

# **POLITICAL AND SOCIAL STATUS OF WOMEN IN KENYA**

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the award of the Degree of  
**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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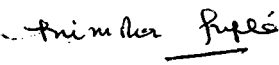
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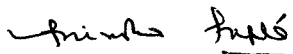
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CERTIFICATE  
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This is to certify that this dissertation entitled, **POLITICAL SOCIAL STATUS OF WOMEN IN KENYA**, submitted by K. SRUJANA, in partial fulfilment of six credits out of a total requirement of twenty four credits, for the award of the degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY of this University, is her original work and may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

This dissertation has not been submitted for the award of any other degree of this university or any other university to the best of our knowledge.

  
(PROF. ANIRUDHA GUPTA)  
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*K. Srujana*  
K. SRUJANA.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

"My wife does not work"

But then,

who bears the tiller, the toiler that

the world goes on?

Who does the cooking, the cleaning,

the washing ?

Who fetches the water, looks after the

children, nurses the sick ?

Whose work provides the time for the

man to drink with his friends, smoke

his hookah, gamble ?

Whose work provides the daily energy

for the man to earn a wage,

For the children to go to school ?

Whose labour unseen, unheard, unpaid,

underpaid, unrecognized ? <sup>1</sup>

---

### Footnotes :

1. Amrita Pritam (from an English translation of her collection of poems in Hindi, published on the occasion of March 8, 1980.)  
Maithreyi Krishna Raj and Vibhuti Patel, "Women's Liberation and the Political Economy of Housework : An Indian perspective"  
Women Studies International, No: 2 July 1982 , P.16 .



This unseen, unpaid and unrecognized labour is a reality women render in a male-dominated society. Women all over the world face difficult situations in family, social, economic and political circles. Also, till very recently, they were denied franchise. Their degree of political participation was negligible. Economically, women are not engaged in income-generating jobs. Even those women who are employed seldom occupy high ranking jobs. Socially, women are illiterate, ignorant and discriminated against.

The present study deals with the Status of Women in Kenya and highlights the growing concern over women's issues and problems. Its scope is limited to the status and role of Kenyan women in society, polity and economy of Kenya. The study focuses on the traditional roles of Kenyan women in the pre-colonial and colonial societies followed by their political and socio-economic status.

## CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

As the study deals with the status of women in different avenues of life, there is a definite need to understand the term 'status'. R.Linton defined status "as a position in a social system, such as 'child' or 'parent'."<sup>2</sup> The term 'status' is often not clearly distinguished from the term 'role'. Some use the two terms almost interchangeably. But the distinction can be made if one keeps in mind that "the status defines 'who' a person is, while role defines 'what' such a person is expected to do."<sup>3</sup> "Status is also used as a synonym for honor or prestige, when social status denotes the relative position of a person on a publicly recognized scale or hierarchy of social worth."<sup>4</sup>

### Footnotes :

2. The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology, (England, 1988) P. 242.
3. International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, vol. 15, (London, reprint. 1968) P. 251)
4. *ibid.* n.2. P. 242.

In the present study, the term status refers to the position of woman as an individual in the social structure defined by her designated rights and obligations. Status is explained in terms of role. Role is thus the dynamic aspect of status. The study of diverse roles of women in society includes that of a mother, wife, a career woman. These roles need not be convergent, nor given the same priority. In one case a woman may perceive her role as a house-wife and in another her career may assume primary role. In the third instance, a woman may struggle to give equal emphasis to two competing roles. In the process she bears the 'double burden' of running a household and pursuing a career. According to Dorothy Hammond and Atla Jablow, "in societies throughout the world women's primary roles have been family oriented. The activities and relationships that are basic to their lives are within the context of the family."<sup>5</sup> Therefore the study of the family roles is fundamental for the understanding of women and their place in society.

The status of women to a large extent is determined by the economy, polity, culture and technological advancement of a particular society. That is why women in the third world are even worse off than women in western countries. The third world is characterized as 'under-developed' or 'developing' countries which are faced with major development problems. The position of Kenyan women has to be studied in this context. A brief background about Kenya is relevant here.

## **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

The Republic of Kenya is in East Africa with a total area of 580, 367 sq. km. excluding inland waters.<sup>6</sup> It has a total population of 25.2 millions in the year 1990.<sup>7</sup>

### Footnotes :

5. Rekhadevi Raju, Status of Women, 1988 (Poona, 1988) P. 4.

6. Africa South of the Sahara 1990 19th edition, (1990) P. 559.

7. The situation of women - 1990, Equality Development Peace, UN Publications, (Vienna , 1990).

**"Kenya is one of the 49 low income countries of the world. It is also one of the 45 countries considered by the UN as Most Seriously Affected (MSA) by recent adverse economic conditions."**<sup>8</sup>

The private sector predominates in Kenya's free-market economy. The principal economic indicators which show the economic backwardness<sup>are</sup> displayed in the table 1.1.<sup>9</sup>

Kenya's economy depends mainly on agricultural production. The three basic aspects of the Kenyan economy are: that it is predominantly agricultural; that a major part of its export earnings depend on a few selected cash crops; and that until independence this provided the base for a hierarchical racial structure with Europeans occupying the top, Asians the middle, and Africans the base. Taken together these three aspects explain the social status of women in post-independent Kenya.<sup>10</sup> Due to the absence of a substantial manufacturing and mining industry Kenya's post-independent economy continued to remain dependent on the export of cash crops. In 1966, agriculture employed about 1.2 million of Kenya's 1.6 million families and contributed more than one-half of the country's total export.<sup>11</sup> From 1966 onwards, the government encouraged Africans to go into private farming, for which a programme of one million acre settlement scheme had been launched. By 1966 the Government had purchased about 1.1 million acres and settled about 29,000 families.<sup>12</sup>

The table 1.2<sup>13</sup> shows the important cash crops cultivated in Kenya. The fact that cash crops are tied up with International market and fluctuating prices inhibits any large-scale production of these cash - crops.<sup>14</sup> Market agriculture also restricts

Footnotes :

8. The Encyclopedia of the III World, Revised Edition Volume II. (London, 1982), P. 437.

9. *ibid.*, P. 938.

10. Anirudha Gupta, "Illusion of Progress" in Urmilla Phadnis and Indira Malani, ed., Women of The World (New Delhi, 1978) P. 249.

11. International Monetary Fund, Surveys of African Economies, vol. 2 (Washington, 1969) P. 142 .

12. *ibid.*, P 143

13. *ibid.*, n.8, P.940.

14. G.N. Gwyer, "Employment opportunities in Kenya Agriculture." East Africa Journal, vol. 0, n. 2 (March, 1973), P. 9-22, 27.

## TABLE 1.1 PRINCIPAL ECONOMIC INDICATORS.

Gross National Product - \$ 4.83 billion (1978) World Rank 77.

GNP Annual Growth Rate - 4.7 % (1970 - 1977).

Per Capita GNP - \$ 320 (1978)

World Rank - 98.

GNP per Capita Annual Growth Rate - 0.9 % ( 1970 - 77)

World Rank 85.

Per Capita GDP - Ksh 5588.4 (\$190) 1975.

Per Capita GDP Annual Growth Rate - 1.1 % (9170 - 1975)

World Rank - 55.

Income Distribution : 20.2 % of national income is received by the top 5%. 3.9 % national income is reduced by the bottom 20 % (1.3 % of the population receive over K L 120 and 14.1 % receive less than K L 20 per year.

Percentage of population in Absolute poverty - 43.

Consumer price index ( 1975 = 1000)

All items : 233.9 (July 1980).

FCOD : 240.7 (July 1980)

Average annual rate of inflation : 12% (1970-78).

Money supply : ksh 10.609 billion (May 1980)

Reserve - ksh 4.440 billion (May 1980) currency in circulated : ksh 2.6906 billion. (May 1980).

International Persons - \$520.5 million of which foreign exchange reserves were \$48% million (October 1980)

**TABLE 1.2 PRINCIPAL CROP PRODUCTION (1978)**

Crops	(1000 metric tons)
Wheat	2,350
Millet	130
Rice	42
Sugar Cane	2,275
Potatoes	361
Sweet Potatoes	330
Barley	35
Cassava (manioc)	620
Pulses	317
Pine apples	110
Coconut	78
Coffee (green)	80
Tea (made)	93
Sisal	31

large-scale employment of the Africans. It is on subsistence agriculture, therefore, that the bulk of the Kenyan population still lives. In 1962, it was estimated that the sex ratio among the rural population was 3,882,850 male and 4,082,468 female.<sup>15</sup> Since independence, most of the men started migrating to urban centres in search of employment. With the result, the burden of tilling the land and raising the family has fallen on the womenfolk.

Kenya is a Republic dominated by one party politics. The ruling party is the Kenya African National Union (KANU). The Government upholds the democratic and egalitarian principles. Kenya's Republican constitution rejects any discrimination - racial, ethnic, class-based or sexual. The Government stresses the equality of both the sexes. The organization of Kenyan Government is illustrated in the table 1.3<sup>16</sup> Kenya has no comprehensive state-sponsored social security system of welfare services, although there are some voluntary programmes sponsored by the National Social Security Fund. Much of Social Welfare is in the hands of private organizations and mutual aid societies. The women's organizations are not government sponsored though the government is involved in such groups.

In terms of development of science and technology, notable scientific institutions in Kenya include the UNESCO Research Office for Science and Technology in Sub-Saharan Africa, in Nairobi, coffee and tea research foundations, cotton, grasslands and plant-breeding research stations and numerous centres for veterinary research. Medical research focuses on the study of leprosy and tuberculosis.<sup>17</sup> No research seems to be conducted on any of the activities in which women are involved.

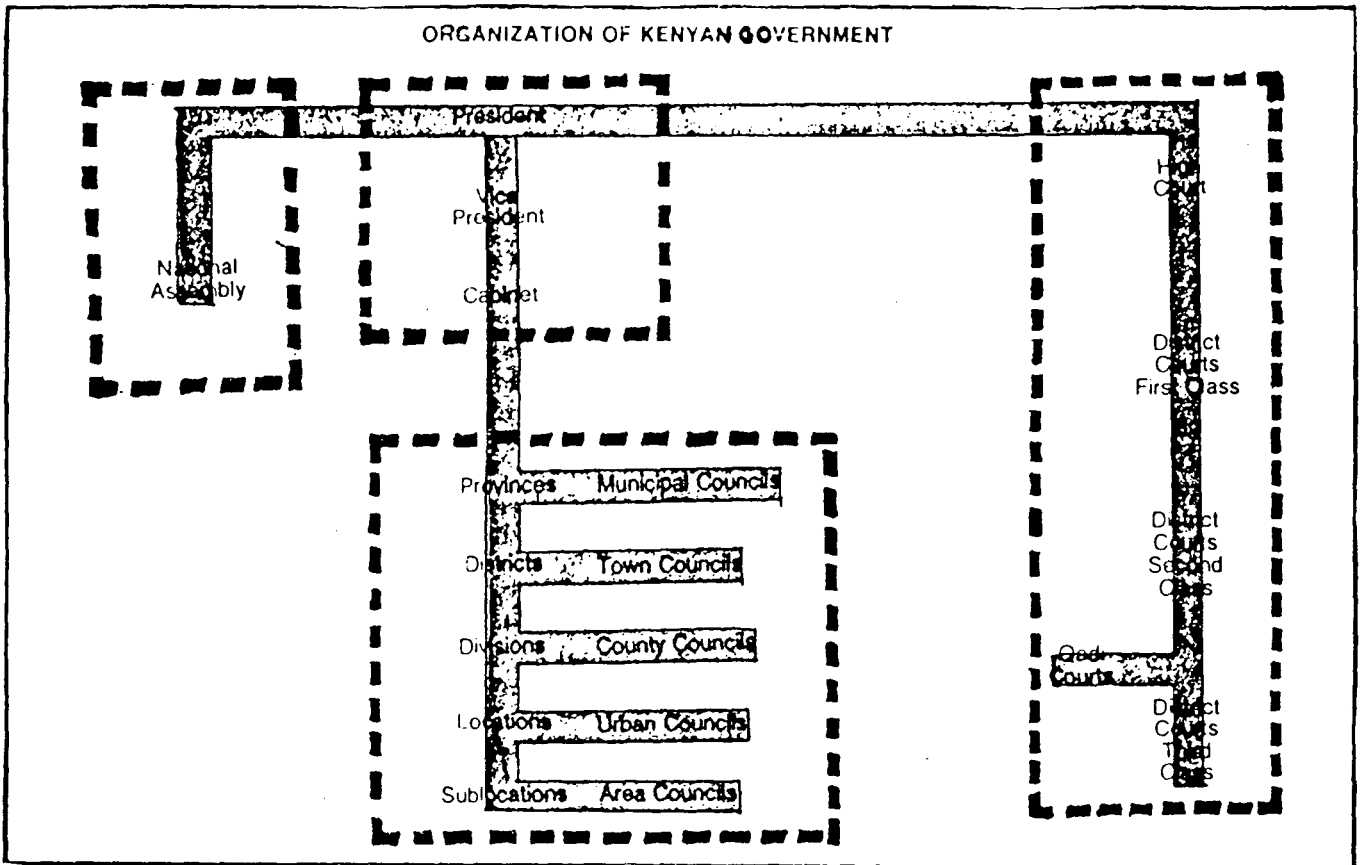
Footnotes :

15. UN Demographic Year book, 1970.

16. *ibid*, n.8, P.934.

17. Worldmark Encyclopedia of the Nations, AFRICA Vol.2, (published), TNC, (New York, 1984) P. 146.

ORGANIZATION OF KENYAN GOVERNMENT



## KENYAN WOMEN - BACKGROUND

In the traditional societies, the division of labour was apparent. Men went out for hunting, while women went gathering fruits and vegetables in the forests. They were interdependent. The question of who heads the family was non-existent. They lived in communities where the problem of survival was the responsibility of the community and where the community carried out disciplinary measures against the offenders of social rules.

The scene in modern times is totally different. The present Kenyan marriage relationships seem to place women in a very disadvantaged position of dependency. Marriage in Kenya is a contract between two lineages and not a direct commitment between the husband and the wife. The wife does not bring wealth to the family, but instead is exchanged for wealth remitted to her parents and lineage. This is termed as bride price or bride wealth. The bride price entitles the husband to the children.

Access to land is governed primarily by men. Women provide most of the on-farm labour in subsistence agriculture which occupies about two-thirds of Kenya's land. Subsistence production is largely the responsibility of women. Kenyan women have traditionally lacked full entitlement to land or to the labour services of their children.

There are clear customary rules in Kenyan society about the purposes of mothers and fathers labour responsibility. Responsibility for feeding the family rests with the mother. It includes all elements in the chain from food production and purchase of or trade of non-produced foods, to meal preparation. Meal preparation entails collection of water, fuel



etc. The traditional duty of the father is to plough the land, to cover major family expenses beyond food and clothing. Among these, schooling expenses have become more important since independence.

In order to earn off-farm income for purchase of food items that they do not produce, Kenyan women engage in a number of modest income-producing activities. Important among these are sale of surplus production, petty trading, beer-brewing, fast food preparation and sale of tobacco. The activities a woman undertakes are largely outside the observation and control of her husband.

Women are chiefly responsible for child rearing. In addition to providing subsistence to their families, they assume the principal role in raising children including responsibility for discipline and general welfare. It is this exclusive role of rearing and maintenance of children that mothers in Kenyan families are distinguished from women in most of the other developing countries.

A greater percentage of Kenyan women are unemployed, in the sense that they are employed in non-paying jobs and the type of work which is generally undervalued. In the urban areas, the woman who holds a formal office employment does double duty ; the office for which she is paid and the job of taking care of the family after she leaves the office. Most senior positions in both government and public sectors are held by men. This indicates that there are certain factors which have militated against women in employment. According to the illiteracy figures of 1977, around 70 percent of the female population is illiterate while only 35 percent of the male population is illiterate.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, men in Kenya

Footnotes :

18. Mumbi Gakue. "Kenyan Women and situation and strategies for improvement." Women's Studies International Forum vol. no.4, 1985 P.373.

are prejudiced against women occupying high positions. When asked if he would be willing to serve a woman prime minister, a KANU leader replied :

**"No ! if I were an MP, I would resign. It goes against our African traditions; a woman should stick to her cooking and looking after her husband and children."**<sup>19</sup>

It is clear that men in Kenya suffer from this gender prejudice and they try to justify it in terms of traditional African values.

Coming to the political aspect, The present-day women groups have become one of the most important popular participatory organizations in the country. The main objective of these groups is to improve their living conditions and become self reliant. They undertake various projects regarding this. The government increased its involvement in the activities of women when it realized that these groups were viable rural development institutions.. Firstly, it increased its assistance to women's groups by helping them to express their needs and interests at the national level. Secondly, through the third development plan i.e. 1974-1978 Plan, women's activities were promoted. Lastly, the establishment of the government machineries to deal specifically with women's issues or matters. One such example is the Women's Bureau in the ministry of culture and social services created in 1976. Thus, the government has shown keen interest in women's groups as institutions of popular participation for development .

Footnotes :

19. *ibid.* n10, P .247.

Government's increased interest in the activities of the women's groups is explained by a few factors. Women are an important political force in the country as they form the majority of the voters. Because of their political significance women's groups provide an important base for political support and action for government's developmental programmes. The government regards women and their groups as important links between the people and the government. The government therefore, uses women's groups to mobilise the community for the purpose of popularising government's development programmes. Women's groups also present the government with ready-made organizational framework which is suitable for certain rural development strategies. The establishment of rural industries and factories would be accordingly based on the needs of the women's groups. Thus, the politicisation of the women's groups served the ends of the politicians rather than solve the problems of women.

## **METHODOLOGY AND HYPOTHESIS**

The study is basically analytical. The political, social, economic and other problems are studied and analysed on the basis of secondary sources. Data and figures on literacy rate, employment, marriage, women's groups etc. are presented to substantiate the arguments.

The hypotheses put forth in the study are:

- 1) The women of Kenya are dissatisfied, discriminated against and oppressed. It will be proved that Kenyan women are politically, economically and socially backward.

2) There is some improvement noticed in women's situation of late. It is argued that Kenyan women are being modernized. Are Kenyan women really modernized? Is the improvement real or just superficial?

