CULTURAL CONSTRAINTS OF WOMEN INVOLVEMENT IN MANAGEMENT LEVEL OF COUNTY FUNDED GRASS-ROOT COMMUNITY WATER PROJECTS IN MAKUENI COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Literature has it that for any national or local project to succeed, community members must be included not only in all levels of development but also the management level where key voices are aired, major decisions made and resources distributed. In response to gender inequalities, many third world countries amended their constitutions and policies to address these issues. While much progress has been realized, research shows that in community development projects, women are not fully involved in senior management positions. The goal of this study was to investigate constraints influencing women's involvement in the management levels of county-funded grass-root community water projects in Makueni County. A case study was done in Makueni County on on-going projects in eight county wards. This study was guided by the following objective: to investigate the influence of cultural constraints in women involvement in the senior management levels of county-funded grass-root community water projects in Makueni County. The study was conducted through a descriptive survey study. The target population comprised of 441 management board members who were assigned to manage individual county-funded grass-root community water projects in the county. A sample size of 132individuals within eight wards was brought about by the use of systematic sampling. This study used structured questionnaire tool for data collection. Descriptive data analysis was employed where frequency distribution tables and percentages were used as data analysis tools. The descriptive statistics used included means, standard deviation, frequency, and percentages. The data collected was summarised and categorized in frequency distribution tables. In addition, the analysis was done using MS Excel spread sheets for initial tabulation analysis and drawing of charts based on the responses. The data was analysed and organized into themes relevant to the study and analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences and Microsoft excel (SPSS). The study established that cultural constraints such as mobility restrictions, gender stereotypes, and sex discrimination had a great influence on the women's involvement in the management of county-funded community water projects. The study recommended that the government should provide education and awareness, training, and capacity building to grass-root communities in water management. The study suggested that the local community should be empowered through education so that it can fully participate in the management of water projects.

Key Words: *cultural constraints, women involvement, management level, county funded grass-root community water projects, Makueni County, Kenya*

INTRODUCTION

Water management in county-funded grass-root community project is a gendered agenda. In support of this argument, Zwarteveen & Bennett (2005) observes that a water management gendered analysis shows that rural water resource projects are virtually flawed when the role

of grass-root community women is left invisible. They assert that women from grass-root community have needs that need to get voiced out by them being at the management level. This results to a comprehensive planning, effective projects and significant gains for women, their households and community as a whole. This is also supported by Waal (2006) who observes that there is a link between gender concerns and goals of community development projects hence calling for attention in water gender perspectives. Further, he argues that decisions made at the management level must factor a women's voice and equitable resources sharing. As a result, gender perspectives are not only made visible but also women gain their rights and play their responsibilities and experiences meaningfully in their own lives. Further, the grass-root community water projects attain efficiency, accountability and sustainability.

For instance, a report by Trivadi (2018) detailed how in 1980, the government of Malawi sought to offer piped water to grass-root community in 50 districts. In the initial stages of this project, men made up 90% of the management boards from National to local level. After a short while, those men left the village to urban centres for paid jobs. The water project came to a standstill with no one left to manage it. As a result, the government sought to involve grass-root community women into the management boards. The project was sustained by the women for a long period of time. Research conducted by a World Bank evaluation (2018) in 122 water resources management projects showed that projects which included women at the management level were 6-7 times more effective and efficient than those which did not.

Involvement means an act of being in an active process through which each stakeholder influences and controls the development project initiative, decisions, and available resources that affect them (World Bank, 2017). Mulwa (1985) supports this argument and contends that involvement is a participatory alternative approach to gender equity in grass-root community projects. Further, this was an alternative approach to top-down dominance approach of development. Involvement approach is a participatory down-up approach that calls for marginalised women to use the management space to share their voice. Grass-root community organizing for community development water projects entails offering a platform for both men and women to not only be involved in the entire development process but also at the management level. According to Caroline & Moser (2010), this development gender cycle process commences with adapting the gender perspectives and terminologies, putting a policy in place, and implementing those policies. In analysing gender mainstreaming in most institutions and organisation, Caroline & Moser (2010) observe that most institutions have adopted the terminologies and put a gender policy in place. Nevertheless, during the time of implementation, gender policies remained largely unknown.

