

Full Length Research Paper

Influence of traditions/customs and beliefs/norms on women in tree growing in Siaya County, Kenya

John Odiaga Oloo,

Supervisors: Dr. Paul M. Makenzi, prof. John Gowland Mwangi and Prof. Ali shaukat abdulrazack

Department of Livestock Production, P. O Box 974, Kisumu
Email no: joloo013@gmail.com

Accepted 29th November, 2013

In any society, social issues are actions taken by individuals and have close interconnectedness with other people. Every society has its socio-cultural factors which members of the society conforms to. These factors are important because a member of the society needs to know them in order to participate in various activities. These socio-cultural factors can have influence either to men or women in a particular society. Some of the factors cannot be explained scientifically to members of the society but they honoured. The main objective of this study was to establish socio-cultural factors that influence women's participation in tree growing. A cross sectional survey was used targeting 280 respondents who included 120 household heads, 40 key informants, 4 women groups and Luo council of elders. The factors considered were tradition/customs, beliefs/norms, and activity profile with respect to tree growing. Data analysis used SPSS resulting in pie-chart, and table. The study concludes that the factors considered have great influence on women in tree growing because women are culturally allowed to both weed and water the plants only. They cannot take decisions on other issues concerning tree growing in the community. The socio-cultural issues are restrictive to women's participation. More efforts should be put in place to sensitize community members the dangers of excluding women from actively participating in tree growing.

Keywords: Socio-cultural factors, tree growing, Siaya County, women

INTRODUCTION

Socio-cultural factors are complex and focus on knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws and customs and any other capacities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society. These factors are important because a member of the society needs to know them in order to participate in various activities (Tylor, 2006). Normally, in any society, the social issues are actions taken by individuals and have close interconnectedness with other people. The culture aspect of a society is concerned with questions of shared social meanings, that is, the various ways we make sense of the world. The meanings are generated through signs, most notably those of language (Cole, 2005). That is, culture is understood to be a fact of place. In so far as culture is a common whole way of life, its boundaries are largely locked into those of nationality and ethnicity (Barker, 2008). Cultures are not pure, authentic and locally bound. They are the synergic and hybridized products of interactions across space (Bhabha, 1994). Culture is the peoples' way of life.

Traditionally, women have a lesser role than men in

the decision making process that affect and control their own lives and those of their homesteads and entitlements (Flintan, 2003; Muir, 2006). Papadopoulos (2010) concludes that culture has some positive attributes which include: that it organizes individuals life daily, weekly, annually and the prevailing customs and traditions bind individuals to the group, that it provides individuals with the face-to-face human interaction and tactile contact that are needed for human development and survival and, that it gives a sense of belonging to a group that is collectively wiser than any individual. Phiri *et al.* (2003) establish that proportionately more men plant improved fallow than women primarily because married women need consent from their husbands before planting trees. While traditions will differ between individuals and regions, it is clear that tradition underpins the "social organization of agriculture". Traditions are formed over generations because they are believed to be the best or most appropriate way of doing something (Dunn *et al.*, 2000). Nyasimi *et al.* (2008) at Sauri Millennium Village document that development in Africa

are bound to fail due to the strongly embedded and practiced socio-cultural beliefs, rites, and norms. In particular, the socio-cultural practices are hindering women's accessing critical resources and from becoming active participants in development activities. According to Khadiagala (2001), cultural practices may not only restrict implementation of development programs but can restrict participation as well. This study was to establish if tradition/customs influence participation of women in tree growing in the study area.

There are traditional beliefs or taboos about cutting or planting tree species among the Luo (Diamond, 1992). Cohen and Atieno-Adhiambo (1989) assert that in Luo community, it is a taboo for a woman to plant finger euphorbia. Korir (2002) similarly notes that in Kakamega district of western Kenya, lack of women's participation in tree growing is perpetuated through various taboos and beliefs. Harris (1940) argues that cultural values influence not only the original adoption or rejection of an innovation but also how the new idea is to be intergrated into the existing way of life. The District Forest Officer's report for Bondo and Siaya districts portray that cultural practices prohibit women from actively participating in environmental conservation measures like tree growing is common (DFO, 2009). This study was to investigate if beliefs/norms influence tree growing in the study area.