3) Does mere economic independence lead to women's emancipation?

4) Are Kenyan women being emancipated?

The essential issues discussed in the subsequent chapters of the study are as follows:

The traditional role of Kenyan women in the pre-colonial and colonial societies is discussed in the second chapter. Here, the division of labour by sex in the pastoral and the agricultural production of the pre-colonial societies is elaborated. And the women's role in these societies is highlighted. Light is thrown on how the colonial economy disrupted the working of pre-colonial societies affecting the women adversely.

Chapter three assesses in detail the role of Kenyan women in the public affairs and the policy-making. The role of women's groups in popular participation is focused upon. Finally it is illustrated how women remained politically backward.

The subsequent chapter i.e. chapter four elaborates on the socio-economic problems of the Kenyan women. The issues discussed are employment, migration, division of labour by sex, marriage, education, health and welfare, social welfare activities, religion so on and so forth. Figures are given in the form of tables. Women's socio-economic

problems are reflected proving that Kenyan women are socially and economically backward.

The fifth chapter is the conclusion including the suggestions and strategies for the improvement of Kenyan women. Here, the hypothesis is discussed and proved.

## CHAPTER II

## THE TRADITIONAL ROLE OF WOMEN IN PRE-COLONIAL AND COLONIAL SOCIETIES

The traditional role of women in the pre-colonial society is categorized into-

- i) Pastoral production and
- ii) Agricultural production

### PASTORAL PRODUCTION

In pastoral production livestock was economically and socially significant. Livestock mainly comprised of cattle, camels and goats. Almost all pre-colonial economies combined pastoral with agricultural production, though not to the same extent. Three types of pastoral economies are identified here- <sup>1</sup>

- a) The first consists of a permanent homestead and a complementary dry season camp. It is composed of women, children and older men. These men provide shelter for herdsmen seeking water and pasture. Agriculture is practiced by women. The Masai of Kenya represents this pattern.<sup>2</sup>

#### Footnotes :

1) Achola O. Pala . African Women in Rural Development : Research Trends and Priorities. O.I.C Paper No. 12 (Dec. 1976), PP. 15-16.

2) The Jie-Karamajong cluster in Uganda and the Nuer and Shilluk of Sudan also present this pattern. *ibid.* P.16.

b) The second pattern occurs when meager grazing and browsing facilities determine the livestock movement. The Turkana of Kenya illustrates this type.

c) The third type is reflected in societies where pastoral and agricultural production co-exist. Pakot of Kenya demonstrates this type. Here, there is one group specializing in agriculture and living on highland areas, while the other occupies the lowland areas and keeps cattle. Goods are interchanged between these groups.

In any type of pastoral production, the role of women was similar as far as allocation of livestock and rights are concerned. Monica Hunter<sup>3</sup> observed that women owned and transmitted property though they neither inherited nor bequeathed it. Women could acquire stock from their fathers on or after marriage. As owners, women had sole responsibility of disposal of their animals. At marriage, a polygamously married man allocated stock to each "indlu"<sup>4</sup> headed by a wife. To dispose animals of her indlu, the husband had to consult the wife.

Among the Turkana of Kenya, a woman was allocated cattle when she came to live with her husband's kin or acquired the status of a full wife.<sup>5</sup> At this point, a yard was built to contain all her possessions including her granaries and stores. This was her private domain, where she cooked, ate with her children and slept.

A wife's allocation was primarily made on the basis of her children's milk needs. She was given milk from sheep, and goats. She was allocated a donkey and an ox for

Footnotes:

3) Monica Hunter, "The Effects of Contact with European on Podo Women" Africa Vol. VI (1933) : PP 259-76.

4) It means the household.

5) Among the Turkana, marrying was a process that lasted from 3 to 5 years. A woman who entered into a marriage relationship with a man would normally live with her own family until she had one or two children. During this period, she would be called 'bride-wife'. After one or two children, she would go to her husband's home where she would acquire her own yard. She then becomes a full wife.



transportation. The brothers retained the remaining livestock until a new wife arrived. The herds initially allocated would be redistributed according to the changing household milk needs. Another means by which cattle could be acquired by a woman is through the marriage of her daughter or a girl in the family. Her father, brother, sisters' husband or daughters' husband could gift her an animal. A woman could allocate animals to her married daughter with children to provide milk. When a mother died, her eldest unmarried daughter kept the herds in trust of her brothers. A son's wife also received an allocation.

Woman's cattle rights were usufructuary, therefore limited to consumption. She had the right to the skin and meat of a dead animal that had been a part of her yard herds. She made clothes, bags, covers and sandals from the skin. Meat was presented as gifts to her women friends and neighbourhood wives.

The Turkana of Kenya made similar allocations with one exception. The chief wife received an allocation in excess of her needs. However, she was expected to hold the surplus in trust for her husband for subsequent allocations as needed. The Turkana families had two homesteads, the goat and the cattle homestead. These wives received camels which provided milk for children when cow's milk was in short supply.

Pastoralism was economically significant in the Nandi tribe of Kenya. The Nandi are a section of the Kalenjin - speaking peoples of Kenya.<sup>6</sup> The people now called Nandi represent an amalgamation of people who found their ways of immigration.<sup>7</sup>

Footnotes :

6) Regina Smith oboler, Women , Power and Economic change - The Nandi of Kenya, (California. 1985). P.17.

7) ibid. . P. 18.

In the pre-colonial Nandi society, herding cattle was preferably done by young men of the warrior age-grade i.e. between the ages of circumcision and marriage.<sup>8</sup> There were communal pastures. Milk had long been one of the mainstays of Nandi diet and the major source of protein. Traditionally, cattle were not killed except for ritual purposes. Nandi culture was traditionally marked by values usually associated with the so called "cattle complex".<sup>9</sup> Wealth was judged in terms of cattle. A man who had no cow at all was looked down as having very low social status. Cattle were associated with the traditional religious systems and were considered sacred. Concern with cattle permeated Nandi life in social matters. Cattle were essential for bride wealth and homicide payments. Most women kept chicken and eggs. There were often sold by women at market as a source of petty cash.

The position of women in the domestic economy of Pastoral Societies varied between nomadic and transhumant types. In the transhumant system, women controlled agricultural production and disposal of garden produce. Farming was primarily the responsibility of women. They grew sorghum as the main staple crop. Sorghum was well adapted to conditions of low rainfall. Older women often harvested crops. Women used short-handled hoe for ground cultivation, for planting and weeding. They did harvesting and storing.

Women as wives, mothers and daughters were equal to men in the household economy as they played a significant role in agriculture. The garden was the women's livestock. A woman's economic responsibilities in her yard consisted of preparing milk products, performing the domestic chores related to feeding the family and rearing the children. Jie and Nuer women milked cattle. Among the Luo, it was a taboo as it is believed that if a

Footnotes :

8) *ibid.* , P. 25.

9) *ibid.* , P. 28.

woman milks a cow, her husband would become impotent. Also, if a menstruating woman approached a cow, its milk would get spoiled.

In the pre-colonial pastoral or agricultural economies, women were well protected economically. Their usufructuary rights in land and cattle were well defined. As women met the subsistence requirements, it was beneficial to the family and the village community, to give women, their land and livestock rights. There was inter-family co-operation in grazing the cattle and sharing the milk. So the woman's usufructuary rights in livestock were extended beyond her immediate family. This practice contributed to her economic security and stability.

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Women's rights in production were derived from the following characteristics of the traditional pre-colonial economy<sup>10</sup> .

- a) The emphasis on usufructuary rights to land, livestock and natural resources favoured the individual economic rights of women, men, children, aged and physically handicapped persons.
- b) Labour in productive work held precedence over absolute ownership. This ensured that as long as an individual worked to his capacity, he would be guaranteed access to products of land and livestock.
- c) The biological role of child-bearing gave women the social responsibility of feeding and rearing children. This made women socially significant. Women commanded respect in society.

Footnotes :

10) Pala, N.I. PP. 20-22..



d) The legal and moral obligations that governed the institution of marriage created marital stability.

e) The socio-economic function of the 'house' in a polygamous marriage made woman strong by virtue of her position as de facto head of the house. The house was important in both its social and economic implications.

Though women had cattle consumption rights, she lacked disposal rights. Women did not inherit cattle. A man could take an animal which the wife had acquired and barter it or dispose it without consulting her. A woman couldn't do this. Men controlled cattle in pastoral communities. A woman's position was rather peripheral. She neither owned nor inherited cattle. Agricultural land and produce were not at her disposal.

## **AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION**

Hoe culture was practiced in agricultural production. Hoe culture refers to farming systems in which the hoe constitutes the major technology used on the farm. Baumann<sup>11</sup> conducted an extensive survey of the division of labour by sex in African hoe culture. He observed that in such a system of subsistence agriculture, men's labour input on the farms consisted of clearing bushes before the land was dug. It was confined to a short period. Women worked throughout the agricultural year. Women were in charge of growing the oldest root crops, kitchen vegetables and spices. They even cultivated food crops. Division of labour on farm and in household made men largely dependent on women as providers

### Footnotes :

11) H. Baumann, "The Division Work According to Sex in African Hoe Culture" Africa vol. I No. 3 (1928) PP. 289 - 319.

of food. For example among the 'Konde'<sup>12</sup>, if a man had no female relatives, he could not grow essential vegetables like beans, peas or maize and had to forgo eating them.<sup>13</sup> Men cultivated fruit trees and perennial crops such as banana and cocoa.

C. K. Meek<sup>14</sup> undertook a study of the Jukun - speaking people of Nigeria. He found that the heavy work of clearing bushes and felling trees was done by men. Though women's work was lighter, it continued all the year. Women took part in planting, collecting and harvesting crops and transporting them home. They also helped men to clear grass, weeds and scare birds from millet crops. If the husband had to be away for an extended period, women cultivated their own small millet fields, to be used for additional food.<sup>15</sup> Women were responsible for thrashing and winnowing the millets. Women cultivated potatoes, kokoyams, groundnuts etc. Though they could, women do not usually dispose off these crops as they constituted the reserve food supply during scarcity.

May. M. Edel's<sup>16</sup> study of the Chiga of western Uganda was conducted in 1932-33. According to her, Chiga practiced a mixed economy of animal husbandry and agriculture. They grew pears, beans, maize and small millet. The division of labour suggested that the entire responsibility of agricultural production rested with women. They turned the soil, sowed, weeded and harvested. Men cleared the land. Their main task consisted of tending cattle and doctoring animals. They built storage bins and houses, tanned hides and specialized in iron work or carpentry. Men worked with their sons, Women worked with their daughters and daughters- in-law. Women were responsible for domestic

Footnotes :

12) The Konde people originally occupied the northern part of Mozambique and Southern Tanzania. Now they live in different parts of Tanzania as far as Dares salaam. Today they are better known as artists of the world famous for MaKonde carvings. A dominant feature of their carving is the embodiment of folk religion and beliefs and distortions of the physical form. Often the eye or ear is in unnatural positions. This type of art, which challenges fixed notions of symmetry and perception of congruity, apparently served as an inspirational source for Picasso's paintings.

13) Baumann, N.7, P. 305.

14) C. K. Meek. A Sudanese Kingdom, (1931).

15) *ibid.*, P.408

16) May. M. Edel, The Chiga of Western Uganda, (1957).

work. Drying and storing the food crops, brewing beer and weaving mats were additional tasks performed by women.

*J.H. Driberg*<sup>17</sup> studied the Lango of Uganda. He was greatly impressed by the complementary nature of productive work in these societies. Men's work included herding, hunting and military operation. They stayed away from home for the greater part of the day or for several consecutive days. Women's work included hoeing, weeding, tending vegetables and preparation of food. They worked for long hours. Men and women appeared equal in their daily work and economic activities.

*P. Kaberry*<sup>18</sup> (1952) studied the Bamenda women of Cameroon. She discovered that women had traditionally been in charge of food production processing and marketing. She demonstrates that within the limits of shifting cultivation, these women played a crucial role in production. They were responsible for hoeing, weeding, harvesting and transporting crops home from the fields. They prepared food. Men were responsible for seasonal heavy bush clearing. Marketing was limited to barter. Gift giving was a common form of exchange. A woman was free to dispose of crops from her fields as gifts to her friends and family, without having to consult her husband. But a man had to consult his wife before he could make offers or gifts of produce from the family crops.

Two studies, one conducted by *Dora Earthy*<sup>19</sup> on Lenge women of Mozambique (1968) and the other by *Monica Hunter*<sup>20</sup> on Ama Pondo women of South Africa (1933) provide further comparative data on African women's position in pre-colonial production.

Footnotes :

17) J. H. Driberg, "The Status of Women Among Nilotics and Nilo- Hamitics" *Africa* (1932) PP. 404-421.

18) P.Kaberry, *Women of the Grassfields London : Colonial Office : Her majesty's stationary Office.* (1952).

19) Dora Earthy, *Valenge Women*, (London , 1968).

20) Hunter, N.3, PP. 259 - 276.

Dora Earthy's<sup>21</sup> discussions on women's agricultural activities and related ritual prohibitions are especially revealing. Among the Lenge, women were in charge of food production and preparation. This included planting, weeding and harvesting as well as disposing of crops by home consumption, exchange and gift-giving. One type of ritual prohibition concerning pregnancy is important to note here. A pregnant woman had to prevent injury to her unborn baby and to crops. When working in the fields, she was required to tie her cloth, not above the breasts, but at the waist. If she tied the cloth above the breasts, it was believed that pumpkins, mealies and groundnuts would rot and die. If she roasted maize in the fields, the maize crops would die. If she poked a fire in the field with a burning stick, it was believed that fire insects would eat the young shoots of the crops. Before sowing seeds she had to perform the Khualaha rite which involved taking earth in her right hand, putting some of it in her left hand and pressing it on either side of her abdomen. If she failed to do this before sowing, the seeds would perish.

Earthy noted that in such a patrilineal society women did not have formal power. Yet there were women called vanyamusore who were feared. They were believed to have the power to call out i.e. exercise demons. It is contradictory to accord pregnant women with the power to cause crops to wilt and die when the same women are fully in charge of food production.

By prevailing rules of marriage, women were chosen from outside group. This 'alien' origin combined with their monopoly of food production and preparation aroused ambivalent feelings towards women. This ambivalence manifests itself in the form of ritual

Footnotes :

21) *ibid.* , N. 19.

prohibitions which essentially held women responsible for crop failure and food shortage. More cases need to be examined to prove this, but that is beyond the scope of this study.

Monica Hunter<sup>22</sup> explains that Pondo women were responsible for growing the staple grains - maize and millet. Their agricultural tasks included hoeing, planting, weeding. They were in charge of all household activities like cooking, water pooling, gathering wild plants for food and child care. They were responsible for the maintenance work such as thatching, mudding and repairing houses. They specialized in pottery and basket work. Men had the responsibility of clearing land in the pre-planting period. Men fell trees and women cut shrubs. Other tasks of men included defense, cattle care, hunting, constructing houses and granaries and specialising in leather-work, iron-smelting and some basket-work.<sup>23</sup> Although the division of labour was fairly equal between the sexes, women's work was 'more continuous and more monotonous' Hunter stressed that 'women were an economic asset in their communities and were economically self-supporting'.<sup>24</sup>

Land was communally owned and each member of the Umzi (patrilineal kinship group) had access to land by virtue of membership to an Umzi. Unmarried women did not have the right to major decisions regarding land. At marriage woman acquired fields which were known by her name. She cultivated these fields and the yields belonged to her in-laws. The yields were inherited by the youngest son as were the animals. To dispose of grain women had to consult their husbands.

Bride-wealth (*ikazi*) was given by the man's family to the family of the woman. To give bride-wealth to the woman's family (*ukulobla*) was to give stability and security to the

Footnotes :

22) Hunter, N. 3, PP. 259-276.

23) *ibid.*, PP. 260-261.

24) *ibid.*, P.261.



woman. If the marriage was unsuccessful, the woman could return to her family and expect to be treated with respect because the family had received her ikazi. We can conclude that pre-colonial Pondo women had a strong social and economic position deriving their central role in food production, child bearing and marriage. While wife beating was not uncommon, women would return to their natal homes to escape this type of male reprisal. Man with a run- away wife lost his station in his umzi. Other women refused to provide domestic services for him. People said -

**"He is living alone just like a wild animal, cooking for himself".<sup>25</sup>**

Pondo women were assigned both benevolent as well as malevolent powers. They could kill or cure. When an umzi was perishing, it was often assumed that one of the wives had summoned an evil spirit. Old women became *amatongo*.<sup>26</sup> Though a woman could be made sick by her paternal aunt or husband's sister, and a child by its dead mother, women still became a *magquira*,<sup>27</sup> a herbalist or even a rain doctor.<sup>28</sup>

Such social organization gave men political power and basic production means. Women were invested with the central economic and ritualistic (religious) capabilities. Men were dependent upon women as producers and reproducers of immediate life.

Recent research in East Africa indicates the importance of women in local economies. The work of Gunter Wagner<sup>29</sup> on the Luyia (1939) and Peristiany<sup>30</sup> on the kipsigis (1939) are important in this context.

Footnotes :

25) *ibid.* , P.266.

26) It means ancestral spirits and ritual officiants to save the sick.

27) It means doctor/diviner in communication with ancestral spirits.

28) Hunter, N. 3. PP. 266 , 268.

29) Gunter Wagner, The Changing Family Among the Bantu Karirondo. (London. 1939).

30) J.G. Peristiany. The Social Institutions of the Kipsigis (London . 1939).

Wagner argued that economic co-operation among family members in the Kitosh and Maragoli communities of the Baluyia was important. Cattle was kept in substantial numbers by different families. Cattle did not change the economy from subsistence to exchange because only few things could be acquired with cattle. Men and boys tended goat and cattle herds. Men were responsible for trading cattle and maintaining the home i.e. thatching the roof and erecting poles. Women and girls were responsible for the bulk of agricultural work, especially hoeing. At fourteen, a girl was given her garden. Her crops were stored in a separate granary to be opened ceremonially at her marriage. In addition to hoeing, women cooked, carried water and wood, gathered wild roots and vegetables and ground sorghum. Both men and women joined in planting, weeding and harvesting. Thus, the family was a self-sufficient economic unit with its members working in a complementary fashion.