Cohen and Hogan (2018) boldly suggested that the current water crisis in many countries was from leaving out grass-root community women water management. In 2014, evidence shows that grass-root women representation in research, planning and application level of community development had improved but women continue to be underrepresented in water management boards (Trivedi, 2018). This is affirmed by a report given by United Nations (2018) that 17% of grass-root community women serve in water projects at research, planning and implementation level. Also UNDP (2016) affirms that women were

underrepresented in water management and governance with 7% of all ministers at the governance level being women.

In 2019, the World Bank group reported that women are significantly underrepresented in water management level due to social and cultural norms, inadequate human resource policies and unwelcome work environment (World Bank Group, 2019). Therefore, this current research seeks to research on how cultural, social, and top-down organizational structure constraints influence women's involvement in the management level of county-funded grass-root community water projects in Makueni County.

Cultural constraints that affect women involvement in project management level include mobility restrictions, sex discrimination, gender stereotypes and implicit biases. Women struggle with mobility restriction constraint due to children and household roles and responsibilities. In sex discrimination, men and women must adhere to traditionally defined roles and responsibilities. Further, salaries are paid based on gender, and persistent sex harassment in exchange for promotion or high position appointments always influence the choices women make for or against those positions. Due to gender stereotypes, women shun of from public management roles and remain trapped into traditional women roles. Implicit bias affects how men and women judge women's competencies for practice in leadership roles.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The importance of involving grass-root community women at water management resource level has been recognised at global level. For instance, the United Nations water conference (1977) and the international water and environment conference (1992) in Dublin affirmed the central role of women at the water resource management level. In addition, the agenda 21 in establishing the International Decade for Action- Water for Life 2005-2015 called for women involvement in water development efforts at all levels (UN Women, 2016). First, the above named conferences argued that women involvement at water resource management level improves equitable access to water supply. In 2013, the global water institute estimated that 700 million people globally could be displaced due to intense water scarcity (Global Water Institute, 2013). In 2017, UNICEF observed that by 2040 one in every four of the world's children under the age of 18 shall be living in extremely high-water stress (UNICEF, 2017). Further, in 2018, United Nations observed that there were 2 billion people in various countries experiencing high water stress (UN, 2018). Therefore, gender mainstreaming at the water projects management level enhances equity in sharing of water resources. This argument is supported by UN water who argue that gender roles, responsibilities and priorities shape the way in which water resource is governed, allocated and used (UN Water, 2006). For instance, research conducted by UNDP in Asia and Africa on 44 water projects showed that grass-root community women involved in water management not only shaped water policies, institutions and communities that made use of that water but also they shared water more equitably than men do especially during water scarcity (Trivadi, 2018). Secondly, the water conferences argued that involving women in water management boards would