The inclusion of local communities in the management forests, including state-owned, formerly state-owned and community forest resources has become increasingly common in the last 25 years. Almost all countries in Africa, and many in Asia, are promoting the participation of rural communities in the management and utilization of forests and woodlands through some form of Participatory Forest Management (PFM) Many countries have now developed, or are in the process of developing, changes to national policies and legislation that institutionalize (PFM) (Wily, 2001). Kenya has embraced Participatory Forest Management (PFM) as an approach towards achieving sustainable forest management. This is out of realization that involvement of the wider stakeholders would significantly contribute towards sustainable management of forests. In this approach, local communities and other stakeholders participate in management of forest resources as provided for by the Forest Act 2005. It's against this background that these guidelines have been developed to provide details on how all stakeholders are to be involved.

The stakeholders spearheaded by the Kenya Forest Service, with technical support from the Commonwealth Secretariat, prepared these guidelines. Most of the ideas presented in these guidelines were collected and collated from foresters, researchers, natural resource managers, non-governmental organizations and community groups previously involved in participatory forest management. The guidelines also capture lessons learnt from neighboring countries such

as Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia (GOK, 2007). The reason of this guideline was to incorporate all stake holders in the management of forest and forest resources and women are recognized as important stakeholders whose slot is specifically stated in every committee for conservation purposes. The foregoing is a pointer that in the past some segments of the society have been excluded conspicuously in management of community assets due to culture. The finding of this study confirms the fear that the guidelines sought to address because in the study area, women are not fully involved in tree management. The specific objective of the study was to determine how socio-cultural factors influence women's participation in tree growing in Bondo and Siaya sub-counties, Siaya County.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Description of Study Area

Siaya County lies between latitude $0^{\circ} 26^1$ to $0^{\circ} 28^1$ north and longitude $33^{\circ} 58^1$ east and $34^{\circ} 33^1$ west with total surface area of the county is 1520 km^2 . It has six sub-counties namely; Ugunja, Yala, Ugenya, Siaya, Bondo and Rarieda. The county borders Busia county to the north, Kakamega county to the north eastern, Vihiga county to the east, Kisumu county to the south east, with Lake Victoria to the south and west. The study location was Bondo and Siaya sub-counties. Bondo sub-county was divided into eleven locations found in three administrative divisions namely; Nyangoma, Usigu and Maranda with land surface area of 593 km^2 (DLPO, 2010) while Siaya sub-county was divided into ten locations contained in three administrative divisions namely; Karemo, Boro and Township with land surface area of 605.8 km^2 . Altitudinally, the sub-counties ranges from 1140 m.asl to 1200m.asl with equatorial type of climate. Fertility of soils here range from moderate to low resulting in most soils being unable to produce without the use of either organic, inorganic, or in most cases both types of fertilizers. Most of the areas have underlying murrum with poor moisture retention (DAO, 2010).

The study employed a sociological survey design which allows collection of information from a population with the purpose of making inference about the targeted group in a more objective way (Kombo and Tromp, 2006). It gives a snapshot of information, quick and cost effective (Kothari, 2007). Secondary data was obtained from Government reports, non-governmental reports, Journals, and Internet. Primary data was collected from household heads, key informants, women groups and Luo Council of Elders who know the community well, have a broad knowledge of the community and can give ways of life that are no longer observable to many. Simple random sampling procedure was used in