Peristiany<sup>31</sup> observed that among the kipsigis the village community or kokwet operated as a co-operative economic unit. According to their myths, when cattle were dying of thirst during a drought, the women found grains of elusine growing in elephant dung. Tasting and finding it to be sweet, they planted the grain. From that moment the kipsigis were stronger than their neighbours.

Within the kokwet family, agricultural work was clearly divided between men and women in terms of labour and decision-making regarding the disposal of crops. There were three kinds of fields-

Footnotes :

31) *ibid.*

i) Kabungat was a small vegetable garden managed exclusively by a woman and her daughters. They grew vegetables to prepare food.

ii) *Imbaret a mossop* was the field of the house. It was owned by each married woman. Each household had its own field. Men erected fences and sowed seeds. Grains were stored in separate granary. Men had no authority over it.

iii) *Imbaret ab soi* or *kapande* was the man's field. The most important crop cultivated was maize. These crops were mainly used to entertain men's friends.

In the Nandi tribe of Kenya, subsistence had always been based primarily upon cultivation. Traditionally, the work of clearing land for its first planting was done by men. After the ground had been cleared, it was broken up using iron hoes and digging sticks. Planting was done by men, women and children. Weeding was done by women and children. Harvesting was done by both sexes. The amount of ground typically cultivated by a Nandi nuclear family was three quarters of an acre.<sup>32</sup> Plows were used by Nandi families by 1900s. Plowing was usually done by father and son, brothers or age-mates. It was rarely that women did plowing. In the whole process of cultivation both sexes co-operated and participated.

Women thus played a significant role in agricultural production in the traditional pre-colonial societies. Women were economically and socially important. The task allocation, the traditions, the rituals and the marriage rules did put women in a disadvantaged position compared to men. In spite of these difficulties, women could take independent

Footnotes :

32) Oboler, N.6. P. 24.

decisions. Women enjoyed independence and commanded respect in society. This is mainly due to the fact that they are the providers of food as well as they being the mothers. Men had to depend on them for both food and children. Women held strong position in the economy and the society. This does not mean that she was not discriminated against men. But the point to be noted here is that, though she was at a disadvantaged position, she still enjoyed independence mainly due to the existence of such land tenure system which gave her the use rights. Moreover her labor was recognized and respected.

### IMPACT OF COLONIAL ECONOMY ON WOMEN

As a colony, Kenya attracted a large number of European and Asian settlers. The European farmers occupied the Kenyan highlands for raising cash crops such as coffee, tea and sisal.

**"The introduction of a market economy in agriculture helped to integrate the colony with the system of world capitalism".<sup>33</sup>**

From Asia the Indian immigrants set up retail trade and commerce thereby opening the country for world market. The net result of European and Asian colonization was that the Africans were largely confined to subsistence agriculture. Due to pressure of population on land, Africans migrated to the towns or plantations. They provided cheap labour. Their income in cash remained far below that of the other two races see Table 2.<sup>34</sup>

#### Footnotes :

33) Anirudh Gupta, "Illusion of Progress- The Women of Kenya", in , Urmila Phadnis and Indira Malani ed., Women of the World - Illusion and Reality (New Delhi, 1978). P. 249.

34) *ibid.*

Table 2.1

Per Capita Domestic Income Race wise , 1957 ( in Pounds )

African	9.8
Asian	166.8
European	556.0

Source : M. W. Forrester, Kenya Today : Social Prerequisites for Economic Development , Hague , 1962 .

A number of authors writing on women's role in African economies have indicated that the colonial economy adversely affected female autonomy and disrupted the traditional patterns of task allocation on the farm.

As early as 1932, Driberg<sup>35</sup> noted that the introduction of cash crops upset the division of labour between men and women and also their pre-colonial economic complementarity.

In 1938, Peristiany<sup>36</sup> observed that the *imbaret ab soi* or *Kapande*, the man's field among the kipsigis of Kenya, was more rapidly commercialized than the *imbaret a mossop*, the field of the house owned by each married woman. Among the kipsigis, the man's field was planted with maize. The field was ploughed rather than hand dug. The maize harvested

Footnotes :

35) Driberg, N.17, PP. 404 - 421.

36) Peristiany, N. 30.

from it was sold and the money used to pay taxes. In this way men's fields were rapidly mechanized and directly linked to the colonial economy. The field of the house continued to be hand dug by women and the produce used to feed the domestic group.

J. Fisher<sup>37</sup> had undertaken a study of the Agikuyu of Kenya in 1950s. She explained the changes in the balance of work among Agikuyu men and women. More and more women were found doing what was traditionally men's work. Fisher explains this change by the following factors -

a) Wage employment was drawing more men away from the work on their own fields.

b) European education had the effect of changing men's attitudes about agriculture. They started considering it women's work.

c) A third and very important factor for this imbalance was the arrest of a large number of men in connection with the 'Mau Mau' revolt. Already by 1950, there was a great deal of political unrest in Kikuyuland. This was due to the increased political consciousness of the masses brought by close contacts with the settlers and colonial administrators.

Thus, when men were forcibly or willingly removed from their localities and were unable to contribute to production, women had to assume their responsibility to maintain the continuity of the community. This situation forced many Kikuyu women to be more independent than other women.

Footnotes :

37) J. Fischer, The Anatomy of Kikuyu Domesticity and Husbandry. (1956).

In 1967 Jane Wills in a study of the Embu of Kenya noted the disruption of the pre-colonial division of labor between the sexes in Embu society. Once again this was mainly due to the high male absenteeism from the countryside. Consequently, women had to perform men's work. They produced more by contributing more physical labor. They took market decisions also.

The same is the case with the women of the other countries in Africa.

**"In Zambia and Malawi for instance, 30-50 percent of able bodied men worked outside their home area. In 1940, it was found that in Kabwe, Zambia, 69.9 percent of the African labor force (6,460 men) had spent two-thirds of their time in town leaving their homes. And only 17.7 percent of their salaries went to their homes. Further, after deducting transport costs and other expenses incurred by the wage earners on their home visits, the amounts of money sent to the home amounted to just 10.5 percent per person per year."<sup>38</sup>**

**"In Kabwe, the African male population of 7,500 had with it a total female population of 3,500 and 4,000 children. For every dependent present, three remained in the rural areas. Most of men in town were young (average age in Kabwe was 24 years and 7 months). They often left their countryside around the age of 16 years."<sup>39</sup>**

It was not possible for these men to raise enough income to feed themselves and their families in the urban industrial work situations. They were also permanently withdrawn

Footnotes :

38) Pala, N.I, P. 23.

39) *ibid.* . P.24.

from the rural areas and were unable to contribute to agricultural and related economic activities. Wives, fiancées and the old were left with deteriorating food and nutrition facilities. This led to malnutrition in children and mothers.

Lets now examine how the colonial rule affected the women of the Nandi tribe in Kenya. In the first place 'women's economic rights were undermined by land consolidation, as a system of use- rights that included women was converted to almost exclusively male private ownership.'<sup>40</sup> Further, control of the cash crops, maize and tea, and high-producing dairy cattle, came to be concentrated in male hands. These activities led to high profits which went to men. In the Nandi society there was no male migration as such. The whole families moved together. But women were more responsible to subsistence agriculture than men. Seed distribution and such extension services were oriented towards men. This led to a situation in which women contributed the major portion of labor for cultivation of eleusine for subsistence, while men cultivated maize and earned profits which were considered his personal property. Plows have been introduced in Nandi in 1925. The husband did the plowing. The wife helped the husband in weeding and harvesting.

**"The crop was split into two portions. One portion, called the ' wife portion' was put into grainary and used to feed the household until the next harvest."**<sup>41</sup>

The brewing of beer had traditionally been women's work. Through this women did make a lot of money. The other major avenue to the accumulation of cash open to women during this period was prostitution.

Footnotes :

40) Oboler, , N. 6 , P. 153.

41) *ibid.* , P. 161.



**"Prostitution occurred traditionally in Nandi, as women who went into lowland areas to trade for grain were known to trade sexual favours as well as stock."<sup>42</sup>**

During the 1930s and 1940s Nandi women made their way into most of Kenya's cities as prostitutes. Many prostitutes returned to Nandi with their earnings, bought land and cattle and resettled in Nandi as independent householders.

**"The apparent attractiveness of this potentially economically profitable option led to concern among Nandi men over loss of control over women."<sup>43</sup>**

All these changes in Nandi had far-reaching implications. The land tenure system was turned upside down. The changes in the land-tenure system only resulted in widening of the economic gap between men and women. The social evils like prostitution continued.

Margaret Jean Hay<sup>44</sup> in her article on Luo women, emphasizes the role of Luo women of western Kenya in

**"adopting economic innovations to resolve particular problems - primarily the need to maintain a certain level of food production despite the large scale withdrawal of male labor from the rural economy and the increasing pressures of taxes, declining soil fertility and the fragmentation of holdings".<sup>45</sup>**

Footnotes :

43) *ibid.* , P. 174.

44) Margaret Jean Hay, "Luo Women and Economic Change During the Colonial Period", in, Nancy J. Holkin and Edna G. Bay, ed., Women in Africa - Studies in Social and Economic Change , (California, 1976), PP. 87- 109.

45) *ibid.* , P. 109.

Luo women took part in an ongoing process of experimentation and change in agricultural crops and techniques. They incorporated the newly possible short-rain crops into the agricultural cycle. There was a constant process of trying out new seed varieties and new techniques. Since the 1930s these women adopted a wide range of labour-saving innovations in order to reduce the time invested in agriculture and to reinvest the time saved in trade. Thus, in the context of deteriorating economic conditions of the colonial period, these women succeeded in maintaining both their agricultural production and their limited opportunities for capital accumulation.

Ester Boserup summarizes the results of colonial agricultural policies as follows :

**"As a result of the attitudes of the extension service, the gap between the labor productivity of men and women thus continues to widen. Men are taught to apply modern methods in the cultivation of a given crop, while women continue to use traditional methods in the cultivation of the same crop, thus getting much less out of their efforts than men. The inevitable result is that women are discouraged from participating in agriculture and are glad to abandon cultivation whenever their husband's income makes it possible".<sup>46</sup>**

Majorie Mbilinyi<sup>47</sup> judges how colonial rule affected the role of women, in the following manner -

Footnotes :

46) Ester Boserup, *Women's Role in Economic Development*, (1970).

47) M.J. Mbilinyi, *The Participation of Women in African Economies*. (Dar-es-Salaam University, 1971) , P. 7.

- "a) In view of the development of dual economics under colonial rule, African women were confined to subsistence production, while men took over cash crop production.**
- b) Because the educational system subserved the colonial administrative interests, boys were favoured rather than girls.**
- c) A shift in the division of labor occurred and women began to do jobs formerly considered men's job, but this did not mean liberation for them and**
- d) Although the subsistence economy remain necessary, women's role in the household diminished in importance."<sup>48</sup>**

In this chapter the traditional role of women in the pre-colonial and the colonial societies is studied with many examples. In the pre-colonial society in both pastoral and agricultural production, women were predominantly responsible for subsistence agricultural production. Women had a monopoly of agricultural skills, while men had monopoly of skills in animal husbandry, fishing and hunting. Men and women shared the work more or less equally. Women had been the primary decision-makers in matters of crop production, although the sources reviewed do not clearly indicate the structure of decision-making in the family and community as a whole. For example in tribes like Kipsigis of Kenya, a man needed his wife's consent to dispose of crops. However, colonial consolidation precipitated a rapid entry and integration of men into the colonial economy. It led them to acquire certain skills, such as the use of plough and oriented them in the colonial market.

Footnotes :

48) Gupta, N.29. P. 253.

The sector in which most women possessed skills and decision-making power was neglected and as a result, stagnated. Thus, women continue to use backward techniques of cultivation which became less and less productive. The colonial economy disrupted the pre-colonial task allocation between men and women. Consequently women became not only backward but overburdened with work and responsibilities.

## CHAPTER III

## W O M E N   I N   K E N Y A N   P O L I T I C S

Kenya's Republican Constitution rejects racial, ethnic, class or sexual discrimination. "The Governments' sessional paper, African Socialism, states that women's part in nation- building is "equal to men's in every respect."<sup>1</sup> In a speech delivered at the East African Women's seminar on 11 April 1964, President Kenyatta declared,

**"the concept of partnership between men and women in society must be respected and given practical application by both sexes. They should understand that the future is as bright for women as it is for them."**<sup>2</sup>

The ruling party, the Kenya African National Union (KANU), has a women's wing. This wing is supposed to mobilize and secure the participation of women in politics. There are also a number of organizations specifically devoted to serving women's interests. These function under a coordinating body called the Kenya National Council of Women. The Government holds a number of seminars, cultural shows and fund-raising ceremonies. The politicians in these functions reiterate their faith in the honoured place women occupy in society. These apart, there are church groups, welfare associations, tribal associations, the Young Women's Christian Association and Red Cross. The Above mentioned are some of the devices adopted by the Kenyan political leaders to encourage women's participation in politics. They hope to protect and upgrade the status of women. They do this only in a symbolic way. There is a gap between what they believe, and what they do. In practice,

### Footnotes :

1. Anirudha Gupta, "Illusion of Progress - The Women of Kenya," Women of the World-Illusion and Reality, in Urmila Phadnis and Indira Malani, ed., Women of the world - Illusion and Reality (1978) P. 256.

2. Audray Wipper, "Politics of sex," African Studies Review vol. 14, No.3, (Dec. 1971), P. 470.

the women's wing of KANU serves as a useful auxiliary to mobilize female votes for KANU candidates. But,

**"until 1964, the party did not put up a single woman candidate for election to the National Assembly. Of the 12 special seats in the Assembly filled by appointment in 1965, not one was allocated to women."**<sup>3</sup>

The remark made by Rath Habwe, a militant worker in women's cause, is relevant, She says :

**"...time and again many of our leaders have expressed favour for the women - although when it comes to give a woman something they have always misled."**<sup>4</sup>

In almost all spheres of politics the participation of Kenyan women is minimal. There are no women Cabinet Ministers. During the period 1985-87, the participation of women in the Kenyan legislature is just 2 percent.<sup>5</sup> Among the high-ranking civil servants there are one or two women whose function exclusively concerns women. The National Youth Service recruits only boys. Very less number of girls receive secondary and University education. In short,

**"despite the democratic and egalitarian principles upheld by the post-independent government, the traditional handicaps generally hold back women's position in society."**<sup>6</sup>

Footnotes :

3. Gupta, N.1, P. 257.

4. Wipper, n.2, P. 465.

5. The situation of women - 1990, Equality, Development peace. (Kenya) by Department of International Economics and Social Affairs, Statistical office, UN office at Vienna, UN Publication (1990).

6. Gupta, n.1, P. 257.

This situation prompted the upper crust of educated women to take initiative to demand

**"equal rights and an equal share for women in the responsibilities and opportunities of nation- making."<sup>7</sup>**

These women formed various self-help groups and women's associations in this direction. The present-day women groups have become one of the most important popular participatory organisations in the country. Before assessing the role of women's group in participatory development, lets briefly examine the concept of popular participation as expressed and practiced in Kenya's *Harambee* system.

Any effort to bring about development must include the issue of the involvement of the people themselves in their development. Virtually all Governments recognize this point. However, different Governments conceptualize and interpret popular participation to development differently. They differ both in the degree to which they involve their people as well as the reason for involving them.

*Harambee* is popular participation as an approach to Kenya's development. According to the *Harambee* philosophy<sup>8</sup> the people in their local environments are required to initiate development projects based on their felt needs. They contribute resources in the form of finance and labour. The role of the Government in this process is to assist in the implementation of these projects initiated by the people, by providing additional

Footnotes :

7. *ibid.* , PP. 257 - 258.

8. Peter Wanyande, "Women's groups in participatory development : Kenya's development experience through the use of Harambee. " *Development*, (2nd March 1987), P. 95.



finance and technical advice and expertise. The strategy thus emphasizes the need for cost sharing between the people and the government in matters of development.

Several factors lead to the adoption of this strategy. It would remove from the minds of the people the assumption that the independent government would provide them with all their development needs. The cost is shared between the government and the people. The responsibility is more on the people as they are the initiators. Any failure to initiate development would be blamed on the people and not on the government as such.

*Harambee* also incorporates the idea of felt needs as an important consideration in the identification of developmental projects. Thus people were given the freedom to choose their own development needs. Another thing about this philosophy is that it is not based on the political consideration of bringing about democratic control of development by the people. To democratize the development process at the local level would appear to contradict the tendency and determination in Kenya to attain political conformity and central government control of local politics.

To facilitate this form of grassroots participation, the Government established several participatory institutions such as the Provincial Development Committee and the District Development Committee.<sup>9</sup> The people on their part organized themselves and formed many community based groups with the objective of participating in their own development. One such group is the women's group movement. It is a movement that has become a household name in development debates specially in the rural areas.

Footnotes :

9. W.O. Oyugi, Popular Participation and Access to Basic Needs in Kenya. In Franklyn Usk (ed) Popular Participation in Planning for Basic Needs. (1985) PP.154 - 166.

## THE CONCEPT OF WOMEN'S GROUPS

The term women's groups generally refer to a relatively small local community based groups formed for the purpose of working collectively and socializing on a regular basis. The groups encourage self help, offering individual members the opportunity to improve their welfare and those of their families.<sup>10</sup>

The significance of women's groups as institutions for popular participation for development is of a recent origin. But their existence dates back to the pre-independence period. During that period these groups took the form of mutual aid work groups. There was reciprocal exchange of labor and other socio-economic services among the group members. The services were for activities such as farming, construction of houses etc. The groups were particularly strong in their rural areas.

An important characteristic of these pre-independence women groups was their informal nature. The only exception in this regard was the *Maendeleo Ya Wanawake* Organization.<sup>11</sup> While the practice of providing labor and the other forms of assistance on a reciprocal basis has persisted, the present - day women's groups have acquired a more well defined formal organizational structure. In addition these groups are carrying out activities directed not only to the felt needs of the women, but also to the community and the country as a whole.

