

Original Research Article

IMPLICATIONS OF DECLINING SUGAR INDUSTRY ON HOUSEHOLD GENDER RELATIONSHIPS IN WESTERN REGION OF KENYA

ABSTRACT

According to Kenya Anti-Corruption Commission (2010), Kenya suffered the biggest crises to its sugar sector between 1998 and 2001. Most sugar mills suffered serious financial crises which almost resulted in collapse of the industry. The main causes of the crises were managerial inefficiency and unregulated importation of sugar due to liberalization. To save the industry from collapse, the government initiated policy reforms that translated into the enactment of the Sugar Act 2001. New reforms and policies were initiated and implemented to guide and control the activities and operations of all stakeholders in the industry, however the government failed to deliberate on matters affecting gender relationships at household level, as a result of the declining status of the sugar industry. This study therefore strives to analyze the implications of the declining sugar industry on gender relationships at household level in Western region of Kenya. The study adopted phenomenological study design. The study was informed by social role theory by Alice Eagly (1987), the study applied purposive sampling. The sample size of the research study depended on the level of information saturation. Data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, and observation. The findings revealed that men have compromised their male ego due to their inability to provide for household needs and livelihoods. The study concluded that the decline of the sugar industry has led to men's inability to provide for household needs and livelihoods hence the changing gender dynamics at household level. To solve these challenges, the study recommends that, the government should initiate empowerment programs for positive change and implement chapter 6 of the Kenyan constitution.

Key words: Households, Gender Relationships, Declining sugar industry

INTRODUCTION

Sugar industry in Kenya is a major source of income that greatly contributes to social and economic development of the country in addition to enhancing the growth of Gross domestic product (KSB 2011). There are more than 250 000 small scale sugar cane farmers in Kenya who depend on the industry. The Kenya Sugar Board estimates that approximately six million Kenyans rely directly or indirectly on the industry as their main source of livelihood. The industry contributes about 75% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and has a major impact on the economies of Western Kenya and Nyanza region and to a lesser extent Rift valley (Kenya Parliament Assembly, 2015). However, the Kenya's manufacturing industry, in which the sugar sector belongs, has remained stagnant in its contribution to the GDP. The contribution has remained at an average of 10% for more than ten years (Kenya Economic Survey, 2015).

Studies indicate that under increasing economic pressure, men in many parts of the world have lost their traditional occupations and jobs, and women have been forced to take on additional income earning tasks while continuing with their domestic tasks. (Kabeer1997). Problems such as marital and domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse have been associated with men's failure to cope with the erosion of their traditional power due to their inability to bring home an income (Ashwin and Lytkina 2004: 196; Kabeer 2007, 52). Even when women take on breadwinning roles, men may feel reluctant to increase their share in domestic work and child care for the fear that their sense of masculinity and self-esteem would be compromised. Worse still, women's labor market participation may threaten men's identity to the point that the latter completely reject household chores (Parrenas 2005, 58).Some research note that wives obliged to support the household because of men's inability to contribute economically may have a relatively high degree of decision-making power (Beneria and Roldan, 1987).

This study therefore aims to analyze how gender relationships have been influenced at household level by socio-economic changes that are taking place in Western region of Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Polygamy is a common practice in every part of Africa, especially in Nigeria regardless of traditions or religious beliefs. Even many well educated people and religious go behind the scene of their faith and prohibition and practice the age old act (Alfred Aisediohen 2010)

Fundamental contradictions inherent in many African legal systems the coexistence of modern, statutory laws with Islamic and traditional customary laws and practices have created a complex and confusing legal regime under which women are denied legal rights. Many African governments, due to the complexity and enormity of the task, and perhaps due to their own resistance toward female empowerment are slow to enact meaningful reform, preferring to allow for extreme decentralization in matters of family or personal law. The practice of polygamy throughout Africa with its accompanying absence of equitable means for justly allocating the respective interests of a man's numerous wives presents problematic administration of estate laws effectively barring a widow's rights to inherit, (Uche E.2002). For instance, few widows attempt to make use of the formal, legal, judicial system. Widows rarely challenge the legality of prevailing customary rules of inheritance or raise the question of discrimination inherent in these rules. Activist organizations are trying to changing this situation. Few widows have filed complaints with the police and fewer have attempted challenging the constitutionality of these oppressive customary rules and practices.