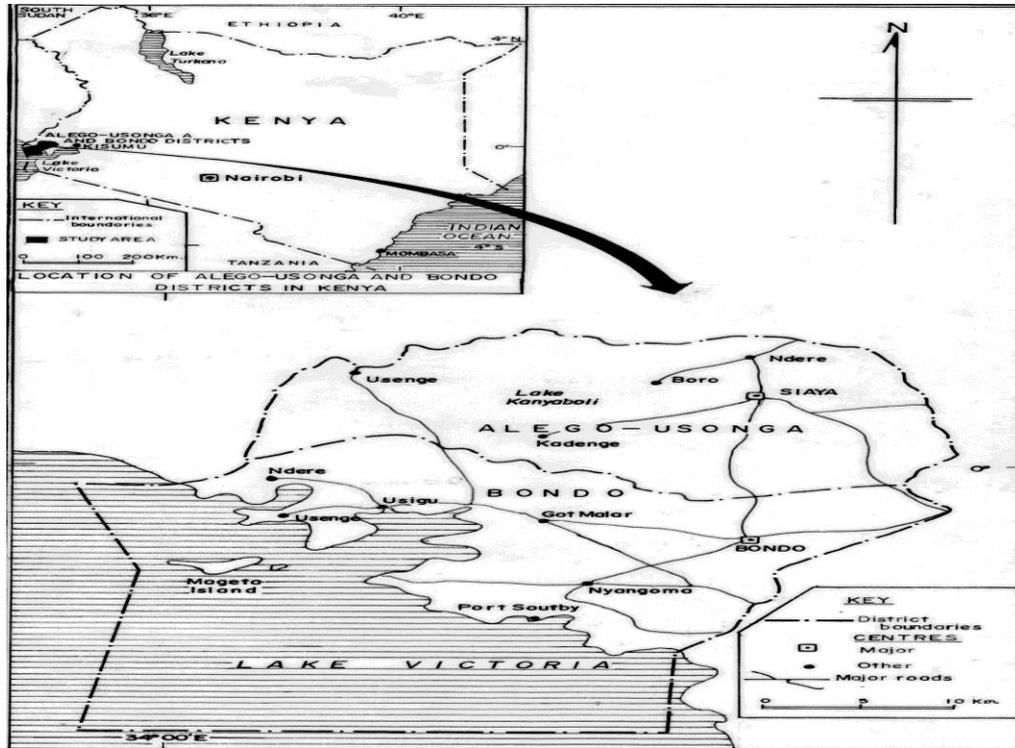


Figure 1: Map of Bondo and Siaya Sub- Counties, Source: Bondo / Siaya Districts Development Plan 2010

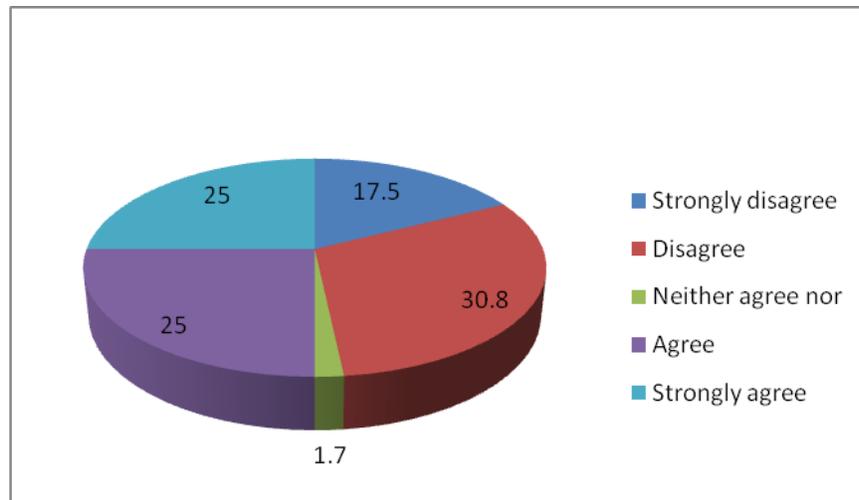


Figure 1: Response of respondents on traditions/customs

Source: Author's survey, 2012

choosing a sample of 280 respondents. Fraenkel and Wallen (1990) recommend a minimum of 100 subjects for descriptive studies. According to Kathuri and Pals (1993), in order to get a representative sample from a population when a survey research targets a major subgroup, at least 100 cases should be investigated. It was divided into phases: The criteria for identifying the key informants were: (a) minimum age of 70 years, (b) have

their own homes, and (c) opinion leaders in the society. Secondary data was obtained from Government reports, non-governmental reports, Journals, and Internet. Primary data was collected from household heads, key informants, women groups and Luo Council of Elders. Four different instruments were developed. Questionnaire was for household heads and interview schedule was for key informants. There were two

Table 1: Response from respondents on beliefs/norms

Response	Frequency	Percentage
strongly disagree	23	19.2
Disagree	47	39.2
neither agree nor disagree	2	1.7
Agree	25	20.8
strongly agree	23	19.2
Total	120	100.0

n=120

Source: Author's survey, 2012

Table 2: Activity profile for women and men in tree growing

Activity (ies)	Who does it?		
	Males	Females	Both
1. Preparation for the holes for transplanting tree seedlings	X		
2. Site selection where tree seedlings are planted	X		
3. Types of tree seedlings to be planted	X		
4. Actual planting of trees	X		
5. Weeding of tree seedlings		X	
6. Watering of trees seedlings		X	
7. Protecting the tree seedlings from destruction by putting protective devices	X		
8. Pruning of trees	X		
Any other activity			

Source: Author's survey, 2012.

