents indicated that they were not allowed to use family land as collateral for any financial assistance while 7% indicated they were allowed. This was also indicating that there exists an inequality in accessibility of resources between FH and MH.

Management of Remittance Sent to Households by Migrants

Respondents were required to indicate if in their opinion the remittances sent by migrants to their households were properly managed. The findings are presented in Figure 3.

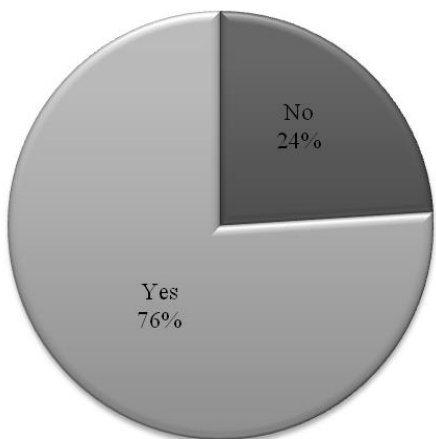


Fig-3: Respondents' Opinion on Management of Remittance Sent to households by Migrants

When asked whether they thought that remittance sent to households by migrants are managed well by the people at home, 76% responded affirmatively while 24% responded negatively.

Types of Mismanagement of Remittance Sent to Households by Migrants

Respondents who had indicated that they felt remittances sent to households by migrants were not well managed by the people at home were asked to

indicate how the remittance was mismanaged. The findings are presented in Figure 4.

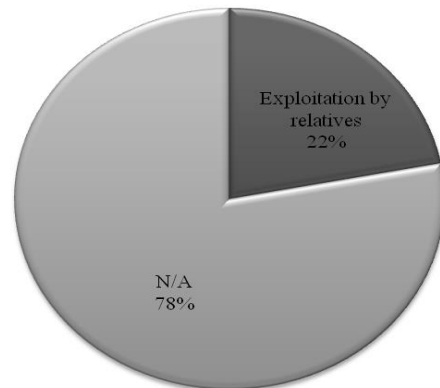


Fig-4: How Remittances Sent to Households by Migrants are Mismanaged

Figure 4 indicates that 22% of respondents felt that relatives at home exploited the migrants by misappropriating the remittances sent to households. The rest of the sample was the ones who indicated that they felt their remittances were well managed.

Respondents whose Business Suffer Monopoly

Respondents were asked to indicate if their businesses suffered monopoly. The findings are presented in Figure 5.

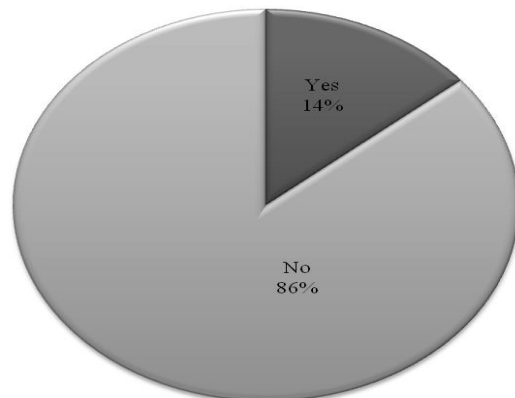


Fig-5: Distribution of Respondents whose Business Suffers Monopoly

As indicated in Figure 5, 14% of respondents indicated that their businesses had monopoly compared to 86% who felt their business did not suffer monopoly.

Type of Monopoly Respondents' Businesses Suffer

To establish the type of monopoly that respondents' businesses suffer, each respondent was required to indicate the type of monopoly their business suffered. The findings are presented in Figure 6.

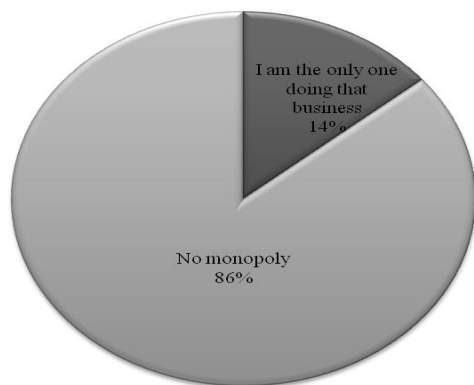


Fig-6: Monopoly that Respondents Business Suffers

As indicated in Figure 6, 14% of the respondents indicated that they were the only ones doing the type of micro-business, indicating that they had monopoly in it.

Summary and conclusion

The challenges encountered by female headed households as they carry out income diversification strategies were recorded as engendered challenges which included women's roles in the household, traditional beliefs and cultural practices, inequality in resource accessibility and absence of male partner.

The study findings showed that 93% of the female headed households in Ilima faced engendered challenges related to traditional beliefs and practices which necessitate inequality in resource accessibility of female heads. This was followed by absence of male partner where the highest number of respondents carried 34% and lastly women's role in the household was shown by waged labor discrimination taking 27.5%, undermining female heads efforts taking 26.1% and the last were negative labeling which took 22.1%. This was a clear indication that female heads are having a hard time due to the fact that they are female who are not living with male partners. The role of giving a livelihood to their household is not an easy task though the community expects them to get livelihoods for their households.

The study established that female heads have accepted to survive with the different challenges they encounter as they diversify their income. However, the study wishes to advise the female heads that they can be a source of their own freedom through embracing modernization and rejecting traditional customs which deny them certain their right.

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