### Footnotes :

10. Mazingira : A Guide to Women's Organisations and Agencies Serving Women in Kenya. (1985). P. 268.

11. This organization will be discussed later on in this chapter.

## OBJECTIVES OF WOMEN GROUPS

Women groups are basically self-help in nature. Their main objectives are to improve their living conditions and becoming self-reliant. To realize this objective, they undertake a diversity of income-generating projects such as cash crop farming and poultry keeping. They even establish a revolving fund which is given to the members in turns. In some groups this done on a monthly basis and in more successful groups it is done twice a month. The purpose of this revolving fund is to help a member meet her immediate financial problems.

Apart from these objectives these groups improve the environment and country for future generations. They take up projects such as tree planting, construction of schools, roads and bridges and adult literacy programmes.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GROUPS

The growth and expansion of women groups has been phenomenal since independence. There are a number of such groups in each province as indicated in the table on page 46. The groups are involved in a variety of developmental activities that are relevant to the needs of the women in particular and the country in general.

TABLE 3.1

PROVINCE	1980		1981		1982		1983		1984	
	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
NAIROBI	-	-	170	7069	258	10652	258	10652	352	1505
CENTRAL	1809	100517	3150	127143	3879	60452	3966	160792	4409	158914
COAST	151	5028	555	31914	697	31872	744	36866	802	40232
EAST	945	41074	2200	100000	2800	20000	3053	129003	3245	128029
N. EAST	22	731	129	1935	157	-	97	1103	119	401
NYANZA	581	20398	1201	39338	2085	86929	2085	87269	1559	35420
RFT-VALLEY	433	20320	1979	95053	3157	135725	3193	125510	3852	19940
WEST	315	11324	1074	40137	1600	46967	1837	51282	1897	54197
TOTAL	4256	119393	10458	492579	14635	572592	15215	612477	16232	438637

DISTRIBUTION OF WOMEN GROUPS IN KENYA BY PROVINCE .

Source : Women of Kenya

A. -- No. of Groups.

Review and Evaluation of Progress.

B. -- Members.

The table indicates the growth in the numbers of these groups. The quantitative growth has also been accompanied by a diversification of their activities. These activities include both income and non-income generating projects. These include subsistence and cash crop farming, tree planting, construction of houses, schools, contribution of cash to members etc. While most are intended to benefit the group members directly, others are of a general nature meant for the benefit of the community as a whole.

There are reasons that account for such phenomenal increase in the number of women's groups in Kenya in the recent past. There is a need on the part of women to build financial and social support systems. As a result of the fast changing economic demands in Africa, women had to increase their work load to assist their male relatives.<sup>12</sup> In Kenya rural women whose husbands are in towns have naturally taken over their roles too. They have become the managers of the home with many economic obligations to be fulfilled. Though husbands assist with monthly financial support, in many cases this is not adequate to meet the financial and social obligations. That is why these women attempt to obtain money to satisfy their needs. Thus, there is a desire on the part of the women to be independent of men, improve their living conditions and become self-reliant.

Kenyan women especially in the rural areas bear the principal responsibility of children, apart from other responsibilities. Any organization or movement that appears to provide them a way out of their poverty by raising their material life is readily accepted and supported. And the success of one women's group in an area provides a strong motivational force to women around, who soon organize and form their own groups.

Footnotes :

12. R.E. Howard, "Women and the Crisis in commonwealth Africa," International Political Science Review, Vol 6 no.2, (1985), P.289.

The initiative to form women groups in Kenya with development oriented activities was taken by the women themselves. This came as a result of the realization by women that they had to rely on themselves to alter the level of their material life. It demonstrates a consciousness on the part of women that they are capable of a self-reliant existence. This is an important prerequisite to the success of such organizations as it provides them with a strong and long-term sense of purpose.

In the context of a developing country such as Kenya, Peoples movement such as women groups provide a viable and a more realistic alternative approach to development. This is because such movements operate on small amount of capital input. The average amount of money held by women groups in south Nyanza district for example was only Ksh. 10,000/- with the richest group having Ksh. 20,000/- to its credit.<sup>13</sup> Yet these groups have been able to successfully undertake many development activities using very little money. The importance of this is that in most developing countries including Kenya, lack of development was for a long time blamed on the lack of capital and manpower.

It is therefore significant that these groups, by emphasising the principle of self-reliant development, based on the use of labour rather than capital, have been able to undertake many development projects. Groups such as *Nyabera* , *Kanyongira* and *Obuya* have undertaken the planting of thousands of trees, growing of groundnuts, vegetables etc. These are sold in the immediate as well as distant markets. The money realized went into the account of the group. They demonstrated that capital need not be a constraint to development. With little more official government encouragement, advice

Footnotes :

13. Wanyande, N.S , P. 97.

and guidance, these groups could provide the key to the realization of the nation's objectives which are stated as -

**"freedom from want, ignorance and exploitation ; equal opportunity for all; a high per capita income equally distributed; and economic self-reliance."**<sup>14</sup>

This is not to suggest that these groups shouldn't seek financial assistance from either governmental or non-governmental organizations. In fact they require such an assistance. The point to be noted is that these groups made a start without such outside help and have demonstrated that they can initiate and successfully undertake development.

### **GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN WOMEN GROUPS**

On realizing that women's groups were viable rural development institutions, the government increased its involvement and interest in the activities and needs of women. This interest and involvement took many forms -

- 1) The government increased its assistance to women groups through the *Maendeleo Ya Wanawake* organization. This was a national organization established during the colonial days by European women in the country. Since independence it became a powerful apex organization of all the women groups

#### Footnotes :

14. Republic of Kenya (1965) sessional Paper No. 10 .African Socialism and Its Application to Planning in Kenya.

and organizations. This is the organization through which all women groups express their needs and interests at the national level.

2) The first few national development plans and official documents made no specific reference to women as target group for development. The 1974-78 Development Plan set a new trend in Kenya's development planning by having a bias towards activities which promote, directly or indirectly, women's integration in development.<sup>15</sup> For the first time women were referred to directly in the plan. But the subsequent Development Plans merely repeated and re-emphasized the trend set by the third Development Plan, 1974-78.

3) The government's involvement also took the form of the establishment of government machineries to deal specifically with women's issues or matters. Women's Bureau in the Ministry of Culture and Social Services created in 1976, is significant in this connection.<sup>16</sup>

Several reasons explain the increased interest by the government in women's groups particularly in the rural areas. They are -

1) Women are an important political force in the country as they form the majority of the voters. This is despite the fact that only a handful of them have been voted into parliament or local authorities. Because of their political significance, women groups provide an important base for political support and action for government development programs. Indeed the government regards women

Footnotes :

15. Wanyande, N.S . P. 98.

16. *ibid.*



and their groups as important links between the community, people and the government. The government therefore uses women groups to mobilize the community for the purpose of popularizing government development programmes in the rural areas.

2) Women groups also present the government with ready-made organisation framework. This is particularly relevant and suitable to the recently introduced 'District Focus for Rural Development Strategy'.<sup>17</sup> This strategy calls for all development initiative particularly the identification and planning of projects to start at the district level. According to the information available, future government rural development activities will revolve around the projects undertaken by women groups. Thus the establishment of rural industries and factories will be based on the needs of the women groups.

3) Women groups and their activities have provided the government with the opportunity to acknowledge the important role and contribution made by women in development. In doing so the government has helped eradicate the belief that women contribution to development is minimal or insignificant as compared to that of men. This seems to have given women more confidence and determination to participate fully in development as can be seen by the number of projects they are involved in.

Footnotes :

17. *ibid.*

## ORGANIZATION AND RULES GOVERNING WOMEN GROUPS

Women groups differ from ordinary *Harambee* groups. The *Harambee* practice merely involves the mobilization of people in an area, on an informal basis, for a particular development project. After the project is over the group disbands. Women groups are multipurpose and continue to operate even after the successful completion of one project.

Even though they are formed at the initiative of the affected members, they are governed by several formal governmental rules and regulations. While many rules are general and apply to all women groups in the country, others are local and apply to particular groups in particular districts only.

As a general rule all women groups should be registered with the government through the ministry of Culture and Social Services. This is done to enable the government to determine the number of such groups in the country and the projects they are involved in. With the knowledge the government can plan and give assistance to the groups. Registration is also important for the purpose of coordinating the activities of the groups by the Women Bureau.<sup>18</sup> This bureau is headed by a woman who is charged with the responsibility of coordinating the assistance given to women groups. Registration requires certain conditions. There should be minimum of 25 members in each group. The group should be involved in at least one income generating project. The groups are free to undertake as many projects as they wish. The role of the government is confined to offering advice to the groups on the projects.

### Footnotes :

18. This Bureau was created in 1976, partly in response to the decision made at the United Nations World Conference for International Women's Year held in 1975 that all governments of the world, particularly those in the III world, should create govt. machinery to deal with issues related to women's problems.

A very important rule that governs the operations of women's groups is the handling of group finances. The women's Bureau requires any financial expenditure by the groups to be authorized by the government. Written requests and explanations of why the group wishes to withdraw money from the bank must be submitted to the government department responsible for women's group in the district, for examination and decision. Thus banks with which these groups keep their money will not allow the group to withdraw any money without authority from the relevant government officer at the district.

This rule is explained this way. The government and donors ensure that the funds donated to the groups are not mismanaged or misappropriated. Such rules attempt to monitor and safeguard the use of money by the groups. It is also necessary for removing any kind of misunderstanding between the members and leaders regarding the use and management of money.

### **LEADERSHIP IN WOMEN'S GROUPS**

Each group has an elected leadership consisting of a Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer. As a rule the secretary must be a woman, able to read and write. She is expected to handle the correspondence. The other officials need not be literate. The most important consideration in the election of these other officials is the trust and respect the community has for them.

These officials together with the group coordinator constitute the Executive Committee of the group. The committee does not have independent decision-making powers as all decisions are made at the meetings attended by the group members. The committee may initiate an idea through the group coordinator, but such ideas must be discussed by the group members before a decision is taken. This is their decision making procedure. The women thus make most of the decisions that affect their development. The government only offers advice.

The most interesting leadership position among women's groups is that of the group coordinator. All women groups in a district has an appointed or elected coordinator who in every group is a man. The women refer to this person as *Jongad Rieko* which means that he is responsible for providing the group with new ideas and guiding them in decision-making. A strong attitude prevalent among the women group members is that men are in a better position to gather and generate new ideas that are beneficial to the groups, than women. Hence the appointment of male coordinators.

The above attitude persists because of the age of the women group members. Group membership tends to be skewed in favour of older women.<sup>19</sup> This generation of women still cherish age-old traditional values emphasizing the dependency relationship between men and women. Men are regarded as the natural leaders and are expected to guide women in major decision-making. Many women still believe that without male guidance women groups would not be strong as men are superior at decision-making.

Footnotes :

19. Mazingira, N.10 , P. 285.

This perpetuates the age-old male-female dependency relationship. This can undermine the self-reliance objective among the women. Indicators say that men are already tending to control these groups through the coordinator. A good example of a group in which the coordinator appears to dominate the group is the *Nyabera* women group. The group members attribute their strength and success to the role played by the coordinator. The coordinator is a former civil servant, with contacts with civil servants and potential donors. In fact it is one of the few groups that has received substantial financial assistance from the government. Under such circumstances coordinator tends to dominate decision-making in groups, thus leading to elitist as opposed to democratic and popular leadership. Popular participation by group members tend to be minimal in such cases especially with regard to decision-making. This is certainly the trend in the *Nyabera* Group. Given the success of this group, it would not be surprising if other groups in the district also decided to give their coordinator this dominant position.

It is important to analyse women groups in atleast a single area in detail for clear understanding of the women's role in politics. The area chosen in the present study is Mbeere in Kenya.

Before discussing the women groups in *Mbeere*, a brief background about the geography economy and society of the country is relevant.

**"Mbeere is a semi-arid area on the lowland plains east of Mt Kenya, named from the predominant ethnic group, the Mbeere, who are culturally and linguistically closely akin to the kikiyu. Rainfall averages**

about 15 inches. Moreover rainfall is erratic and unpredictable. Therefore, the area is subject to drought and famines. The population density is 160 per square mile. The annual population growth rate is 3.5 percent<sup>20</sup>

*Mbeere* is also marginal in economic development. The Kenya's development policy considers it as having 'low economic potential'. So it has not received much attention in terms of resource allocation. For this reason, the activities such as extension programmes, road construction and provision of agricultural incentives have remained minimal.

*Mbeere* people practice both pastoralism and agricultural production. These two production systems complement each other. Since the implementation of individual land tenure, the emphasis has shifted to agriculture. As a result the livestock population declined. However, crop production is less reliable than livestock because of the unsuitable climate and poor market conditions.

Agriculture is their main source of income. Casual labor, charcoal making, firewood gathering and bee-keeping the other sources of income. Off-farm activities like tailoring and retailing are male-dominated. The average income per household is very low, about ksh. 2,000 per annum.<sup>21</sup> Due to a rising demand for more income a large force of male labour has migrated to the urban centers.

*Mbeere* society can be described as male-centred, characterized as a strong patrilineal system with marked subordination of women. Women could not inherit property

Footnotes :

20. Nyaga Mwaniki. "Against Many Odds : The Dilemmas of Women Self-help Groups in Mbeere, Kenya" *Africa*, 56 (2), (1986), PP. 211 - 212.

21. *ibid.*, P. 212.

or own important forms of wealth such as land and livestock. Ownership of livestock was the exclusive right of men. It was used to pay bridewealth. Within a household the property was controlled by the male head who could allocate as well as dispose it. Women's land rights were usufructuary. It was husband's responsibility to provide his wife with land to cultivate. An unmarried women had the right to use land controlled by her father. It was therefore reasoned that a woman did not need to own land. This rationale later on lead to the system of land tenure where land was distributed only to the males as legal land title holders.

The role of the women groups in *Mbeere* should be understood against this background. In 1982 there were 140 women's groups in *Mbeere*.<sup>22</sup> The groups formally organized headed by a chairperson. They have a secretary and a treasurer. The group leaders should have 'personal charisma, social respectability, a reputation for hard work, being wife of a respected husband, education.'<sup>23</sup>

A group's members usually come from one geographical area. Almost all the groups in *Mbeere* are composed of married women. And these groups are small in membership and capital ownership.

The table 3.2<sup>24</sup> on next page shows the number of women's groups in *Mbeere*, the total membership and the amount of money contributed by groups in each location.

Footnotes :

22. *ibid.* , P. 213.

23. *ibid.*

24. *ibid.* , P. 214.

## GROUP ACTIVITIES

These groups raise money by doing farm activities such as clearing bush, sowing, weeding and harvesting. They are also hired to pick cotton, cut grass for thatch, fence gardens using thorny bushes or for mudding houses. Basket making and needlework are other activities.

**TABLE 3.2**

NUMBER OF WOMEN GROUPS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS

DIVISION	LOCATION	NO. OF WOMEN GROUPS	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP	TOTAL CONTR- IBUTIONS Ksh
SIKAGO	EVURORI	19	680	2180
	NTHAWA	34	750	9300
GACHOKA	MAVURIA	38	1262	N/A
	MBETI	20	N/A	N/A
	MWEA	29	N/A	N/A

Table 3.3<sup>25</sup> clearly illustrates the type of activities that they take up. It is clear that most of the groups are involved in the activities to raise money. The main reason for raising money is to form the initial capital the group needs to finance the planned income generating projects. The number of groups involved in projects to generate income are

Footnotes:

25. *ibid.*, P. 215.



very less. Regarding the general development activities, many groups are involved. That means that these groups do not only concern themselves with activities to raise income, but are also involved in activities which help alleviate immediate social and economic hardship.

The groups buy the cows and goats for milk, manure as well as to raise livestock as an income-generating project. A report, by the Agricultural Department of Home-Economics, *Siakayo* Division, of twenty women's groups, with a total membership of 704, shows their animal projects as listed in table 3.4.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, these general development activities, although not directly generating income for the groups, do tackle other pressing problems for women which would otherwise impede their attempts to raise cash for income-generating projects.

### **TYPES OF ASSISTANCE GIVEN BY GROUPS TO MEMBERS**

There are three types of assistance given by the groups to the members. They are -

- 1) Financial Assistance : In offering financial help equal treatment of all members is a cardinal rule in all groups. In some groups each member contributes a certain amount of money that is later given to one member. This process continues until all members receive such amount. Some groups contribute money to the poorest member of the group. During food shortages

#### Footnotes :

26. *ibid.* . P. 218.

**TABLE 3.3 GROUPS' ACTIVITIES**

CATEGORIES	ACTIVITIES	NO OF GROUPS INVOLVED
Activities to raise	General work	76
raise money.	Cotton farming.	8
	Basket making and needlework.	4
Projects to	Poultry	3
generate income.	Raising pigs.	2
	Build retail shops.	12
	Build canteen / tea shop.	9
	Build farmers' store.	1
	Build a lodging house.	1
	Build a social hall.	1
	Buy a grain (posho) mill.	5
	Goat ranch.	1
General development	Water extension projects.	4
activities.	Homestead improved.	30
	Buying cows for members.	3
	Building nursery schools.	19
	Building primary schools.	4
	Buying goats for members.	18.

TABLE 3.4 ANIMAL PROJECTS

TYPE OF STOCK	No. OF PROJECTS	No. OF ANIMALS
GOATS	136	127
CATTLE	14	43
SHEEP	10	21
POULTRY	226	1722
RABBITS	3	18

Source : Home Economic Annual Report (1981,9), Ministry of Agriculture , Siakago.

the members pool in the raised money to enable members to buy food. They lend money during an emergency to any member.

2) Labour Assistance : Due to many reasons like male migration, women are overburdened with work. A *Mbeere* woman works an average of 12.5 hours a day compared to an average of 5.6 hours for males.<sup>27</sup> This burden is lessened by receiving some labour assistance from the other members specially in farm activities. Assistance is particularly given to the pregnant women and those

Footnotes :

27. *ibid.* . P. 219.

who would have given birth to a child. And during the peak agricultural period, labor is contributed the most to meet demand.

3) Assistance in Social Matters : Women groups have become important reference groups for their members. The groups have become a source of identity, pride, moral support and motivation in their endeavor to improve the quality of their lives and that of their families. They provide a forum through which valuable information is transmitted, new ideas are exchanged and various issues discussed informally.