Discussion guides. One guide targeted women groups and the other one targeted Luo Council of Elders. Structured questionnaire was used for household characteristics and its reliability was 0.71. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (1999), people's opinions, views, attitudes and perceptions are best received by the use of questionnaires and scheduled interviews. (figure 1 above)

Data Analysis

Data from open-ended questions were coded with respect to three levels i.e. (a) Key informants (b) women group and (c) Luo Council of Elders and thematic areas. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) soft ware and content data analysis were employed resulting in tables, pie-charts, and percentages. Another tool used was 24 hours daily gender calendar where daily routine works are culturally divided.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

On traditions/customs and whether they influence participation of women, Figure 2 above shows the response out of 120 household heads interviewed, 48.3% either disagreed or strongly disagreed and were of the opinion that tradition/culture does not influence participation of women in tree growing, but 50% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that tradition/culture does influence whereas only 1.7% could not decide. Using interview schedule with key informants and guided discussions with four women groups and Luo Council of Elders, it came out clearly that traditions/customs influence participation of women for it is a taboo in the society for women to grow *Euphorbia triculli*, *Agave sisalana*, *Albizia coriaria*, and *Tamarindus indica*. The above responses from respondents, key informants and women groups agree with the findings of Rocheleau (1992), that certain tree species may have culturally defined gender specific and

ownership restrictions. It is alleged that if a woman plants a tree, she will become barren and her husband will die Chavangi (1984).

On beliefs/norms, Table 1 above shows the results from household heads. Human beings tend to internalize the beliefs of people around them especially during childhood and cling to the minds for long periods to come. Normally, beliefs/norms influence human beings behaviour/attitude. Some beliefs may be true while may not be true but because not many people can risk to confirm otherwise, the belief stays. 40% of household heads agreed or strongly agreed that it does influence, 58.4% disagreed, while 1.7% could not decide. Although the percentage disagreeing was big, the percentage agreeing was equally high and this is a pointer to how the beliefs/norms can influence participation of women. Some of the beliefs when women defied beliefs/norms include deaths of their children and husbands and because death is feared, no woman is ready to experiment. A belief is located in the brain of a person and can greatly influence decisions. At triangulation stage, it came out clearly that key informants, women groups and Luo council of elders concurred with the 40% household heads that beliefs/norms negatively influence participation of women in tree growing. This outcome agrees with Chavangi (1984) that if a woman plants a tree, she will become barren and her husband and children will die. Beliefs and norms make people to fear the consequences especially if associated with negative consequences. The finding further agrees with that of Makindi (2002) that certain taboos and beliefs bar women and female children from planting trees.

Activity Profile a tool which shows how the culturally the society has allocated various activities to both women and men in tree growing is shown in Table 2.

From the table above, socio-cultural factors are at play. There are activities which are to be performed by men and there are those to be performed by women. However, when women perform activities which are associated with men, then they are doing them on behalf of men not on their own behalf. All activities in tree growing are for men except weeding and watering which are for women. The sentiments for discrimination of women with respect to tree growing were agreed by all respondents. The allocation of duties is discriminating against women. The finding of the study supports that of Ekisa (2010) that cultural aspects for community limits participation of women in a forestation and agro-forestry programs.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Culturally, the only activities women are allowed to do in tree growing without asking for consent from men are watering and weeding. All other activities required in tree growing are preserve of men.

RECOMMENDATION

More emphasis should be put in place to sensitise the community members to change their attitudes towards women with respect to tree growing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was part of a PhD in Environmental Science at Egerton University. The three corresponding authors were supervisors. This study was co-funded by Egerton University and National Council for Science and Technology.