Complex inheritance issues arise from polygamy and the ability of African men to jump from one form of marriage to another. Men marry wives under civil law, then add a few more under custom or start the other way round and then marry a wife under general law. Although such combinations and "juggling" of wives may cause complications during the life of the man, the real problem arises when he dies and the resources of the family have to be allocated among the various competing "groups" and wives within the family. Given the complex relations courts have a lot of interests to balance.

The first tier interest of the legal wife of a monogamous, statutory union, the interest of the legitimate children of such marriage, the interest of the additional "wives", mistresses of a man

who had previously contracted a monogamous marriage, the interest of the various wives in a polygamous, customary law or marriage, the interest of the many children born in a polygamous, customary law marriage, and the interest of the illegitimate children of the deceased. Second-tier interests would include those of the parents, brothers, and sisters of a man. So complex is the web of relationships and interests that may exist with regard to a single estate that several calls have been made for legislation to deal with the problem. Any reform can only be a beginning that will need to be amended as its efficacy is evaluated throughout implementation.

Domestic violence is a universal phenomenon. Irrespectively of whether a country is poor or rich, spousal violence is pervasive. Men's violence against women is a key determinant of gender inequality as it disempowers and impoverishes women. Further, violence against women profoundly limits choices open to women and girls. Women's economic empowerment and in particular the autonomy to work outside the home has been proposed as a powerful instrument to eradicate domestic violence. On one hand, an increase in income may lead women to end the partnership if abuse continues (Aizer, 2010). On the other, the increase in outside home employment reduces domestic violence by reducing the time partners spend together (Dugan et al. 1999). However, a wife's economic independence represents a challenge to a culturally prescribed norm of male dominance and female dependence. When a man lacks this sign of dominance, violence may be a mean of reinstating his authority over his wife (Macmillan and Gartner, 1999). Outside employment can also lead to an increase in domestic violence resulting from the insecurity and jealousy that males feel when their partners are exposed to the possibility of sexual encounters with other males (Daly and Wilson, 1993, 1998).

Microfinance both credit and savings, have also been proposed as a potential tool for empowering poor women in developing countries. However, these programs have a varied effect on men's violence against women (Goetz and Gupta 1996, Kabeer 2000 and Schuler et al. 2010). They can reduce women's vulnerability to men's violence by strengthening their economic roles and making their lives more public. However, when women challenge gender norms, they sometimes provoke violence in their husbands. By putting resources into women's hands, credit programs may indirectly exacerbate such violence; but they may also provide a context for intervention.

From multiple perspectives, women find themselves in subordinate positions to men. In most societies, women are socially, culturally, and economically dependent on men. Violence against women is “an extreme expression of male dominance” and “one of the most intractable violations of women’s human rights” (Bradley qtd. in Davies 1994:18). The persistence of domestic violence across many societies suggests that it is not merely a characteristic of particular individuals but is, at a deeper level, related to social structures that maintain unequal socioeconomic relations between men and women. (WHO 1997) At the core of gender based violence are the unequal power relations that limit women’s choices and reinforce dependency on men. Davies argues, “The social, political, and economic dependence of women on men provides a structure wherein men can perpetuate violence against women” (Davies 1994:4). Despite the widespread nature of domestic violence, it appears to be a socially and politically “untouchable” subject even by state agencies and international institutions (CEDAW).