Thus, the assistance given to the members by groups is significant. It is important to note that these groups' cooperative activities represent a concern for the general welfare of the communities in which the members live and cooperate. They help each other to cope socially and psychologically too.

### **PROBLEMS FACING GROUPS**

There are both internal as well as external constraints affecting the performance of women groups in *Mbeere*. Some of the important internal constraints are -

1) Poor attendance is one of the main problems facing the women groups. Women have heavy domestic and agricultural responsibilities. Male migration further increased their workload. The assumption of these responsibilities result in poor attendance at group activities.

- 2) Another major problem is poor organization and weak leadership. This leads to internal squabbling, fights for leadership and allegations of misappropriation of group funds. The groups with such problems are ineffective and unstable.
- 3) Food shortages, water scarcity and inadequate nutrition are other serious problems faced by women groups. During famines much time is spent on efforts to acquire food and water. The groups tend to disintegrate during such crises. Moreover food shortages cause nutritional problems among children who demand greater attention from their mothers.
- 4) Another problem is the large allowances demanded by some group leaders for the extra duties they perform. Given the weak financial base of many groups, this demand undermines the members' commitment and the group's growth potential.
- 5) Lack of support from husbands is also a serious problem facing a large number of women. This kills the working spirit of these women, affecting their contributions and commitment to the group. There is also a significant numbers of women whose husbands refuse to allow them to join a group.
- 6) Women's groups also have to cope with malicious criticism from other women who are not members of any group. Forming women groups, is a new venture which has not gained the full support of all women in *Mbeere*. Some women still think that joining a group is a waste of time and energy and criticize group

members as being lazy and irresponsible. Such criticism seriously undermines the morale of group members. It is unfortunate that this division comes at a time when cooperation among women is most needed.

7) Women groups face the problem of identifying the right kind of projects. These groups raise funds to launch projects for which no feasibility study had been carried out to determine whether there is an adequate infrastructure and the like. And in many cases the group members do not have the vaguest idea of the amount of capital required to put their planned projects into operation.

8) Women groups will run into management problems when their income generating projects become operational. There is almost a total lack of concern among the groups about how their projects will run.

These problems not only hinder a group's activities but also discourage women who are not members from joining. Other obstacles include unsuccessful projects, inability to pay the membership fee and contributions etc.

Women groups in *Mbeere* are also afflicted by many external constraints for which they cannot be blamed. They are -

1) Lack of capital is the most serious problem. This is explained by the fiscal crisis in Kenya which prevents the government from offering any or at least sufficient aid to the groups. In order to receive aid from the government the groups have to show physical evidence that the project is on-going and that it

needs financial help for its completion. But there is no guarantee that the aid will be forthcoming if the group meets this condition. In the case of *Mbeere* where the main problem is raising the initial capital to start income generating projects, this condition seems unrealistic. It could lead women's groups to initiate unrealistic projects.

Aid from other sources like Women's Bureau, the District Development Council is also not readily available. The Women's Bureau formed in 1975 to help integrate women into the development process requires funds from international organizations and institutions for aid to women. But these funds are unequally distributed among the groups. Women groups in *Mbeere* are also unable to obtain credit from banks because they lack property to offer as collateral. Therefore these groups struggle on their own relying mostly on occasional employment.

2) Lack of good roads presents a critical problem for women's groups when they begin transporting goods to their consumer shops and other income-generating projects. This is reason for the isolation of women's groups in *Mbeere*. There is unawareness about the vital sources for their projects. The tendency of national women organizations to concentrate their activities in urban centers contribute to this lack of knowledge.

3) Another problem is the lack of personnel to help groups conduct feasibility studies of their projects. The community development personnel's advise and

expertise fails to reach all these women's groups. This is because few community development personnel are available and their mobility is severely constrained by the lack of good roads.

4) Lack of market poses another problem. Those groups involved in activities such as basket-making and needle-work complain that they cannot find agents or organizations to buy or sell their products in larger urban areas.

5) Last but not the least is the problem of women's subordination. Feldman argues that

**"this is the root cause of poverty and unemployment among women as well as their low position in Kenyan societies. In *Mbeere* it can be blamed for a host of women's problems especially their lack of capital (because of lack of access to major forms of wealth); of heavy workload (because of the skewed division of labour by sex), lack of crucial skills and education, and inferior legal status."**<sup>28</sup>

Considering the internal and external constraints impeding the effectiveness of *Mbeere* women groups, one realises that these constraints are closely inter-related, which makes finding solutions for them more complex.

Before assessing the role of women in politics, a brief discussion about the largest and most powerful women's association, *Msendoleo ye Wanawake*, is relevant. It was started by the Colonial Government in the early 1950's because it was felt that women

Footnotes:

28. R. Feldman. "Women's group and women's subordination: an analysis of policies towards rural women in Kenya", Review of African Political Economy, (1984), PP. 68 - 70.



were uneducated and socially backward. The movement changed from colonial to independent status with the Africanization of its leadership. It is the largest association with branches throughout the rural areas. It has a membership of more than 50,000.<sup>29</sup> It is concerned with change at the most fundamental level, the home. It aims to improve domestic standards by educating women in home making, child care, nutrition and hygiene. At the national level the organization is led by militants who speak out publicly on issues that affect women. Ruth Habwe, its president issued this call in 1964 :

**"For quite sometime, women in the world have been fighting to get equal treatment with men. This is because of the flagrant attitude which men have adopted towards women. In the home, in public, in job valuation and even in day-to-day activities, men have always regarded women as inferior to them. When according to responsibilities women have been considered second...**

**It is time men started to change their thinking, for to-day's society can no longer be regarded as yesterday's. Women will no longer be subservient to men....**

**May I remind you all that all women need recognition, respect, privileges, participation, and their voice to be heard in all walks of life."<sup>30</sup>**

These women leaders form a

Footnotes :

29. Gupta, N.I , P. 258.

30. Audrey Wipper, "Equal Rights for women in Kenya". Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol. 9, n.3, (October 1971), P. 433.

**"small band of interlocking elite families, many of whom have attended the same school and have known each other for years."<sup>31</sup>**

They include Hargaret Kenyatta, daughter of the president : Hannah Rubia, wife of the former Mayor of Nairobi ; Grace Ogot, wife of the former Dean of Social Sciences at the University and Kenya's best known Ristorian ; and Muthoni Likimani , the former wife of the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Health and Housing. Several are descended from important chiefs or belong to prominent families.<sup>32</sup> The movement spreads its ideas through the mass media, public meetings, conferences and seminars. The campaign extends from University classrooms to informal gatherings of tribesmen in the District Commissioner's compound. It has succeeded in propagating its cause and means serious business. However, as noted earlier, a handful of urbanized women who are a narrow-based elite cannot act as spokesmen for their backward sisters. What is basic is that,

**"imbued by western values, they too want to assert their individuality as persons who want recognition, respect and privilege."**

The attitude was best expressed by a *Msendoleo* worker when she said :

**"Our husbands have got to realize that they can have an intelligent, modern wife with a nice clean home and well dressed children, or they can have a beast of burden."<sup>33</sup>**

The organization's magazine, *Voice of Women*, had this to say five years later :

Footnotes :

31. Gupta, N.1, P. 258.

32. *ibid.*, N. 30, P. 439.

33. *ibid.*, N. 1, P. 258.

**"Although women have an important role to play in the development of the nation, yet the role which women have to play in Kenya in the nation building seems rather undermined. Open though the opportunities are, the men appear to assume that the women have not as yet reached a level where they can effectively participate in the nation building.**

**According to the African man's view, a women is only supposed to be in the house. Her role educated though she might be seems to be only to look after the home and entire nursing of the young ones. This view has been taken to such extremes that the men appear to neglect or completely under-rate the part which our women folk can play in the nation."**<sup>34</sup>

Thus women remained backward politically. Since Kenya is a one-party state, women need the support of KANU, if they are to win a seat. Otherwise they may be allotted one of the appointed seats. Efforts to get a woman elected have been marked by a singular lack of success. For instance, in a 1966 by-election a woman candidate backed by KANU was placed in a constituency against two strong male opponents.<sup>35</sup> The woman subsequently lost. If KANU had any real interest in this candidate, it could have placed her more favourably elsewhere. Kenya's ministers and party leaders publicly affirm women's political rights while simultaneously ignore them as serious contestants. For political reasons the Kenyan leaders attend women's meetings and seminars, announce scholarship, travel grants etc. In reality they fail to trust women with responsibilities. Speaking on the issue of women's political representation a Government leader stated -

Footnotes :

34. Voice of Women (Nairobi) June 1969, P. 1.

35. Wipper, N.30, P. 437.

36. Gupta, N.1, P. 259.

**"There were no really able women in the last election. They weren't serious in seeking party support nor were they proper women leaders. Women must prove themselves first, prove their qualities."**<sup>36</sup>

Women's status in public sphere is determined by the extent of female involvement in policy positions. During the Colonial period women were not involved in the process of policy making. The situation has endured, with few exceptions, since independence. Women's representation in politics also determined by their access to decision makers. Once again, women appear to have few avenues of approach to leadership at the national level. The women groups which became powerful vehicles of popular participation are constrained and hinder women's political participation. Government involvement in these groups resulted in the politicisation of the women groups. This politicisation served the ends of the politicians than solve the problems of the women.

This chapter dealt with role of Kenyan women in politics. The gap between the theory and practice is identified. Views of Kenya's Republic Constitution and KANU regarding women's position in politics is presented. It is shown how there are hardly any women representatives in the politics of Kenya. The novel concept of *Harambee* is explained as a background against the emergence of women groups. The concept of women groups, their objectives, development, organization, leadership and activities are discussed followed by the government's involvement in these groups. The case study of the women groups in *Mbeere* is taken up for a clear understanding of the role of women groups in popular participation. Light is thrown on the problems faced by these women groups.

Footnotes :

36. Gupta, N.I, P. 259.

*Msendoleo ye Wanawake* (Swahili for 'Women's progress'). a cultural club for women is briefly discussed reflecting on its drawbacks and contradictions. In the end it is concluded that women are still politically backward.

## CHAPTER IV

## SOCIO – ECONOMIC ROLE OF KENYAN WOMEN

Changes in the participation of women in the economic activities at all levels, including decision-making, are an important determinant of the advancement of women in society. In Kenya, not many changes took place in the economic activities of women, even after independence. Women are still largely responsible for subsistence production, child-rearing, cooking, nursing and the like. Any changes that took place in the economy and society have only put her in a more disadvantaged situation, overburdening her with extra work and more responsibilities.

A brief discussion of the Kenyan economy in chapter one clearly indicates how backward Kenya is economically. Though both men and women are affected by such backwardness, women are the worst hit. To prove this fact, economic and social factors such as occupation and employment, urbanization, migration, division of labor by sex, wage gap, saving patterns, marriage, divorce, education, illiteracy, health and welfare, religion, social welfare activities as well as social evils are studied.

Women's labour is labelled as valueless.

**"The concept of labour refers to that segment of population that works or has the potential to work in production of economic goods and services."<sup>1</sup>**

### FOOTNOTES :

1. Neera Chandhoke, "Development Process: Heightening of Oppression: A case study of Sub-Saharan Africa." *Womens Oppression - Patterns and Perspectives*, Susheela Kaushik, 1985 p.103.

Housewives are thus excluded from this definition as they are not regarded as being engaged in productive activities. Though women's work in the domestic and external sphere demands more time and energy, it is disregarded.

Women are involved in rural activities in the farming system. Nature of farming systems determine the rate of women's participation in agriculture. There are the 'female farming systems' prevalent in Africa, where hoe cultivation is practiced and the 'male farming systems' prevalent in Asia where plough cultivation is practiced.<sup>2</sup> The available time allocation studies show a higher share of men in total agricultural work in Asia compared to that in Africa.

**Table 4.1 : SEX COMPOSITION OF THE AGRICULTURAL LABOUR FORCE**

Region	Females as a Percentage of Agricultural Labour Force
Sub Sharan Africa	46
North Africa / Middle East	31
Asia	45
Carribbean	40
Average	42

Table 4.1<sup>3</sup> shows the sex composition of the female agricultural labour force by region.

Footnotes :

2. Sarthi Acharya, Women and Rural Development in the III World, Nov. 1987, Tata Institute of social sciences, ( Bombay, Nov., 1987) p.4.

3. *ibid.*, p.5



**TABLE 4.2 : DIVISION OF LABOUR BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN : RURAL AFRICA ( PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL LABOUR IN HOURS)**

Activity	Men	Women
Cuts down the forests, slates out the fields	95	5
Turns the soil	70	30
Plants the seeds and cuttings	50	50
Cuts and weeds	30	70
Harvests	40	60
Transports crops home from fields	20	80
Stores the crops	20	80
Processes the food crops	10	90
Brewing	10	90
Markets the access	40	60
Trims the tree crops	90	10
Carrys water and fuel	10	90
Cares for domestic animals and cleans the stable	50	50
Hunts	90	10
Feeds and cares for the young, the men and the aged.	5	95

Source : ILO, A Research Note, Technology and Rural Women, p.2, in Krishna Ahooja - Patel , P. 83.

Women perform moderate to heavy labour in Africa. The farming practices are very much along the traditional pattern of female farming systems. Women are primarily responsible for growing food, storing it, marketing, feeding the family and child care while men engage themselves in hunting cash crop growing and looking after security. A typical time allocation pattern for different jobs in rural Africa is presented in the table 4.2.<sup>4</sup> It is evident from the table that majority of the food related activities are performed by women while hunting and bush clearing are predominantly men's job. The same time allocation pattern applies to Kenya.

In Kenya, plough introduction gave men a greater opportunity to earn cash by virtue of their ownership of oxen. Since women work with hoes, the productivity is lower. It is also seen that plough cultivation has necessitated different cropping patterns, thus eliminating crops like squashes and pumpkins which were under women's control, leaving only maize which is a men's crop. Ox driven ploughs also permitted economies of scale which encouraged land consolidation.<sup>5</sup>

A recent survey shows that the male headed households are better endowed in agricultural implements than the female headed households in rural Kenya. In the extension programmes the services are offered to men farmers only. The extension officers are mostly menfolk who communicate exclusively with men. About 1/3 rd of them also expressed their prejudice against the women engaged in agriculture saying that women are primitive and subsistence oriented with little capacity to innovate.<sup>6</sup> The general policy

Footnotes :

4. *ibid.*, n.1 p.104

5. *ibid.*, n.2, p.46

6. *ibid.*, p.47

thus discourages women to withdraw from agriculture as development advances. Similar results are reported in other field studies in Kenya.

**"Studies in 1975-76 concluded that Kenyan women are increasingly working since the 1930's till today with no greater authority. The world Bank report of 1973 on Kenya finds that more than 80 percent of the credit was given to large farms, owned by men and practically no credit was offered to the subsistence farms controlled by women, in the early 1970's."**<sup>7</sup>

Some of the many constraints facing women in production include :

1. limited access to and control of land, labour and credit ;
2. increased demand for women's labour in agriculture in addition to domestic chores ;
3. over employment of women, leading to inefficiency and decrease in overall productivity of female labour ;
4. lack of female extension staff ;
5. insufficient technical training in food production and marketing operations ;
6. agricultural policies favouring male farmers and male-dominated income-generating projects and

Footnotes :

7. *ibid.*

7. treatment of women's projects and other economic initiative as short-term solutions to women's problems.<sup>8</sup>

These drawbacks suggest a general lack of male support for efforts to bring change in women's activities. The general exclusion of women's participation in the formulation of development policies is reflected.

In the urban areas, women are not better off. The women who hold a formal office employment work a double duty. She has to work in the office as well as at home. At the office the urban woman performs her work along with her male colleagues. But as the current situation shows, she has to put in more effort towards her work to prove herself and to avoid being underrated by her male bosses.<sup>9</sup> The Kenyan women today whether in the urban or in the rural areas, are overburdened.

### TABLE 4.3 : CONCEPTUAL DIVISION OF LABOUR BY SEX

Women Responses	Men's Responses
<b><u>Tasks assigned exclusively to women :</u></b>	
Washing dishes.	Washing dishes.
Making beds.	Making beds.
Sweeping.	Sweeping.
Carrying water.	Carrying water.
Regular house plastering.	Regular house plastering.

Footnotes :

8. Nyaga Hwaniki, "Against Many Odds : The Dilemmas of Women's self-help Groups in Mbeere, Kenya" Africa vol. 5b No.2 1986 p.210.

9. Mumbi Gakuo, "The Kenyan Women and Situation and strategies for Improvement". Women's Studies International Forum vol. 8 no. 4, 1985 p.373

Women's Responses	Men's Responses
Taking maize to mill.	Taking maize to mill.
Winnowing.	Winnowing.
Shelling and drying beans.	Shelling and drying beans.
Collecting and chopping firewood.	Collecting and chopping firewood.
Laundry.	Laundry.
Mending and pressing cloths.	Mending and pressing cloths.
Bathing and dressing children.	Bathing and dressing children.
Cutting thaching grass.	Cutting thaching grass.
Brewing.	Brewing.
Maintaining and operating lamps.	Maintaining and operating lamps.
Cleaning storage gourds.	Cleaning storage gourds.
Building inside fire.	Building inside fire.
Cooking.	
Feeding chickens.	
Spreading natural fertilizer.	
Harvesting vegetables.	
Weeding vegetable.	
Buying kitchen utensils.	
<b><u>Tasks assigned exclusively to men :</u></b>	
Building house frame.	Building house frame.
Thatching.	Thatching.
Building fences.	Building fences.
Buinding outbuildings.	Buinding outbuildings.
Clearing land for cultivation.	Clearing land for cultivation.
Making and repairing tools.	Making and repairing tools.
Slaughtering (except chikens)	Slaughtering (except chikens)

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 Women's Responses
 

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Driving Tractor.  
Buying farm supplies.

## Men's Responses

Driving Tractor.  
Buying farm supplies.  
Plowing.  
Cutting maize at harvest.  
Hauling.  
Breaking rocks.  
Buying furniture.  
Making kitchen utensils.

**Tasks usually done by women, but not forbidden to men :**

Milking.  
Collecting eggs.  
Selling vegetables.  
Welcoming visitors.  
Slaughtering chickens.  
Making kitchen utensils.  
Carrying heavy loads.