ensure equitable access of water for agricultural produce. UN water (2006) affirms that grass-root community women produce 60-80 percent of community food. This is also supported by Makueni county integrated report 2018-2022 that 80% of the country farming activities is done by women. Further women have great role in establishing effective, efficient, and sustainable use of water resource in small scale farming in terms of offering protection and management (UN Water, 2006). Research shows many third world countries have introduced gender policies and measures aimed at increasing women's involvement in water management boards. As a result, progress in addressing the gender gap has been noted in countries like Uganda, Tanzania and South Africa that have adopted national water policies which aimed at increasing women at the water management level (Thompson & O'Dell, 2017). In Uganda, the minister of water spearheaded the formation of a five-year water management strategies which prioritized gender mainstreaming (Trivedi, 2018). Nevertheless, Afulabi (2017) observes that in theory, most of the country's constitutions are sound and reflect no gender bias; while in practice, women are underrepresented in meetings where decisions are made and resources are shared. Above all, they do not get their chance to fight for their representation. Also, he adds that women remain invisible in structures that lead to employment. Due to high population and climate change effects, Kenya continues to suffer low water supply across the country. In fact, recent research shows that grass-root community water supply coverage is at 52%. With a future estimate that less than a quarter of Kenyan population will have water supply by 2025 (Charity water, 2020). In 1990, the government of Kenya set a strategy that was to supply water in every household by 2000. By 1999, the ministry of water had laid up policies with legal framework for water reforms. This led to water Act 2002 that addressed challenges that were faced at the management board level. In it, they embraced grass-root community participatory approach since they believed community involvement would promote guaranteed sustainability of any water projects (Biamah, 2012). Part of the water policies entailed gender equality in grass-root community projects at all levels. Research conducted over two decades showed that gender equality at water management board would increase healthy governance, transparency, and accountability of water supplies (UNDP, 2014). Makueni County is an arid and semiarid area with scarce water supply. The county receives 45.3% of the total required water across the county. While the county requires 40,794m3 per\day of water, they only receive 18490m3 per day with 17.7% of the households receiving piped water as 36% of its residents receive water from improved water source (Makueni County, 2019). This implies women and children from the grass-root community are most affected. Many of them walk 8 kilometres to and from water sources in search of water. That is why women involvement in grass-root community water projects management is critical. Cultural, social, and top-down organizational structure constraints were some of the main catalysts for low women representation at the management of county-funded water projects in Makueni County. The solution to the problem, therefore, lies in breaking the social, cultural, and organizational barriers. This will ensure that women are equally involved not only in the project's identification processes but also in the actual planning, design, construction of water supply structures, as well as in the overall water resource management activities. Therefore, the proposed research seeks to investigate how cultural constraints influence women involvement in the management levels of county-funded community water projects in Makueni County.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The goal of this research was to investigate cultural constraints to women involved in senior management levels of county-funded grass-root community water projects in Makueni County.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Gender and Development (GAD) emerged as a response of the limitations of earlier attempts of feminist development theory and practice in Women in Development (W I D) and Women and Development (WAD). A group called Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) developed this new paradigm in early 1985 in Nairobi, Kenya. GAD called for more attention to the collective voices and experiences of grass-root community women, collective action, focus on gender roles and relations, culture and social inequalities. Proponents of GAD seeks to have those active women voices heard where decisions are made and resources are shared hence women becoming visible in public sphere (Jaquette, 2016). Their concern was coming up with a woman developed approach that recognized the importance of global and gender inequalities (Sen & Grown, 1987).

Gender and Development theory followers acknowledge that women are affected by patriarchy and capitalist ideologies in their communities at the local, national, and household levels. In response, they seek to challenge both male dominance and capitalists. GAD theorists are not just concerned with how women are assigned specific roles, responsibilities, and expectations rather they welcome the potential contribution of men who share concerns for issues of equality and social justice (Young, 1993). They do not just focus on single productive and reproductive aspect of women and men lives separately. Rather the approach seeks analysis of the women's nature within the context of community and work done inside and outside the households without undervaluing the work of women in the family (Parpart, 1993).

GAD theorists call for equitable development and women full participation, participation of state in promoting women emancipation, taking it as their duty to offer social services to women in order to enhance women involvement in projects (Jaquette, 2016). They urge organizations to embrace holistic, transformation of gender equality approach through women empowerment in all aspects, structural change, power shifts, reforms of gender policies, and application of specific gender intervention strategies for sustainable development (Brenner, 2009). The approach questions the underlying assumptions of social, cultural, organizational, economic, and political to ensure that women are integrated into the community ongoing development project (Rathgeber, 1990). As a result, they make women create their own improvements with lasting and sustainable change.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

USAID (2018) observes that Kenyan women represent 51% of the Kenyan population. While USAID is a first-world body, it is assumed that its research is credible and reliable. This

percentage shows that the ideal men to women representation ratio in the management level should stand at 50: 50. Nevertheless, women representation in management positions has not even hit the third gender rule target in the urban and public sector. This argument tells us that women have persistently been underrepresented in management positions of grass-roots community development projects. This is because, throughout the years, there have been slow changes to discrimination, societal attitudes, and cultural practices that affect the way men and women develop a willingness of women to be involved in management positions. Some of the cultural constraints include women mobility restrictions, Sex discrimination attitudes, negative Stereotypes, and implicit biases.