Problems such as marital and domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse have been associated with men's failure to cope with the erosion of power due to their inability to bring home an income (Ashwin and Lytkina 2004: 196; Kabeer 2007, 52). Even when women take on breadwinning roles, men may feel reluctant to increase their share in domestic work and child care for the fear that their sense of masculinity and self-esteem would be compromised. Worse still, women's labor market participation may threaten men's identity to the point that the latter completely reject household chores (Parrenas 2005, 58). Men, as observed by studies, for example, in the Philippines (McKay 2010; Parrenas 2005), may be willing to do a greater share of domestic and care work if their masculinity is more intact and made secure by their financial contributions to the family. In the Kenyan context gender based violence is increasing on a daily basis, Silberschmidt (1991) in her ethnographic studies among the Abaguusi of Kisii District, Kenya, noted that that gender violence was common in transitional societies. She noted that men seem to have lost identity, their position is weakened, and their esteem and self- respect is affected as a result of altered gender relations following modernization (and unemployment). This caused conflict that led to high levels of domestic violence.

In the developed world women have caught up with men in terms of human capital accumulation and the gender gap is also shrinking. This substantial economic empowerment of women has

been accompanied by a decreasing trend in female domestic violence. Aizer (2010) proposes an economic theory of household bargaining that incorporates domestic violence. Therefore, an increase in a woman's relative wage increases her bargaining power and lowers the levels of violence by improving her outside options. Using new sources of administrative data for the US, the author finds that the decline in the wage gap witnessed over the past 13 years can explain nine percent of the reduction in violence and the costs associated with it. Modern economic theory recognizes the presence of multiple agents within the family, with distinct preferences, who are jointly determining the observed outcome. Thus household allocation decisions are the result of a bargaining process in which its members seek to allocate resources, over which they have control, to goods they especially care about (Bourguignon and Chiappori, 1992). Crucial to the final allocation is thus the bargaining strength of each spouse. Relative income clearly influences the intra-household distribution of power (Duflo, 2004; Thomas, 1990, 1994), but it is not the only variable that affects the decisional process. Factors that change the household's economic environment and in particular their members' respective bargaining positions are also important.

Doepke and Tertilt (2008), state that technological change and its associated increase in human capital may have caused the expansion of women's rights through the nineteenth century in England and the US. Those higher returns raised the importance of education and recalibrated the trade-off between the rights of a man's own wife and those of other men's wives. The authors argue that improvements in married women's economic rights increase females' bargaining power within the household. As there is evidence that women spend more resources in their children's well-being than men (Duflo, 2004; Thomas, 1990, 1994), more bargaining power for women means greater investments in their children's human capital.

The changing work status of women in the 1970s and 1980s stimulated a great deal of research concerning decision roles and shifts in role responsibilities. In part, this research may reflect the assumption that roles within the family were expected to change as the wife entered the outside domain. Cunningham and Green (1974) found that decision roles had shifted, with there being more shared decision making for cars, vacations, and housing, but with the wife having more decision-making role in terms of food and groceries while the husband's influence had increased

in the case of insurance. Belch, Belch and Ceresino (1985), however, found rather "traditional" roles with men making the decisions for automobiles and televisions, and women dominating the purchase of appliances, furniture, and cereal. In other words, such investigations indicated that while men and women may take on new structural roles, their allegiance to masculinity and femininity respectively remains undeterred.

Some research notes that wives obliged to support the household because of men's inability to contribute economically may have a relatively high degree of decision-making power (Beneria and Roldan, 1987). By contrast, other research drawing on evidence from Greece, Honduras and Kenya has found that 'a wife's earned income does not become a valuable and powerful resource that wins her decision-making power and equality in the division of labor' unless her husband feels secure in his superior position and fulfils his breadwinning role (Safilios-Rothschild, 1990).

METHODOLOGY

This study applied purposive sampling where sugarcane companies in Western region were purposely selected, which also served as the base of sugar belt zones in Western region of Kenya. Through the assistance of the area chiefs and local administration transect walks were made to purposely select households from each location based on their knowledge and understanding of the declining sugar industry in the region. The sample size of the research study depended on the level of information saturation. Data was collected by using qualitative interviews, in-depth structured interviews, and observation. These households and family members were determined by the area chiefs and local administration based on their farming experience in sugar cane farming; knowledge and understanding of sugarcane issues and their willingness to present tangible information on matters that are affecting the sugar industry in Western region of Kenya. A series of events that have been unfolding in relation to the current declining status of the sugar industry were constructed where by the respondents were asked to share their views, perceptions and experiences. Key turning points of the phenomenon were brought out to provide a context within which respondents could give their views and reactions. Data was analyzed using the thematic analysis, where data was coded based on the transcribed