Milking.  
Collecting eggs.  
Selling vegetables.  
Welcoming visitors.

Cooking.  
Feeding chickens.  
Weeding vegetables.  
Harvesting vegetables.  
Buying food.

**Tasks usually done by men, but not forbidden to women :**

Initial rough mudding of house.  
Building outdoor fire.  
Cattle health care.  
Plowing.

Initial rough mudding of house.  
Building outdoor fire.

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 Women's Responses
 

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Cutting maize at harvest.  
 Trimming hedges.  
 Helping children with schoolwork.

 Men's Responses
 

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Giving salt to cattle.  
 Breaking ground with hoe.  
 Buying household items.

**Tasks assigned to both sexes equally :**

Planting.  
 Weeding with hoe (maize).  
 Husking maize at harvest.  
 Picking tea.  
 Spreading chemical fertilizer.  
 Buying cloths.

Planting.  
 Weeding with hoe (maize).  
 Husking maize at harvest.  
 Picking tea.

Sorting maize coles.

**Tasks where informants disagree about sex assignment :<sup>b</sup>**

Herding cattle.  
 Teaching children.  
 Disciplining children.  
 Playing with children.  
 Drawing water for cattle.  
 Giving salt to cattle.  
 Breaking ground with hoe.  
 Buying food.  
 Sorting maize coles (bias -> women).  
 Buying furniture (bias -> men).  
 Loading and hauling (bias -> men).

Herding cattle.  
 Teaching children.  
 Disciplining children.  
 Playing with children (bias -> women).

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 Women's Responses
 

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Breaking rocks (bias -> men).

Cleaning sand for building (bias -> men).

 Men's Responses
 

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Spreading fertilizer.

Slaughtering chickens.

Buying cloths.

Helping children with schoolwork.

Carrying heavy loads.

Loading (bias -> men).

Cleaning sand (bias -> men).

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- a. Most informants specified that men do this only when using a bicycle.
  - b. This usually means disagreement on which sex more frequently performs the task, but it may be disagreement on whether the task is sex-specific or is performed by both sexes. Where a bias towards either sex is noted it means that most interviewed assigned the task to that sex.
  - c. Several informants remarked spontaneously that this is not done by adults at all, but by other children. This was the only task any informants assigned primarily to children, though they were given the option of doing so.
- 

The conceptual division of labour illustrated in table 4.3<sup>10</sup>, is based on the interviews conducted by Regina Smith Oboler in the Nandi society of Kenya. It can be seen from the table that there is agreement among the most informants of both sexes about the sex assignment of most tasks. There are a few tasks actually forbidden to one or the other sex by rules. Violation of these rules could result in any type of sanction. There are a few exceptions. If a woman slaughters a cow, sheep or goat she can be cursed. Other activities that invoke this sanction are using male weapons, wearing a man's helmet, or blowing the

Footnotes:

10. Regina Smith Oboler, Women, Power and Economic change - The Nandi of Kenya, Stanford University Press 1985. (California, 1985) pp.200-201.



war trumpet. It is also considered extremely inappropriate for a woman to build any structures, especially houses. For men, it is not so much that they are forbidden to do certain types of work. But they refuse categorically because such work is beneath the dignity of a man. Informants agree that under no circumstances will a man wash the clothes of women and children. Today, young men do cut grass if they are paid for their labour, but cutting grass on the family's own property for its own use is still a woman's job.

The table 4.4<sup>11</sup> and table 4.5<sup>12</sup>, display the activities of Nandi girls and Nandi boys, once again proving how girls are discriminated against boys in their daily routine work. Observations are made in different age groups for a clear understanding. Most percentage of girls engage themselves in housework where as very less percentage of boys involve in such activities. Girls are not involved in wage labor, which fetches money. Girls are involved in unpaid activities.

Thus, it is clear that women are at a disadvantaged position compared to men as far as task allocation is concerned. This kind of division of labour not only denies women access to productive resources, but also makes them dependent on men. Men's work is paid and dignified. Though men depend upon women for food, services, it is unnoticed mainly because women's activities are unpaid, therefore unrecognized.

Now coming to the factor of urbanization, it has proceeded at a rapid pace. It rose to 9.6 percent of the total in 1970.

Footnotes :

11. *ibid.*, p.84

12. *ibid.*, p.85

**TABLE 4.4 : ACTIVITIES OF 22 NANDI GIRLS, AGE 7 - 18**

Activity	Age 7-9 (N=10)		Age 10- 12(N=4)		Age 13- 15(N=4)		Age 16- 18(N=4)	
	No. of Observations	% of all Observations	No. of Observations	% of all Observations	No. of Observations	% of all Observations	No. of Observations	% of all Observations
Housework	14	55%	21	21%	16	21.9%	25	24.8%
Farm Production	58	22.9 <sup>b</sup>	14	14	11	15.1	10	9.9
Other work	6	2.4	3	3	5	6.8	-	-
Wage Labour	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	4.9 <sup>c</sup>
School	15	5.9	9	9	12	16.4	12	11.9
Child care	43	17.0	17	17	7	9.6	10	9.9
Leisure	104	41.1	35	35	19	26.0	29	28.7
Other	13	5.2	1	1	3	4.2	10	9.9
Total	253	100%	100	100%	73	100%	101	100%

Source : R.S.Oboler, "Work and Leisure in modern Nandi : Preliminary Results of a study of time Allocation", Working paper no. 324 (Nairobi : Institute for Development Studies, 1977).

- a. One of the four was away staying in another household during part of the study period.
- b. Mostly herding animals (19.3%)
- c. One individual.

**TABLE 4.5 : ACTIVITIES OF 12 NANDI BOYS, AGED 7 - 18.**

Activity	Age 7-9 (N=10)		Age 10 - 12(N=3)		Age 13 - 15(N=7)		Age 16 - 18(N=5)	
	No. of Observations	% of all Observations	No. of Observations	% of all Observations	No. of Observations	% of all Observations	No. of Observations	% of all Observations
Housework	2	2.5%	4	5.6%	4	2.4%	2	2.1%
Farm Production	36	45.0	20	28.2 <sup>a</sup>	70	42.7 <sup>a</sup>	13	13.4
Other Work	-	-	4	5.6	12	7.3	9	9.3
Wage Labour	1	1.3 <sup>b</sup>	-	-	-	7.3	3	3.1
School	9	11.2	6	8.5	21	12.8 <sup>c</sup>	7	7.2 <sup>c</sup>
Child care	3	3.7	-	-	-	-	-	-
Leisure	24	30.0	28	39.5	47	28.7	36	37.1
whereabouts unknown	1	1.3	2	2.8	3	1.8	20	20.6
Other	4	5.0	7	9.8	7	4.3	7	7.2
Total	80	100%	71	100%	164	100%	97	100%

Source : R.S.Oboler, "Work and Leisure in modern Nandi : Preliminary Results of a study of time Allocation", Working paper no. 324 (Nairobi : Institute for Development Studies, 1977).

a. Mostly herding - 37.5%, 19.4% and 32.3% respectively      b. Assisting an older person.

c. Excluding boarding students (one in each age group). 10.4% of the total observations of the 13-15 group and 17.1% of the 16-18 group were "away at boarding school" This

table analyses only the time spend in Kaptel. "Away" observations are not counted as school because there is no way of knowing that school activities are actually being performed at a given time. The school category is actually underrepresented in these data because the two boarding students are not even counted as at school.

**"It was partly because of the spurt of industrial and manufacturing activities following independence and also partly because of the non-availability of jobs in agriculture, that Africans moved in increasing numbers to the cities."**<sup>13</sup>

In the beginning they moved with families but later on they started leaving their families in the villages. This explains why the number of females in Nairobi remains less than 60 per cent of the total male population. Table 6<sup>14</sup> shows the urban and rural population by racial groups in Kenya in 1962. The percentage of the Africans is much less compared to the other racial groups.

Migration from village to the cities remained mostly restricted to the menfolk. According to Anirudha Gupta, the features of Kenyan post independent economy - urbanization, cash- crop farming and subsistence agriculture, are responsible. It also relates to unemployment and the role of education in Kenya. The 1969 census showed that in agriculture, employment fell by an annual rate of 2.4 per cent, while it rose by a mere 2.2 per cent in private industry and commerce.<sup>15</sup> At the same time pressure of population on land forced many to migrate to the towns.

As far as women are concerned, restricted scope for employment kept down their

Footnotes :

13. Anirudha Gupta , "Illusion of Progress" , Urmila Phadnis and Indira Malani, ed., Women of the world - Illusion and Reality (1974), p.250

14. *ibid.*,

15. D.P. Ghai, "Employment Performance, Prospects and Policies in Kenya," East Africa Journal, vol.7, no.9 (Nov. 1970) pp.4-11.

**TABLE 4.6 : URBAN AND RURAL POPULATION BY RACIAL GROUPS, 1962**

	Total	In Transit	Rural	Urban	Percentage of Urban
African / Somali	83,65,942	2,325	79,21,878	4,41,736	5.3
Asian	1,76,613	174	11,447	1,64,992	9.3
European	55,759	126	20,768	34,865	62.6
Arale	34,048	2	8,016	26,030	76.5
Others	3,901	2	580	3,319	85.1
Total non-Africans	2,70,321	303	40,811	2,89,206	84.8
grand Total	86,36,263	2,629	79,26,689	6,70,945	7.8

Source : W. T. W. Morgan and N. N. Shaffer, Population of Kenya, Addis Ababa, 1966.

migration to towns to a minimum. Except for some casual jobs, urban women find few openings.<sup>16</sup> Moreover all single female migrants were branded as 'prostitutes' or 'loose' women who were intent on satisfying sexual needs of the male migrants and consuming some of their money, but who were not destined for marriage.<sup>17</sup> Some ethnic groups such as Luo of Kenya punished and repatriated all women deemed 'loose'. Therefore men

Footnotes :

16. M.L.Mbilinyi, The Participation of Women in African Economics, (Dar-es-Salaam, 1971) p.7.

17. Christine Obbo, African Women Their Struggle for Economic Independence, (1980), pp. 26-27.

migrated more than women. The following Table 4.7<sup>18</sup>, clearly indicates that in Kenya nearly 60 percentage of the total migrants are men. In other African countries the percentage of male migration is even more.

**TABLE 4.7 : MALE MIGRANTS IN E. AFRICA, 1969.**

Nationality	Total Number(Male+Female)	Proportion of Males (%)
Kenyans	35,409	61.5
Tanzanians	4,857	67.1
Ruandans	4,235	71.3
Congolese	3,053	72.0
Sudanese	2,588	65.7
Rundi	659	82.0

Source : Atlas of 1969 population Census in Uganda, vol. 3, Table 1 (Langlands, 1974).

Footnotes :

18. *ibid.*, p.27

Table 4.8 Occupational Activities of Female Migrants

Occupation	Ethnic Group																			Total		
	Kakwa	Lango	Acholi	Nubi	Teso	Nyole	Gisu	Ziba	Niyawueri	Chagga	Kikesyu	Kamba	Luyia	Toro	Ankole	Ruandans	Rundi	Kiga	Luo		Ganda	Soga
Unemployed	1		1							1	1	1	7		1	7		2	27	5		54
Distillers		2					1						1	1				2	4	7		18
Brewers			1													3	1		5	8		18
Teachers																				1		1
Verandah Selling																		1	1	2		4
Prostitutes								1	1									1		5		8
Barmaids							2									1				3	1	7
House-owners			2	1											1					5		9
Shopkeepers														1		3			4	3		11
Oressenakers													1			1			1	1		4
Cooked food sellers	1	1													2	2			1	5		12
Cuttinators																1				7		8
Market Traders											1		1						4			6
Coffee sorters						1																1
Factory workers					1																	1
Matmakers				2																		2
Total	2	2	3	4	2	1	3	1	1	1	2	1	10	2	4	18	1	6	47	52	1	164

The occupational activities of the women is shown in table 4.8<sup>19</sup> of different ethnic groups. The maximum of the women are unemployed. Those women who are engaged in other income earning activities are comparatively less.

Looking into the reasons why women migrate is important. The reasons are complex. But still they can be summed up as limited resources and personal dissatisfaction. Table 4.9<sup>20</sup> shows some of the reasons why women migrate to the urban areas. The maximum number of women accompanied their husbands. While nearly more or less the same number of women migrated alone. Table 4.10<sup>21</sup> gives reasons why women migrate alone. The maximum number migrated due to the failure of marriages. Quite a few left because they were tired of village and wanted a change. Around 10 in the sample migrated seeking a job.

**TABLE 4.9 : REASONS FORMIGRATION TO AN URBAN AREA.**

ETHNIC GROUP	ACCOMP ANYING HUSBAND	G O I N G ALONE	TRAVELLI NG TO T V I S I T R E L A T I V E	COMING FOLLO W HUSBAND	BORN IN O T H E A R E A 1 9 5 0 settlers	TOTAL
Kakwa				2		2
Lango		2				2
Acholi	1		1		1	3
Nubi	2				2	4
Teso		1		1		2

Footnotes :

19. *ibid.*, p.125

20. *ibid.*, p.71

21. *ibid.*



Nyole				1	1	1
Gisu		2				3
Ziba		1				1
Nyamwegi			1			1
Chagga	1					1
Kikuyu	2					2
Kamba	1					1
Luyia	6	1	1	2		10
Toro		2				2
Nkole		4				4
Ruandans	3	6	2	6	1	18
Rundi		1				1
Kiga	2	3		1		6
Luo	26	26	4	13	1	70
Ganda	6		6	1	12	25
Soga	1					1
Total	51	9	15	27	18	160

- Key a - One Luo woman in the sample had migrated with her husband and was still happily married though barren.  
 b - Four women in the sample had persuaded their husbands to escape sorcery accusations.  
 c - 14 women in the sample had migrated to escape unsatisfactory marriages but had married before moving to Namuwanga and Walrgato where they assured with their husbands.  
 d - 20 women in the sample had migrated because they were pregnant, but this was explained away as seeking future or tiredness with village life. There were

TABLE 4.10 REASONS WHY WOMEN MIGRATE ALONE

Reason	Lango	Kakwa	Acholi	Nyole	Chagga	Kikuyu	Kamba	Teso	Gisu	Ziba	Niyanuwega	Luyia	Toro	Nkole	Ruandan	Rundi	Kiga	Luo	Ganda	Soga	Total	
Burden/Divorce	1							1											2			4a
Seeking Job or 'Fortune'		1										1	1	1	2	1			3			10
Stigma of Divorce																		4				4
Sorcery Accusation																			1			1b
Read & Write								1														1
Unsatisfactory marriage									1						1	1	1	1	1			15c
Widow										1									2			4
Tired of village life													1	1	3		2	1	4			12
Total	2		1	2	1	1	1	2	3	6	1	3	3	3	26							51d

Thus, it is clear that women are discouraged to migrate. They are thus denied opportunity to develop and improve. The general attitude still prevails in Kenya that urban migration is bad for women because it corrupts their virtue, leads to marital instability and erodes traditional norms.

**TABLE 4.11 : AVERAGE WAGES, 1977.**

Ksh

Finance, insurance, real estate, and business services	22,728.0
Transport and communications	14,184.0
Restaurants, Hotels	13,200.0
Central Government	13,200.0
Manufacturing	11,932.0
Construction	9,800.0
Agriculture and forestry	2,694.0

There is a substantial gap in the earnings between men and women, with female workers receiving lower wages than the male workers. In Kenya, wages are paid for a

Footnotes :

variety of activities to both men and women. The following table 4.11 <sup>22</sup> indicates the average wages in the year 1977 in Kenya. The different activities and the amount of wage paid for these activities is indicated.

The total economically active population in Kenya was estimated at over 5.4 million in 1979. Women constituted one third of the labour force. A statutory minimum wage was established in 1975. It applies equally to men and women. The practice is different. It is important to note how much less than men that the women are paid. The following table 4.12 <sup>23</sup> clearly shows the wages of females as a percentage of the wages of males in Kenya.

**TABLE 4.12 : WAGES OF FEMALES AS A PERCENTAGE OF WAGES OF MALES IN KENYA**

YEAR	%
1977	55.6
1980	62.5
1986	75.6 (Based on 1985)

Source : ILO, Year Book of Labour Statistics, 1987. (Geneva, 1987).

Footnotes :

23. 1989 Report on the World Social Situation United Nations, (1989), p.13

The factors which contribute to the inequality in earnings are difficult to establish with precision. There are employers' preferences for employing women in certain occupations. Women tend to be placed in tasks that are repetitive, of short cycle and relatively quick to learn for which little technical knowledge of the production process as a whole is necessary. The lower pay of women compared with men in manufacturing is also related to the concentration of women in low-paying labour intensive industries.

**TABLE 4.13 : SAVING PATTERNS OF COUPLES.**

	Seperately	Together	No Answer	No Money to Save	Single	Total
Rundi	1					1
Runanda	3	4	2	9		18
Nyamwezi					1	1
Ziba					1	1
Acholi	2			1		3
Lango	2					2
Kakwa		2				2
Nubi	4	1			1	5

Teso		1			1	2
Nyole	1				1	1
Kiga	2	3				6
Luyia	6	4			1	10
Toro	1					2
Kamba		1				1
Kikuyu		1	1			2
Chaga		1		1		2
Gisu	1			11	2	4
Luo	15	12	6	5	3	41
Ganda	23	5			19	47
Soga					1	1
Total	61	35	9	27	30	162

Table 4.13<sup>24</sup> gives information about the savings pattern of married women. This table reveals women's endeavours and strategies to achieve economic autonomy. The

Footnotes :

24. *ibid.*, n.17, p.41

table shows that only a minority of married women saved jointly with their husbands. Except for 19 single women, the rest had residential relationship with men. Six claimed that they had no money to keep. It is important to note that women were expected to save where man was expected to spend.