Schultz (2016) observes that women with childcare responsibilities have more mobility restrictions. This is also supported by Bensahel & Barno (2015) who argues that parenthood and career flexibility affect retention of women in management level of projects. For instance, they discuss a random research conducted on men and women about being laid off because of parental and childcare responsibilities. The report showed that 8% of men felt strongly that they would be laid off while 16% of women thought they would be laid off if they were pregnant or had their little children concerns at home. This is twice as much as men and thus gender bias is portrayed when women seek promotions to management boards. According to Byron and Roscigno (2014) women are more disadvantaged in organisational structures and its culture due to gender assumptions concerning childcare, pregnancies, power, patriarchy and promotions to management boards gender inequalities. Byron and Roscigna (2014) call it a wide spread illegality around the world whose policies need to be put in place and implemented to guard the women right to serve at all level of community development projects. The most disappointing thing to note in this is that these journals and research was conducted in the west. While developed countries have tried to offer this, many developing countries are yet to realize public childcare services. Research shows that the percentage of women wage earners in economies that provide childcare is twice that of economies that do not offer those services.

According to Hoere and Gell (2009), mobility restrictions on women deepen female marginalization and poverty levels. This is because they are left without the opportunity to raise their voice concerning their needs and interests in the households, community projects and institutions that exist to serve their interests. Those institutions remain domineered by men and their interest. Further women lack the chance to influence social, political, and economic processes and institutions which control and shape their very own lives. They become invisible in those systems put in place to serve their needs. Therefore, it is important to offer equal opportunity for both men and women to fight poverty. Women's voice is as crucial as man's voice in management boards where decisions are made, and resources shared to solve the needs of grass-root community.

According to the American Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC, 2018), Sex discrimination entails unconsented, verbal, or physical sexual requests, moves, favours, and harassment and requests for sexual favours. Besides, sexual discrimination also includes offensive comments about an individual's sex. In the Kenyan constitution 2010, under the

sexual offenses act, a person may be found guilty of any form of sexual discrimination and harassment by those in authority. Nevertheless, sex advances in management positions are highly practice in Kenya. For instance, a study that was carried out in Kenya by International Labour Rights Fund (ILRF) 2016, in tea and coffee farms, shows that 90 % of women respondents had experienced some form of sexual abuse from their employers and supervisors. 71% of the men responded to interviewed viewed sexual harassment as a frequent and natural behaviour. 99% of the women respondents considered decline from taking up management positions because they were male domineered jobs. Victimization and sex discrimination against women in management was another critical issue. 60 % of the women and men believed any woman in a management position was already compromised sexually. Above all, there were once one woman among seven men in those positions. The rest served as subordinates.

According to the AAUW (2017), sex discrimination against women influences gender parity. The report shows that some select positions continue to be advertised with gender preference in them. In most cases, lower ranks will prefer women placement as opposed to high level management positions. Women with less representation in management positions are more vulnerable to sexual assaults in exchange for salary increments or promotions. Victims are selected based on perceived vulnerability, accessibility, and lack of credibility. As a result, many qualified and faithful women choose not to participate in these positions. Such factors are powerfully informed by the prevailing gender stereotypes and attitudes which also result in explicit and implicit gender bias (Huhtanen, 2017).

Martin & Dinella (2011) define gender stereotypes as beliefs that are socially constructed about the roles of men and women in each community. The literature review has it that gender stereotypes emerge and grow from the complexities and dynamics of the traditional, social-cultural definition of the roles and responsibilities of men and women in society. Such functions are rooted in patriarchy and capitalist societies. These roles are influential and yet contrary to gender equity and equality principles. Gender stereotypes trap women in traditional roles and limit each of them in participating in management positions within community projects (Huhtanen, 2017). This continues to make women poor and lives each of them marginalised. According to Raphel (2014), women with the will to lead and serve others in management positions encounter negative stereotypes from grass-root community members. As a result, they slowdown from seeking these positions. For instance, women contesting for top seat could be branded as arrogant to compete with men, and as one who defies the social-cultural women roles and responsibilities.

Seeking to be involved in management positions is not the only subject of stereotypes by men but also by other women in the community and themselves as well. Research shows that performance can be undermined when a person fears confirming negative stereotypes from the identity group. Women who are aware of stigmas from gender stereotypes can trigger feelings of anxiety, active coping mechanisms such as self-silencing, isolation, and disengagements. Women experiencing backlash from violation of cultural norms will avoid

negotiating for salaries and will avoid high-level management employment or promotions (Godsil, 2016).