and field notes. Themes were identified based on descriptive summaries and interpreted verbatim which provided the basis for theoretical understanding of data collected. Validity and reliability was checked through feedback from the respondents as objectivity was achieved through bracketing.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study showed that before the decline of the sugar industry, polygamy was highly practiced based on traditional cultural ideology and religious believes, however the findings revealed more factors that contributed to polygamy in the region. Men's total access and ownership of financial resources from sugarcane returns acted as a symbol of wealth and power to attract many wives, it also meant that men had the ability to care and provide for their many wives and children. Other factors included men's willingness and love for women. To ensure peace and tranquility among household members, men build their wives' homes far apart from each other. They also ensured equal division of resources among households according to Islamic religious believes which most households belong to. Conjugal rights and sexual roles were equally shared among all wives regardless of their sexual prowess. Sons also emulated their fathers' characteristics and behavior as they also misused shares on leisure. Mothers socialized their young daughters into marriage at an early age as the caretakers of their husband's' wealth and possessions as girls were considered ready for marriage immediately they received their 1st menses according to Islamic religious believes. These cultural practices and socialization process explains the high levels of polygamy and early marriages among many communities in Western region of Kenya. The findings also meant that access to financial resources determined the number of women a man would marry hence the high male ego, status and dignity in the society, as it indicated how wealthy and powerful a man was.

The study also revealed that gender based violence and abuse was high, as women fought against polygamy and infidelity at household level. There was no peace in most households as men's promiscuity sparked and provoked anger from their wives hence high levels of gender based violence. Men engaged in extra-marital affairs as they dated different women without shame or fear about the feelings of their legally married wives. They further provoked their traditionally married wife/wives by putting up a separate house in their matrimonial homes to accommodate their extra relations, which spackled hostility and frequent fights between the man and his

wife/wives in cases of any resistance against their new partners. Men spend excessive financial resources lavishly on their multiple sexual relationships as they made trips to Mombasa with their new relations. On return men built new homes for their newly married wives and bought expensive household goods for their new relations, including a bicycle, a radio and a mattress. Every harvesting season translated into a new wife hence the polygamous marriage system in the region.

Although men provided for their traditionally married wives, they had no peace to consume what had been provided for, due to excessive harshness and harassment from their husbands. Men never cared about their sexual role to their already married wives which further provoked anger among their wives. This implied that sex role had been replaced with household provision role, which was unacceptable by the married wife/wives. However co-wives never quarreled among themselves, instead they developed intimacy and closeness as it was perceived that they shared the same predicaments. Mothers' in-laws also empathized with their daughters in-laws and encouraged them to hold on to their marriages as African men are polygamous in nature.

The declining status of the sugar industry in Western region of Kenya has however, reaped off men their wealth and financial resources hence the changing gender relationships at household level. Men have been deprived of their main source of income as a result they have lost their dignity and honor as heads of their households; their ego has been lowered as they lose their ability to provide for their household members. The findings of this study revealed that polygamy and wife inheritance are quickly fading away due to poor capital returns among men. The study also revealed that marriage institution has weakened and lost value, as both men and women do not stick to their marriages due to economic hardships and constraints experiences in many households; this has lead to unstable marriage relationships that has weakened the marriage institution. It was found out that there are many cases of broken and abandoned marriages as men delay to marry, and in cases where they are married the couple planned for fewer children as a strategy to meet their daily needs and sustain their household needs. The study further revealed that dowry payments that were tied to the marriage institution have eroded as it was found out that parents who are lucky enough to marry off their daughters in these hard economic times hardly asked for their daughters' dowry in fear of carrying a lifetime burden of their daughters' needs and expenses. These findings mean that marriage institution has lost value

and dignity it was accorded before the decline of the sugar industry, when men possessed wealth and financial resources to dictate and decide on their marriage interests.