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**TABLE 4.14 : DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS (1980).**

Population , total (in 1,000)	15,660.0
Population , males (in 1,000)	7,950.2
Population , females (in 1,000)	7,709.8
Population ages (% of total)	
0 - 4	20.8
5 - 14	28.95
15 - 64	47.75
65+	2.49
Population under age 20 (% of total)	60.20
Women ages 15 - 49 (% of total)	42.04
Dependency ratios (per 1000)	1,094.5
Child - women ratio (per 1)	0.984
Sex ratios (per 100 females)	78.8
Medial ages (years)	15.11
Average size of household	5.6

Proportion of urban %	14.17
Population density (per sq. km)	23
Rates of growth (%)	3.849
Natural increase rate (per 1000)	38.37
Crude birth rates (per 1000)	50.76
Crude death rates (per 1000)	12.39
Gross reproduction rates	3.6
Net reproduction rates	2.887
Total fertility rates (per 1000)	7,300.7
General fertility rates (per 1000)	239.0
Life expectancy , males (years)	53.92
Life expectancy , females (years)	57.53
<hr/>	
Life expectancy , total (years)	55.70

The demographic indicators displayed in table 4.14<sup>25</sup>, reflect on many economic factors including the dependency ratios. From the table it can be concluded that economically Kenya is backward. The figures are disappointing. Once again, both men and women are affected. But women are doubly affected. Especially as they have no access to health care, they are more affected than men.

Footnotes :

25. *ibid.*, n.22, p.931



Table 4.15 TYPE AND FREQUENCY OF MARRIAGES

	Kakwa	Lango	Acholi	Nubi	Teso	Nyole	Gisu	Ziba	Nyamuvezi	Chagga	Kikuyu	Kamba	Luyia	Nkole	Runanda	Rundi	Kiga	Luo	Ganda	Soga	Teso	Total	
Traditional (Mosque or Church)	2		2	1	1					1	2	1	7 <sup>a</sup>		9			40	6				72
Traditional + single							2	1										2	2				7
Church + single																			6				6
Traditional + Traditional																	1	3	1				5
Traditional + Traditiona + single									1									2	1				4
Traditional + cohabitation	2	1											1	1	1				1				7
Traditional + cohabitation + single															5 <sup>c</sup>				8		1		14
Traditional + Traditional + cohabitation		1	1 <sup>b</sup>																7				9
Church + Traditional + cohabitation				1									1		1				6				9
Single				1										1					5 <sup>b</sup>		1		8
Single cohabitation					1	1							1						3	1			7
Multiple cohabitation														2 <sup>e</sup>	3 <sup>b</sup>		5 <sup>b</sup>		6 <sup>b</sup>				16
Total	2	2	3	4	2	1	3	1	1	1	2	1	10	4	18	1	6	47	52	1	2		164

Key a - widowed after interview.

b - one had cohabited 3 times.

c - four had cohabited 3 times.

d - one had cohabited twice; one had cohabited 3 times.

e - one had cohabited 5 times.

Thus, all the economic factors discussed so far clearly prove that women are oppressed at every stage. Women are at a disadvantaged position often denied access to development.

All these economic factors determine the social role of Kenyan women. The study of social factors which affect women's growth, will now receive focus.

TABLE 4.16 : AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE FOR 63 WOMEN MARRIED 1970 -1977.

Age at Marriage	No. of women	Age at Marriage	No. of women
14	3	21	2
15	11	22	1
16	9	23	2
17	11	24	1
18	13	25	0
19	5	26	1
20	4		

Footnotes :

26. *ibid.*, n.17, p.40

Kenyan marriage relationships put women in a very disadvantaged position of dependency. Majority of the Kenyans go in for traditional type of marriage. This is shown in the table 4.15<sup>26</sup>. The changing perceptions of marriage are also reflected. In Kenya, women are married at a very early age. In the Nandi society of Kenya most of the women are married at the age of 17 or 18 as illustrated in the following table 4.16<sup>27</sup>.

**TABLE 4.17 : INITIATIVE IN ARRANGING 120 NANDI MARIAGES, 1920'S - 1970'S**

Decade of Marriage	Type of marriage			Mutual choice as percent of total
	Arranged by parents	Husband's choice	Mutual choice	
1920's	1	2	0	0
1930's	0	3	3	50
1940's	0	4	6	60
1950's	1	17	14	44
1960's	0	23	13	36
1970's	1	14	18	55

Footnotes :

27. *ibid.*, n.10, p.09

Total	3	63	54	45
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The mean age at marriage for women is slowly increased from 18.5 years in 1960's to 20 years in 1970's. Coming to the arrangement of marriages, in Kenya not many are arranged by parents. The table 4.17<sup>28</sup> throws light on the initiative in arranging marriages in Nandi society of Kenya.

It is clear from the table that in the Nandi society of Kenya the maximum number of marriages are arranged according to the will of the man. There is no single instance where a woman wills or arranges marriage. There is a good amount of mutual choice in the Nandi society.

In a marriage relationship woman occupies a subordinate position in relation to man. African wife is still described as a slave. The bridewealth paid for her represents a purchase price. In the parent's family, an unmarried girl is always a "junior". When she gets married she becomes the property of her husband and in-laws. In most tribes, the payment of bridewealth is crucial for the legitimization of marriage. In Nandi, marriage involves the transfer of bridewealth in mostly cattle. The following table 4.18<sup>29</sup> shows the bridewealth cattle in Nandi society.

In case the wife fails to bear children she returns the bridewealth and goes back to her parents. The birth of a child is therefore regarded as the final consummation of a legal marriage. This practice has been criticized on two grounds. Firstly it has reduced the

Footnotes :

28. *ibid.*, p.101

29. *ibid.*, p.109

30. *ibid.*, p.126

institution of marriage into a commercial activity. Secondly, it promotes polygamy in the sense that a chief or a wealthy man can afford to pay for a number of wives. In the Nandi society, the practice of polygamy, its percentage of married men is illustrated in the table 4.19<sup>30</sup>.

TABLE 4.18 : BRIDEWEALTH CATTLE, 1920'S - 1970's

Decade	No. of Marriages	Average no. of cattle
1920's	2	2.5
1930's	8	3.5
1940's	7	3.7
1950's	13	4.7
1960's	10	5.3
1970's	9	5.4

TABLE 4.19 : POLYGYNISTS AS PERCENTAGE OF EVER-MARRIED MEN BY AGE-SET

Age-set	No. of Polygynists	Percent of Married men
Nyongi	29	39.2
Maina	56	40.5

Chuma	42	36.2
Same	11	11.2
Kipkoimet	1	3.5

Finally, criticism is made on the ground that brideprice gives unlimited power to the husband to treat his wife as a beast, first to work on his own land and second to produce "children".

An educated girl fetches a higher price in the marriage market. A graduate girl may fetch as much as 1,000 shillings as against an illiterate girl with the maximum price of 100 shillings only. This shows why some illiterate mothers want their girls to be sent to school, expecting a bigger return<sup>31</sup>.

Study of 'fertility' is yet another social factor which determines women's social role.

**"Fertility is both a biological process constrained by its physiological setting and a social process enmeshed within a social structure, economy and culture."**<sup>32</sup>

In Kenya the total fertility is 8 births per woman and the natural increase is 4 percent per year<sup>33</sup>. Kenyan women by and large do not use modern contraception and very few have voluntary abortions. The 1984 contraceptive prevalence survey found 10 percent of currently married women aged 15-49 years using modern contraception<sup>34</sup>. In 1987, the

Footnotes :

31. *ibid.*, n.13, p.255

32. Odile Frank and Geoffrey McNicoll. "An Interpretation of fertility and Population policy in Kenya," Population and Development Review, vol. 13, no. 2, (June 1987), pp. 209-49.

33. *ibid.*, p.209.

34. *ibid.*, p. 220.

35. World Development Report 1991

married women of childbearing age using contraception was 27 percent<sup>35</sup>. For Kenya's population as a whole abortion is likely to be demographically invisible.

There are powerful dampening effects of certain customary practices that offset the traditionally strong upward pressures on child bearing in the Kenyan society. Most important of these practices is breast-feeding. Breast-feeding blocks ovulation. On the average, women in Kenya breastfeed for 16-17 months. In addition Kenyan women typically abstain from sexual relations after the birth of a baby. Abstinence has been getting shorter. Its average duration was only 4 months in the late 1970's. Nevertheless, with the combined effects of breastfeeding and abstaining, the average Kenyan woman is not likely to become pregnant again for some 13 months.

'Health' constitutes an important factor which can hinder women's role if care is not taken. In Kenya, women and children suffer from many diseases mainly due to malnutrition. They also do not have access to good health services.

**"In 1976, there was one national hospital, 40 district hospitals, 158 other hospitals and 200 health centers with a total of 17, 896 beds, or 1 bed per 773 inhabitants. In 1974, there were 1,242 physicians in the country or**

**TABLE 4.20 : PRINCIPAL HEALTH INDICATORS**

Crude Death Rate	16 per 1000 (1970- 75)
Decline in Death Rate	-26.3% (1960 - 75)

Infant Mortality Rate	51.4 per 1000 live birth (1970 -75)
Child Death Rate (Age 1 - 4)	per 1000 : 14
Life Expecting at birth	46.9 (Males) : 51.2 (Females) (1970 -75)

one physician per 11,950 inhabitants. Kenya ranks 87th among the nations of the world in physicians per capita."<sup>36</sup>

The principal health indicators are shown in the table 20<sup>37</sup>.

The table 4.21<sup>38</sup> reflects on the health and welfare of Kenyan males and females.

**TABLE 4.21 : HEALTH AND WELFARE**

Under 5 mortality rate / 1000 living births		Life expectancy at birth (Years).			
Female	Male	Female		Male	
1989	1989	1965	1989	1965	1989
98	114	50	61	46	57

Footnotes :

36. *ibid.*, n.22 p.947

37. *ibid.*,

38. *ibid.*, n.35



Kenya has a comprehensive health care delivery system and infrastructure under the Ministry of Health. In 1979 the health budget constituted 7.9 percent of the national budget and 1.8 percent of GNP per capita health expenditure was \$9. The main health problems are infections, respiratory diseases, malaria, leprosy etc. Health problems are complicated by malnutrition and poor sanitation. Only 17 percent of the population have access to safe water. Thus, it reflects the unhygienic conditions in Kenya. Women and children are most neglected. They hardly have any access to health services, as most of them reside in the rural areas.

Kenya's national literacy rate is 25 percent Kenya ranks 93rd among the nations of the world in literacy. Kenya has not introduced free, universal and compulsory education. Enrollment is 104 percent at the primary age level (5 to 14) and 17 percent at the secondary level (15-19) for a combined enrollment ratio of 69 percent. Kenya ranks 91st in the world, in adjusted enrollment ratio. Girls constitute 47 percent of enrollment at the primary level and 35 percent at the secondary level. The table 4.22<sup>39</sup> shows the percentage of population who have completed school in 1976. The following table 4.23<sup>40</sup> indicates the educational enrollment of teachers and students in 1976.

Footnotes :

39. *ibid.*, n.22, p.945.

40. *ibid*

**TABLE 4.22 : PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION WHO HAVE COMPLETED SCHOOL ( 19976)**

Age (Total )	Primary School	Secondary School	Higher Level
15 years and below	14.3 %	2.5 %	0.7 %
15 to 24 years	23.8 %	3.3 %	0.5 %
25 to 29 yaers	18.7 %	3.7 %	1.0 %
30 years and above	6.7 %	1.5 %	0.7 %

In the tables 4.24, 4.25 <sup>41</sup> comparative data on the educational attainment of Nandi girls and boys is shown. It is clear that the number of females is very less compared to that of males on Nandi.

Owing to the prevailing educational system only a handful of Kenyan girls gain access to higher education. Formal schooling above the primary level still remains expensive and very selective. It helps to produce a privileged elite. In a population with less than 20 percent illiteracy, the number of girls in the age group of 7-11 attending primary

Footnotes :

41. *ibid.*, n. 10, p. 88.

school constitutes only half of the total number of boys. At the post-primary level, the intake

**TABLE : 4.23 EDUCATIONAL ENROLMENT 1976**

	Teachers	Students
First Level	89,074	29,74,849
Second Level	12,077	3,28,714
Third Level	N / A	N / A
Special Level	164	2,009

**TABLE 4.24 : EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF 183 ADULT NANDI MALES.**

Number in age group	Level Achived							
	N o n e		Std 1 - 4		Std 5 - 8		M o r e	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
19 - 24 (40)	4	10	5	12.5	15	37.5	16	40.0
25 - 29 (36)	3	8.3	5	13.9	21	58.3	7	19.5
30 - 34 (21)	2	9.5	1	4.8	15	71.4	3	14.3
35 - 39 (15)	1	6.7	10	66.6	3	20	1	6.7
40 - 44 (14)	2	14.3	5	35.7	7	50	-	-
45 - 49 (16)	8	50	8	50	-	-	-	-
> = 50 (41)	31	75.6	5	12.2	5	12.2	-	-

**TABLE 4.25 : EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF 215 ADULT NANDI FEMALES.**

Number in age group	Level Achived							
	N o n e		Std 1 - 4		Std 5 - 8		M o r e	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
19 - 24 (55)	14	25.5	15	27.2	14	25.5	12	21.8
25 - 29 (31)	3	9.6	14	45.2	14	45.2	-	-
30 - 34 (25)	9	36	8	32	6	24.0	2	8
35 - 39 (18)	10	55.5	8	44.5	-	-	-	-
40 - 44 (17)	14	82.4	3	17.6	-	-	-	-
45 - 49 (24)	23	95.8	1	4.2	-	-	-	-
> = 50 (45)	45	100	-	-	-	-	-	-

of girls remains negligible. In 1966-67 there were 86 girls attending under graduate courses as against 249 boys. In vocational schools the same situation prevails.

In Kenya, religions, beliefs and forms of worship show great variety, both between races and tribes and from one district to another. The Arab Community is Muslim, Indians are partly Muslims and partly Hindu, while the Europeans are Christians. Muslims are found mainly along the coastline, but the Islamic faith has also established itself among Africans around Nairobi. As Christian missionaries are active, about 25 percent of Africans are Christians. In Hinduism, Islam as well as Christianity, women are given a subordinate role. The theology of subordination buttresses this view and believes that woman is morally, ontologically and intellectually inferior to the male.

The same is the case with the Kenyan traditional religions. In Nandi traditional belief, the major controlling force in the Universe is Asis. Prayers to Asis are said twice a day by both men and women, but not by children. The head of the household could pray on behalf of his entire household. Women did not enjoy such privilege. Witches are still believed. Witchcraft or sorcery has several categories. The most common kind of which is the *bonindet*. This can be a person of either sex but is usually a woman who has no inborn ability but is adept at using magical devices. A *'Kimetit'* is a male member of certain clan who possesses an inborn power that brings misfortune upon others. The *'sakutindet'* is a woman, usually barren, who may cause a newborn child to die if she comes near it, owing to the envy it arouses in her. *'chebusoriot'* is a woman who bewitches her husband by putting magical preparation in his food, making him stupid, weak and easy to bend to her

will. In every community certain people, usually old women with few relatives are thought to be witches and are shunned.

Thus, religion imposes a lot of restrictions on women. It ascribes to women qualities like jealousy and hatred. The main purpose of these beliefs seems to see to it that women remain inferior and subordinate to men. If in case any woman outsmarts her husband she is called a witch trying to make her husband stupid. So religion perpetuated the subordination of women to man.

The problem of 'prostitution' is glaring in the Kenyan society. Many women wind up as prostitutes. It is not clear why the ambition to be economically self-supporting is so often fulfilled by prostitution. The discrimination women faces in other fields and lack of access to other dignified jobs, prompt women to take to this evil. Moreover as women do not enjoy respect as such in the society she takes recourse to prostitution. There is a tendency to regard all urban woman as sexually loose especially who work or appear well dressed. Thus, prejudice is extended even to the highly educated women. The plight of poor, helpless rural women can be understood.

Moreover, the society pressurises the Kenyan women into illegitimate relationships before marriage. Such relationships often break at the last minute only to leave the single women behind with children to look after. These women are not only psychologically disturbed, but are unable to meet the needs of their growing children. Yet when women urge menfolk to show some responsibility by economically assisting the children, they fathered, the whole idea is ridiculed.

A motion requiring single or married men to maintain children farthered out of wedlock was opposed and defeated in the Kenyan Parliament. Mrs. P. Asiyo, the member of the Parliament for Karachuonyo was actually trying to have men give financial support to the mothers of these children so that the children at least received the basics of life. <sup>42</sup> Dr. E. Gachakia, a formerly nominated member of parliament supported the motion by emphasizing that, if mothers of those children born out of wedlock had enough financial support, they would in most cases not abandon their children. <sup>43</sup> But the efforts and suggestions of these women never took a concrete shape. In 1982, in Kenya there were 45,000 orphans and abandoned children who were suffering in children's homes and the like. <sup>44</sup>

The existence of such problems and social evils like illegitimate children and prostitution means that men have no respect for women in the society. Women are treated like commodities. They are used by men for their pleasure. It is pitiable that women are helpless to the extent of taking to prostitution at the cost of their dignity and self-respect.

The government of Kenya is not blind to the pathetic role of women in Kenyan society. The government recognizes the principles of UN regarding women. One of the main aims of the UN is to ensure the universal recognition of human rights for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion. The Preamble to the charter of the UN proclaims the determination of the peoples of the UN

**"to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women."**<sup>45</sup>

Footnotes :

42. *ibid.*, n. 9, p. 374.

43. *ibid.*,

44. *ibid.*,

45. *Compendium of International Conventions Concerning the status of women . ( 1988), p. 1.*



The Article 10<sup>46</sup> of the charter contains the following-

The state's parties to the present covenant recognize that :

- 1) The widest possible protection and assistance should be accorded to the family, which is the natural and fundamental group unit of society, particularly for its establishment and while it is responsible for the care and education of dependent children. Marriage must be entered into with the free consent of the intending spouses.
- 2) Special protection should be accorded to mothers during a reasonable period before working mothers should be accorded paid leave or leave with adequate social security benefits.
- 3) Special measures of protection and assistance should be taken on behalf of all children and young persons without any discrimination for reasons of parentage or other conditions. Children and young persons should be protected from economic and social exploitation. Their employment in work harmful to their health or dangerous to life or likely to hamper their normal development should be punishable by law. States should also set age limits below which the paid employment of child labour should be prohibited and punishable by law.