Literature review has it that Implicit Bias is the prevailing social-cultural gender stereotype and attitudes that are reflected unconsciously by everyone. Implicit bias is about gender stereotypes influence on perceptions, responses, and preconceived assumptions as well as behaviour even when every person consciously disagrees with them. Implicit bias is a powerful predictor of people's reactions. For instance, they affect how men and women judge women's competence for practice in high leadership roles, what salaries are offered by women in negotiation, and whether women are recognized for their excellent performance at work (Huhtanen, 2017).

Research conducted in North America among women in management positions where men had dominated the meetings showed that 96% of them experienced gender bias from men in those positions as well as women from that ethnic group. 68% of women argued that for them to compete, they had to strive to perform better than men. Further, their mistakes were noticed more and remembered longer. They claimed while men were judged on their potentials, women were judged on their performance alone. A single error for one woman became a negative stereotype for all women. Besides, women were also evaluated more harshly than men (Williams, 2017).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design is basically the blueprint for data collection, measurement, and analysis. A descriptive research design was used in this study because the data was collected qualitatively and analysed quantitatively. The research used statistics, frequencies, average and percentages to determine relationship and outcome of the research. This study was carried out in Makueni County which is situated in the eastern part of Kenya, around 144 kilometres from the city of Nairobi. The county boarders Machakos County to the east, Kitui County to the north, Kajiado County to the south, and Taita Taveta County to the east. There are 49 on-going county-funded community water projects in the County. As a semi-arid area, Makueni County suffers from severe water shortage. The study focused on water projects since they are projects where women should be more involved because it had much impact on them as they are primary beneficiaries. The researcher targeted a population of 441 management board members who were assigned to manage individual county-funded community water projects in the county. The sample size is the population selected as respondents in qualitative and quantitative research sample. 30% of the total population was used as the sample size, that is, 30% of 441 which was 132 management level board members. Systematic random sampling is a technique of selected probability samples that requires a listing of the target population. This involves the direct selection of subjects or other primary sampling units from the sampling frame that is listed progressively. With the help of an informant, systematic sampling was used to pick up members of the projects. Further, convenient sampling was applied in the research where the respondents were picked randomly. This study used structured questionnaire tool for data collection to obtain

descriptive information from a larger sample. The researcher identified 12 assistant researchers from 8 sub counties within Makueni county where water projects were ongoing. Each assistant researcher was trained on how to administer the questionnaire and introduction research letter at the sub county office where the county water officials would introduce them to water projects human resource personnel and management board members. Each researcher assistant was assigned to at least 13 respondents (5 women and 8 men) from which data was collected from. The respondents were given two weeks to fill the questionnaires. Through Facebook messenger, the researcher was able to network with those on the ground to do coding and get the data reports. All assistant researchers were compensated for the work they did and given daily lunch and Phone credit. Further, Secondary sources with informed reports and previous studies were used to strengthen the interpretation of the data collected. Secondary data was collected from publications and articles found in scholarly journals that address the topic of study.mData analysis is the process that involves reduction of huge data into statistics which are interpreted to give insights. Questionnaires were coded based on each of the research question for accurate data analysis process. Descriptive data analysis was employed where frequency distribution tables and percentages were used as data analysis tools. Descriptive statistics are fundamental in organizing research data as it serves to summarize the information collected. The descriptive statistics used included means, standard deviation, frequency, and percentages. The data collected was summarised and categorized in frequency distribution tables. In addition, the analysis was done using MS Excel spread sheets for initial tabulation analysis and drawing of charts based on the responses. The data was analysed and organized into themes relevant to the study and analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences and Microsoft excel (SPSS).

RESEARCH RESULTS

Women Involvement in Management of Grass-root Community Water Projects

While there have been continued efforts to increase women involvement in grass-root community at the water projects, women continue to be underrepresented at the management level of the projects. Even so, majority of respondents 69.9% (72) indicated that women representation in top management has improved. Moreover, majority of the respondents 49.5% (51) indicated that increased mobilizing of communities towards a common goal has improved. These findings correlate with Laboso (2014) who argues that while there is a remarkable increase of women in political elective and appointment positions, both National and County Governments cannot account for women participation in management positions in community development projects.