Central to the African gender ideology that places women in the domestic sphere and men in the public sphere, the findings of this study revealed that men have allowed women to venture into micro enterprise activities as they claimed that they have no problem with their wives carrying out their businesses in the public sphere for they understand one another. Men have impressed peace and compliance to household roles as they create ample time for their wives to participate in micro-enterprise activities to meet household needs. Both men and women respect one another as they complement each other's efforts invested in household sustainability and improved livelihoods. The findings revealed that tensions and struggles are not experienced in households as men have allowed their wives to trade and carry out businesses beyond their locations and across the borders where women spent some days before they come back to their households. However this is not normal for a real African man, it means men are compromising their traditional ideology and nature as jealousy creatures for household survival and livelihoods.

However, the findings further revealed that other forms of inter-household conflicts and gender based violence over property rights and inheritance have emerged in the region. Lack of men to write their wills before they die has led to household conflicts after their demise. Brothers' in-laws and sons are colluding to victimize childless and barren women over property rights and inheritance. The findings revealed that some brothers' in-laws meddle into their brother's household financial and resource management affairs which have led to inter household conflicts. This form of conflict has made women to take over men's protection role and responsibility to manage and safeguard financial resources and assets for their households' survival. Women have adapted an individualistic perspective where they safeguard and protect their social, economic and financial resources for the welfare and wellbeing of their households' livelihoods, as men still hold onto cultural ideologies of collective relationships with their late brothers' wives. The findings also revealed a passive form of conflict among co-wives who hate each other as they undertake witchcraft acts against each other's household members. The findings revealed that co-wives threaten and warn their husbands with death over their discriminative role performance and resource distribution among them, which has led to witchcraft and use of supernatural forces and power as an intervention to solve their livelihood

predicaments. This finding indicates that as the region continues to experience economic hardships, co-wives are determined to fight over scarce resources available through all means accessible, including witchcraft. However based on the context in which this study was conducted some women are enlightened and aware of their property rights as the findings revealed that they made use of their local administrative law courts and judiciary systems.

In regard to decision making at household level, the findings of this study revealed that women exposure and interaction in the public sphere as they carry out micro-enterprise activities has economically empowered women to make and decide on very important household matters. Women make decisions on the quality and largeness of their intended house for construction. This is because women make extra income from the businesses and income generating activities they engage in, which gives them the power to decide on what they want over their husbands inability to do so. The findings revealed that economically empowered women have access to economic and financial resources which enables them to decide on which type of business to conduct and carry out on behalf of their households for sustainable and improved livelihoods. The current findings reveal that women uphold their decisions on prioritizing school fees against other household needs as they perceive investment into their children human capital as their pension scheme for their future.

CONCLUSION

The declining status of the sugar industry in Western region of Kenya has not only affected the country's economy but also gender relationships at household level. Men have been reaped off their wealth and financial resources hence the changing gender relationships at household level. Men have lost their sense of masculinity and male ego hence their inability to provide for household needs and livelihoods. Before the decline of the sugar industry marriage institution was highly valued where polygamy and wife inheritance were common practices, gender based violence and abuse was also high, as women fought against polygamy and infidelity at household level. However, these practices are quickly fading away due to low capital return among men; the marriage institution has weakened as many cases of broken marriages have been reported. As opposed to the cultural ideology that places men in the public sphere and women in the domestic sphere, men have allowed their wives to venture into micro enterprise activities in the public

sphere to support immediate household needs as they spent most of their time in the domestic sphere carrying out production and household related activities as a form of their contribution to household needs and livelihoods. Women exposure and interaction in the public sphere has economically empowered them hence their derived power to decide on very important household matters. Gender based violence has also reduced as both men and women respect and complement each other's efforts invested in household sustainability and improved livelihoods, however other forms of inter-household conflicts and gender based violence over property rights and inheritance have emerged in the region. However, as observed men have lost their sense of masculinity and self ego hence their newly acquired compromising nature.

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