Kenya responded to this in the following manner -

**"While the Kenyan Government recognizes and endorses the principles laid down in article 10 of the covenant, the present circumstances obtaining in Kenya do not render necessary or expedient the imposition of those principles by legislation. "47**

The voluntary fund for the UN decade for women 1978-83, took up certain social welfare activities in Kenya. Tree planting and reforestation activities like green belt movement in Kenya demonstrate the importance of women's role in the fight against desertification and drought . 48

The three projects undertaken are displayed clearly in the form of tables. Project 1 49 is a general one concerning the environment. Though not related to women it shows the role of women in major development issues. Project 2 50 is an income generating one which directly helps women to improve their conditions. Project 3 51 is again oriented towards women's need and help.

Actually, the projects were not too successful. The participation is less and for a short time. They faced a lot of constraints, financial constraint being the major one. Such projects do not really help women much in improving their conditions. As these are on a temporary basis, they are not very effective.

Footnotes :

47. *ibid.*, p. 155.

48. United Nations Development Fund for Women Department of International Economic and Social Affairs . (1985), p. 36.

49. *ibid.*, p. 56.

50. *ibid.*, p. 57.

51. *ibid.*

Thus, this chapter evaluates the economic and social role of Kenyan women. Economic and social variable like employment, migration, division of labor, wage gap, marriage, family planning, education, religion are identified to study the economic and social status of women. These variables are discussed in great detail substantiated by data and figures. The whole discussion and analysis boils down to the fact that Kenyan women are economically backward and socially oppressed.





### PROJECT 3

- Project Title Karachuonyo women's self-help.
- Voluntary fund category Human development / employment pottery
- Executing and cooperating agencies Non-government organization.
- Voluntary fund funding \$ 10,000.
- Other sources funding \$ 12,319.
- Length of actual project duration 3 years ongoing.
- Type of expertise employed National expert + peace crops volunteer.
- Major activities Pottery
- Obstacles There were delays in promised funds. The other major problem is transportation.
- No. of direct participants 200
- Strength and innovative aspects  
The involvement of a member of parliament as an integrated member of the group served well as a role model.  
  
There have been several spin-offs primarily, health services etc.

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## Chapter V

## CONCLUSION

The present work dealt with the status of women in Kenya, since independence. The traditional role of Kenyan women in the pre-colonial and colonial societies has been discussed as the background to the study. The status of women has been understood and analysed, keeping in mind the physical, economic and social conditions of Kenya. The women's role in the polity, economy and society of Kenya has been focussed upon.

In the traditional pre-colonial societies, women formed the backbone of the agrarian economy. They were involved in food- gathering, processing and storing. They thus produced labour power and goods, while men hunted, cleared fields and grazed cattle. Women enjoyed usufructuary rights in land and cattle. These rights were extended beyond her family because labour demanded in grazing cattle often necessitated inter-family co-operation and milk sharing. This practice contributed to her economic security and stability. Motherhood was glorified in these societies. Mothers were autonomous in child rearing. They were the educators, the purveyors of moral values, the custodians of the traditions, the propagators of social norms and the means of transmitting aesthetics through folklores, rituals and art. Women thus played a crucial role at home, in the society and the economy.

All the same, women were integrated into the system of male dominance. Female control and subordination was intrinsic to the system. Control was ensured through male possession of resources - cattle, labour and land, and control by the lineage male elders over the marriage mechanism. In this way, access to women in the traditional societies was controlled. This led to the control over labour especially through polygamy which was a common practice. Paying of the bridewealth was an economic investment, as the women worked in the fields. Many wives meant increased productivity, surplus and the ability to purchase material goods and more wives. In the traditional African household, a good wife was one who was fertile, submitted herself wholly to her husband and contributed by her



work to the economic prosperity of the household. The inferior status of the woman was further demonstrated by her working docilely behind her husband and carrying a load on her head which was meant to be a low job.

The colonial economy adversely affected the role of Kenyan women. It upset the traditional sex roles prescribed by the tribal organization. It disrupted the traditional patterns of task allocation on the farm. The land was registered under men's names denying land rights to women. The introduction of cash crops upset the pre-colonial economic complementarity between men and women. Industrialization, urbanization, imposition of the cash economy, commoditization of the labour force resulted in the migration of males. The colonial government discouraged migration of women to work places in order to preserve the mobile labour force. The women became the residual agricultural population tied to the subsistence sector. They continued to stay in the traditional stagnant and backward sectors while men moved into the modern cash economy. The colonial economy not only affected the female autonomy but also resulted in the breakdown of family structures, kinship groupings and the transformation of the social function of the family. Worst of all, women's importance in the household diminished.

Independence did not bring any noticeable changes in the role of women. It failed to involve them equally with men in the functioning of the country's economic, political and social institutions. Government by Africans was less responsive to women's rights than the colonial administration. Independence only led to further dissatisfaction among women as their expectations were not met. But one cannot altogether dismiss the active role of women in various fields.

During the early years of independence, a militant women's equal rights movement was developed in Kenya. Led by the urban, educated women, the movement rejected the traditional inferior role of women. It wanted for themselves an equal share in the respon-

sibilities and the opportunities of nationhood. During this period, various women groups evolved which formed the backbone of the movement. The origin, development, objectives, organization, achievements and problems of these women groups was meticulously sketched in the relevant chapter.

Unfortunately, these women groups failed in achieving their objectives. While discussing the constraints and contradictions that these groups faced, it was pointed out how a large number of them were controlled and dominated by the males. The government's involvement in these groups was critically examined. In fact, these groups at best served the ends of the politicians. Women failed to take active part in the politics of Kenya. The government's indifference towards the involvement of women in the political system was discussed. Ultimately, it was proved how backward and weak, Kenyan women were, politically.

Economically, some improvement was noticed in the role of Kenyan women. Women were educated and career-oriented. They became doctors, lawyers, teachers, nurses, clerks and the like. Women went to offices and worked along with men. Most importantly these women were paid for their work. Thus, a few educated women who took up jobs became economically independent.

On the contrary, in the rural areas, the women lost the economic significance that they enjoyed in the traditional societies. Women were still responsible for subsistence production for mainly two reasons. Firstly, as men increasingly migrated to the urban work places, women had to take up their responsibilities. Secondly they cultivated land as they were the principal providers of food. Women were economically insecure as they lacked the land ownership rights.

In the Kenyan society, the educated women and the wives of the prominent men, did enjoy a privileged status. They enjoyed such higher status merely as members of an elite

group who were 'modernized'. On the other hand, women in the rural areas did not enjoy any such status and remained 'traditional'.

Two issues need to be discussed here. Firstly, the modern- traditional dichotomy and secondly the issue relating to the economic independence of the women.

A preliminary discussion of the modern-traditional dichotomy is relevant in this context. But it is beyond the scope of the present study. Our understanding of the term 'modern' here is therefore extremely limited and contextual. In Kenya, the women try to emulate the western women to become modernized. For them learning English, dress-making, understanding modern methods of childcare, maintaining beautiful houses, playing a proper hostess to guests are some of the most important attributes of modernization. Women clamour for such rights and abilities. In Kenya, westernization is supposed to be modernization. Therefore those handful of elite women, who try to follow the foreigners, are not modern in the true sense of the term. Such modernization they aim at is just superficial and not real. In reality, therefore, the term 'modernization' when applied to an underdeveloped society like Kenya, denotes women's individual aspirations to reach an elite status by sheer imitation.

Coming to the next issue, it is important to note that most of the Kenyan women are engaged in non-income generating activities. Their labour is unpaid and unrecognized. Those women who have taken up jobs are very few. These women are subjected to more tension and work. They are overburdened with responsibilities. These apart, their work is underrated, and they are often subjected to sex prejudice by men. It is generally argued that economic independence leads to emancipation of women. Economic independence does give a kind of security and confidence to women. But as long as men consider women as inferior and as long as men suffer from sex prejudice, mere economic independence can never help women to emancipate themselves.

Thus, it is proved that the Kenyan women are politically, socially and economically backward. Data and figures have been given to substantiate the arguments. Numerous socio-economic factors such as migration, wage gaps, economic indicators, marriage, polygamy, brideprice, health, nutrition, religion, prostitution, the problem of illegitimate children and so on and so forth were discussed and analysed in great detail. It was clearly indicated how Kenyan women were being oppressed, suppressed and exploited. The backward economic and social conditions in Kenya further worsened the position of women.

It is therefore clear that there is a definite connection between the depressed status of women in an underdeveloped society and the state of the economy in which a social structure is established. In other words, the nature of underdevelopment explains the position which women occupy in society, just as the status of women demonstrates the stage of development of a given society.

In Kenya, special programmes for the uplift of women have been launched. Three such projects were discussed. Yet, the extent to which these plans aim at redressing inequalities between the sexes is in doubt. Special programmes for women do not in themselves constitute a solution to the problem. Women are set aside and treated as a segmented group which is in itself a self-defeating task. Such plans which are mainly centred around welfare activities, health, child care, social service, tree-planting, etc actually restate their traditional roles as wives and mothers.

What is needed is an exercise towards the incorporation and co-ordination of both men and women into the development process. Women's problem and issues cannot be solved without altering men's attitude towards them. Solutions to women's problems become meaningful only when men begin to respect women and accept them as equals.

Since ages women have been silently suffering. They have been treated like commodities, made dependent, exploited, suppressed and oppressed. Women should assert themselves in the society. They should become self-reliant and confident and should realise their potential. And its high time they revolted against all the injustice they are subjected to. I conclude with the hope that women in Kenya will one day say -

**See**

**that no matter what you have done**

**I am still here**

**dangerous, and wise.**

**And brother,**

**you cannot whore, perfume**

**and suppress me anymore**

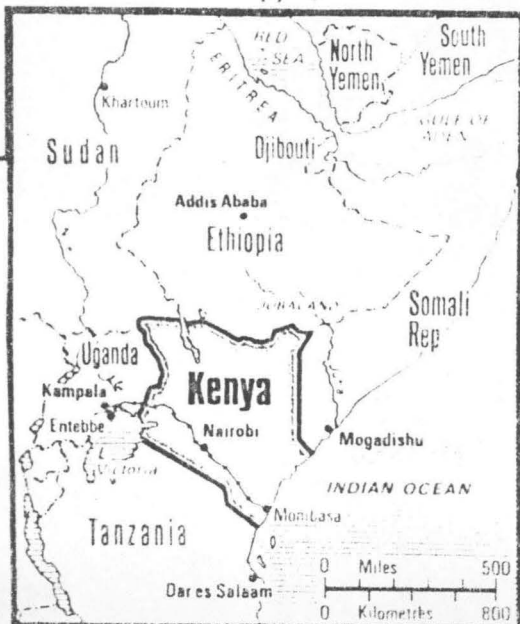
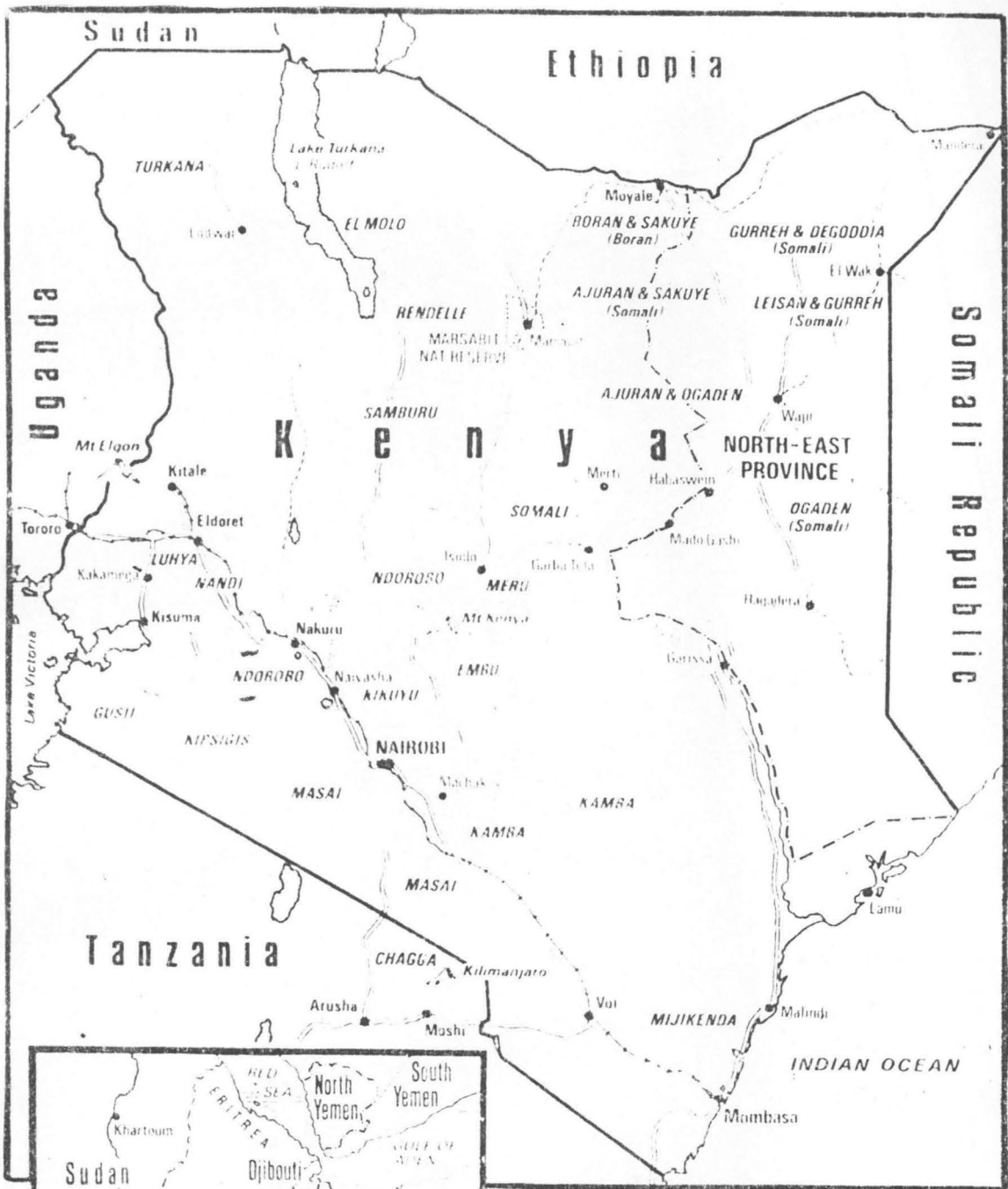
**I have my own business**

**in this skin and on this planet .**

## APPENDIX - I

GROUP	NUMBER(1969)	%	Language group	Area or Province
Kibwyu	2,201,632	20.12	Bantu	Central
Luo	1,521,595	13.9	Nilotu	Nyanza
Luhya	1,453,302	13.28	Bantu	Western
Kamba	1,197,712	10.95	Bantu	Eastern
Kalenjun	1,190,203	10.88	Paranilotic	Rift Valley
Kisii	701,679	6.41	Bantu	Nyanza
Meru	554,256	5.07	Bantu	Eastern
Mijikenda	520,520	4.76	Bantu	Coast
Somali	250,112	2.29	Cushitu	North Eastern
Turkana	203,177	1.86	Paranilotu	Rift Valley
Masai	154,906	1.42	Paranilotu	Rift Valley
Embu	117,969	1.08	Bantu	Eastern
Taita	108,494	1.00	Paranilotu	Western
Itesa	85,800	0.78	Paranilotu	Western
Kurra	59,875	0.54	Bantu	Nyanza
Sambura	54,796	0.50	Paranilotu	Rift Valley
Tharaka	51,883	0.45	Bantu	Eastern
Mbere	49,247	0.45	Bantu	Eastern
Pokono	35,181	0.32	Bantu	Coast
Boran	34,086	0.31	Cushitu	Eastern
Bajun	24,387	0.22	Bantu	Coast
Nderbo	21,034	0.19	Paranilotic	Rift Valley
Rendille	18,729	0.17	Cushitu	Eastern
Orma	18,729	0.15	Cushitu	Coast
Gabbra	16,306	0.15	Cushitu	Eastern
Swahilli-Shirazi	9,971	0.09	Bantu	Coast
Njemps	6,526	0.06	Paranilotic	Rift Valley
Tanela	6,324	0.06	Bantu	Coast
Sakuya	4,369	0.04	Cushitu	Eastern
Boni and Sanye	6,900	0.07	Cushitu	Coast

APPENDIX - II







# KENYA

## BASIC FACT SHEET

**OFFICIAL NAME:** Republic of Kenya

**ABBREVIATION:** KE

**CAPITAL:** Nairobi

**HEAD OF STATE & HEAD OF GOVERNMENT:**  
President Daniel Teroitich arap Moi (from 1978)

**NATURE OF GOVERNMENT:** One-party modified democracy

**POPULATION:** 15,660,000 (1980)

**AREA:** 582,646 sq km (224,960 sq mi)

**ETHNIC MAJORITY:** Kikuyu, Luo, Luhya, Kamba, and Kalenjin

**LANGUAGES:** English and Swahili

**RELIGION:** Christianity and Animism

**UNIT OF CURRENCY:** Kenya Shilling (\$1= Sh 7.3395, August, 1980) The Kenya Pound is only a unit of account.

**NATIONAL FLAG:** Black, red and green horizontal stripes in descending order separated by narrow white bands. In the center are a warrior's shield and crossed spears.

**NATIONAL EMBLEM:** The principal elements of the national coat of arms are two gold lions holding two crossed spears, an oval shield with the colors of the national flag, a white cockerel holding an axe, and the national motto "Harambee" ("Let Us Pull Together") at the bottom.

**NATIONAL ANTHEM:** "O God of All Creation"

**NATIONAL HOLIDAYS:** December 12 (National Day, Independence Day); January 1 (New Year's Day); May 1 (Labor Day); June 1 (Madaraka ["Self-Government" ] Day) October 20 (Kenyatta Day); December 25 (Christmas); December 26 (Boxing Day). Also, variable Christian festivals, such as Good Friday and Easter.

**NATIONAL CALENDAR:** Gregorian

**PHYSICAL QUALITY OF LIFE INDEX:** 48 (up from 40 in 1976) (On an ascending scale with 100 as the maximum. U.S., 95)

**DATE OF INDEPENDENCE:** December 12, 1963

**DATE OF CONSTITUTION:** 1963 (Amended 1965 and 1964)

**WEIGHTS & MEASURES:** Imperial and metric systems are used.

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