Further, Respondents indicated eight factors affecting women from being involved in the management level of community projects in Table 4.11. Some of them include low level of education (13.6%), children responsibilities (12.6%), and verbal or physical sexual harassment in exchange with management positions (12.6%). In the results, they proposed nine strategies and tools to improve women involvement in management level of grass-root community projects. For example, disciplinary actions on sexual acts for promotions

(17.5%), men support women ideas and performance in meetings (14.6%), and in-service project leadership and management training (13.6%).

Cultural Constraints Influence on Women Involvement in Management level of Grass-rot Community Water Projects

This study established that mobility restrictions, gender stereotypes and sex discrimination greatly influence the women's involvement in the management of county-funded community water projects. This research established that implicit bias moderately influences women's involvement in the management of county-funded community water projects. 53% of respondents affirmed that mobility restrictions greatly influence grass-root women involvement in management level of community projects. 33% (34) of the respondents indicated that sex discrimination influences women's involvement in the management of county-funded community water projects to a great extent. In Gender stereotypes, 48.5% of respondents said it greatly influences, while 30.1% of respondents said it very greatly influences women involvement in water management level of county funded projects. In addition, implicit bias had 51.5% (53) of the respondents indicated that it influences women's involvement in the management of county-funded community water projects in a moderate extent.

CONCLUSIONS

The cultural structures constraints facing grass-root community women in being involved at the management level of community projects can be eliminated if the government, project managers and community members are keen in laying the following gender practices laid down. The study revealed that the national government has always strived to have women involvement at the management level of community development projects. The national government has committed herself to the removal of all forms of political, social, cultural, and economic discrimination against women. Therefore, the major responsibility lies in the hands of the county government, the community, and the project managers to implement gender policies comprehensively at management level for community transformation.

The study established that women are still underrepresented, and the factors mentioned continue to be a challenge to increase of women involvement at the management level of community projects. The revelation that women are limited in seeking for those promotions and that the few who serve at the management level are undermined in their performance, is an urgent issue that needs to be addressed by government, the community and gender equality stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To the County Government and policy makers: The study conclusion is that the community acknowledges that there is need to empower women to serve in management levels of community development projects. They need to be empowered

and trained on how to engage women fully in community organising and service in high management level.

2. The county government need to provide the right skills, empowerment, and experience to grassroot women who are willing to fully be involved in community projects. Further, community development management leaders ought to emerge from within the community through men and women who are actively involved in the projects and programs.

3. In addition, the government should network and partner with grassroot community organising expertise to not only develop their community with knowledge, skills, and experience necessary for project management but also gain wisdom and experience from these non-profits.

4. The county government ought to organise workshops for the grassroot community. Further, the donor and stakeholders from the central and county governments need to monitor and evaluate employment policies and their implementations to identify challenges faced by the project directors and seek to address them in a timely manner.

5. Further, the government should seek to emphasize on bottom up involvement approaches for sustainable development in water projects.

6. The government ought to create awareness, embark on water education, training, and capacity building to grassroot community organising and water management boards.

7. Grass-root communities need to be sensitized by the government on the strategies for maximum utilization of the available opportunities for rural water management.

8. Community development project county directors need to ensure that women are involved in the project research, prioritization, planning, implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation processes. As a result, women shall gain all kinds of project skills, knowledge and experiences that are crucial in leadership and management performance of community projects.

9. Also, there is need to campaign for more grass root women to access adult education and professional training to build their capacity to participate actively in the management of water projects.

10. Gender mainstreaming should be prioritized by the government in the intervention strategies designed by all the community water stakeholders, through clear procedures and policies and gender-sensitized personnel who will create awareness of gender equity in all the processes.

11. Gender experts incorporated in each aspect of the water projects to enhance gender-responsive objectives and gender responsive implementation results. There is need to acknowledge the importance of the role played by women in the provision, management, and preservation of water. Any gender-sensitive approach to water project management will seek to achieve equality between women and men in access to resources, benefits, power, information, decision-making, manual work, among others. Such a system is achievable when the different interests of men and women are taken into consideration

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