REFERENCE

- Bhabha H (1994). *The location of culture*. London. and New York. Routledge
- Bradley PN (1991). *Wood fuel, women, and woodlots*. The foundation of a woodlot development strategy for East Africa. Mackmillan Educational Publishers Limited. London: Basingtoke.
- Chavangi N (1984). *Cultural aspects of fuel wood procurement in Kakamega district, Kenya*. Working paper No. 4. Kenya fuel wood development program/Beijer Institute, Nairobi.
- Cohen DW, Adhiambo ESA (1989). *Siaya: The historical anthropology of an African landscape*. U.S.A, Ohio Press: 138.
- Cole M (2005). *Culture in development*: In: Bomstein MN, Lamb ME (eds). *Developmental science: An advanced textbook (5e)*: 45-102. Crblaum Associates
- District Forest Officer. (2010). Annual report, Bondo district
- District Forest Officer. (2009). Performance contract. Bondo district
- District Forest Officer. (2009). Annual report, Rongo district.
- Dunn T, Gray I, Phillips E (2000). From personal barriers to community plans: a farm and community planning approach to the extension of sustainable agriculture, in Shulman, A. and Price, R. (eds) *Case studies in increasing the adoption of sustainable resource management practices*, LWRRDC, Canberra.
- Ekisa GT (2010). *Socio-economic and Cultural Aspects for Community Participation Programs: A case study of Teso District*. Thesis, Moi University. Eldoret, Kenya.
- Flintan F (2003). *Engendering Eden*. Volume 11. Women, gender and ICDPs in Africa: Lessons learnt and experiences shared. IIED wildlife and development series, (17)
- Fraenkel JR, Wallen NE (1990). *How to design and evaluate research in education*. New York, NY: Mc Graw Hill Publishing Co.
- Government of Kenya, (2007). *The strategy for wealth and employment creation, Mid-Term Review*. Nairobi. Kenya. Popular Version. Government Printer: 17-18.
- Kalineza HMM, Mdoe NSY, Mlozi MRS (1999). Factors influencing adoption of soil conservation technologies in Tanzania: a case study in Gairo: In proceedings of FoA conference 4(1999):76-83.
- Khadiagala LS (2001). *The failure of popular justice in Uganda: Local councils and worries property rights*. *Development and change* 32 (1): 55-76.
- Kothari, C. R. (2007). *Research methodology methods and techniques*. New Delhi: New Age International (P).Ltd: 1-56
- Korir HK (2002). *Impact of agro-forestry on farm production and household farm income: Case study of Kakamega district, Kenya*. Unpublished, MSc. Thesis. Egerton University, Njoro, Kenya.
- Makindi SM (2002). *Issues in adoption of social forestry. The case of Kitui farmers in Kenya*. Unpublished MSc, Thesis. Egerton University, Njoro, Kenya.

- Miur A (2006). Customary pastoral institutes study. Unpublished report for the SC-US PLI consortium, CARE PLI consortium and SOS Sahel Borana programme. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- Mugenda MO, Mugenda AG (1999). Research methods. quantitative and qualitative approaches, Nairobi: African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS).
- Nyasimi M, Okang'a J, Mutuo M, Masira J (2008). Change from within: Engaging local communities in achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Sub-Saharan Africa. In: The journal of sustainable development, 2009. Nairobi.
- Ouma PE, Ouma SA, Bett KE, Chuchu TO, Muriki AG, Ndonye GK (2004). River njoro watershed socio-economic survey. Initial findings. Unpublished report. Egerton
- Papadopoulus D (2011). The benefits of culture. Northern Marianas College, Saispan, CNM1
- Phiri D, Franzel S, Maforngaya P, Jere I, Katanga R, Phiri S (2003). Who is using the new technology? The association of wealth status and gender with planting of improved tree fallows in Eastern Province, Zambia. Agro-forestry Systems
- Richards C, Lawrence G, Kelly N (2003). Is it hard to be green when you are in the red? A sociological account of primary production and environments sustainability, paper presented to the "New times", new worlds, new ideas: sociology today and tomorrow; conference of the Australian Sociological Association, University of New England, Armidale.
- Vernooy R (2006). Social and gender analysis in natural resources management; Learning studies and lessons from Asia. Canada: IDRC
- Wily L (2001a). Forest management and democracy in east and southern Africa: lessons from Tanzania. Gatekeeper Series No. 95. London, IIED)