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**Benefits from Kipsigis Women Engaging in Socio-Economic Activities in Kericho and  
Bomet Counties, Kenya**

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**Abstract**

**Purpose:** To investigate the impact of Kipsigis women group economic activities and how the public perceive this new undertaking in Kericho and Bomet Counties in Kenya.

**Methodology:** The study used a qualitative research design, where different components of the study addressed the research problem. Probability sampling technique was used to select the participants in the study. The methods used to interrogate the participants included: focus group discussions, observation and face to face interviews. Each participant responded to the questions individually, as posed in the interview guide. This was later collected by the researcher for perusal and recording of the result that was compiled along with those from other methods. Along with the focus groups discussions, the researcher selected topics related to the topic of the study for discussion in the groups. The questions used in the different methods were posed to the participants who had been purposively selected to represent the rest of the population. This was done with the view of collecting the data that was later analyzed using tools such as NVivo or done manually. This study manually analyzed the data collected from the participants through the afore-mentioned research techniques for collecting the data.

**Findings:** The findings showed that there was recognition of women's contribution in society. The results from Bomet County indicated that 52% have embraced and supported women's group activities, 24% see such group activities as making the women responsible and hardworking while another 24% feel that the women are not well supported in their group economic activities. In Kericho County, the results indicated that 54% felt that women's contribution would improve living standards and another 46% felt that the group ability would significantly improve. The study also sought to find out the effect of women engaging in socio-economic activities on the home and family. The results from women in Kericho County show that 96% indicated that there was a positive effect on family and society as stated in the research outcome, 4% said there was no effect. The results from Bomet County showed that 98% of participants agreed that the women involvement in economic activities had a positive effect on family and society. Two percent were of the feeling that there was no effect on the home and family. Bomet had a percentage of respondents who indicated that women have not contributed much through their involvement in economic activities.

**Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy:** The Critical Social Theory helps in understanding social functioning and behavior among gender groups in the society, where men and women roles among the Kipsigis is very distinct. Women assigned roles are undertaken by women and girls as their responsibilities lies in the kitchen and around the home. This is where the small children and the elderly are, and the women and the older girls are expected to undertake those roles without question.

**Keywords:** *Assigned Roles, Economic Activities, Gender, Urbanization, Women*

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## INTRODUCTION

Among traditional societies of the world, men and women were assigned different roles to accomplish and to maintain their way of life. However, Cohen (2006) opined that societal beliefs continue to hinder progress in women empowerment and subsequently, their participation in economic activities in many aspects. This resonates with the Kipsigis community in that, women's contribution is often considered negligible, with many small and medium scale enterprises not being recognized (Bula, 2012). This is because economic engagement and financial provision for the family is considered a man's role as a key responsibility (Billow, 1991). Reports by leading developmental organizations reveal that, not only does gender equality matter in the society, but women's participation can and has enhanced economic efficiency World Bank, (2012). Furthermore, the World Bank reports that Africa has the highest rate of female run entrepreneurs World Bank (2019), despite all odds. In fact, Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rate of female entrepreneurship, with twenty six percent of female adults engaged in entrepreneurial activity in the world, Bosma et. Al (2020). Bula (2012) indicates, that in the exploration of the African enterprises in most African economies, thousands of women invest money, employ workers, and function as entrepreneurs, which provides evidence of women's ability to undertake and improve their family welfare and that of their communities. Furthermore, UNICEF asserts that women continue to be essential contributors to both rural and urban economies all over the world. According to Chukumwa (2007), women in Africa societies are often considered to be heavily dependent, gullible, voiceless and stuck in the background of patrimony, however, these notions can be challenged and the traditional image corrected by recognizing female assertion as an ideological focus, Billow (1991).

Historically, the Kipsigis practice a patriarchal system of governance, based on which roles and responsibilities among men and women, are distributed, Von Bulow (1992). Women's roles and responsibilities are culturally limited to home-based duties like looking after children, the elderly, the home, milking the cows, and tending small kitchen gardens, where they plant vegetables in a small scale, Musila (2018). However, similar to Chukumwa's reflection and views on African women, the role of Kipsigis women, like in other parts of Kenya and Africa, have been experiencing changes due to the women increasingly getting enlightened because of education, and increasingly engaging in works outside the home and the community.

The proposed study will research the Kipsigis women's cultural roles in the home and in the society, identifying the various group entrepreneurial activities that women undertake, and the potential effects this has on the family, and the society. The study will reflect on various studies that have explored women's economic collaboration. For instance, Sorensen (1992) observed that female collaboration provides opportunities to support each other financially, while at the same time boosting spending power and ability to cater for basics and other needs in their homes. It is on this strength that the research on Kipsigis women, seeks to explore the Kipsigis women's contribution to household income and well-being, in the light of changing socio-economic roles. On the other hand, understanding the motivations and hurdles to engaging in such activities, is also vital to understanding the current and future trends in women's engagement in socio-economic activities. For instance, Gibbs and Hendricks (2004) pointed to the vulnerability attitude instilled in black women in the United States, and its links to fear of taking risks in business and accessing

information due to the influence of patriarchal societies.

Other challenges faced by women, and identified by Fieldman (1983), who observed rural women in Kenya, noted that they are often burdened by heavy workloads. This is in terms of attending to domestic chores, as well as working as casual laborers. In addition, women are often hampered by lack of access to income obtained from the sale of cash crops grown by the household, even though they often contribute labor to the cultivation of such crops (Von Bulow, 1992). Women efforts were recognized and appreciated by the community in Kericho and Bomet. This can be an indicator of future entrepreneurs, starting group economic activities to cater for their needs and that of family and society, as a result of the appreciated efforts of women groups economic activities

### **Statement of the Problem**

Kipsigis women roles in the home involve specific duties that are undertaken as stated in the social strata of the society, where all members are allocated duties to perform in conformity with the dictates of society. As observed by Musila (2018), various studies observed that women roles and responsibilities, are culturally defined by a patriarchal system, and are often limited to home-based duties, with limited roles in decision making and economic pursuit, Musila (2018). In this regard, Kipsigis women socio-economic activities and the effects on family and society come as a result of a number of factors impacting on women well-being, like change in family structure, increase in financial demands, access to education opportunities, and women advocacy programs that are increasingly advocating for women empowerment. Despite the conformity to the cultural roles that were mandatory to be carried out, Kipsigis women devised means and ways of survival like forming women groups, where their core mandate is the socio-economic activities. With all the changes and pressures experienced, this affected Kipsigis women in terms of their traditional roles and the formation of group socio-economic activities which became a form of emancipation from their traditional roles to socio-economic activities where economic enhancement is expected. It necessitated the Kipsigis women to think of means and ways of keeping up with the changing times and its demands. Involvement in group economic activities became a way of empowering themselves, and the group socio-economic activities becomes an addition to the already established roles in the homes. By undertaking this, the potential to affect the family can be both ways, positively or negatively. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of women activities in the home and in groups, forms the core of the study, in finding out the effects these has on the family and the society. In addition, the study will enhance the relevance of women financial empowerment and the social aspect derived from their group meetings, and seek to understand the various arguments on the potential and actual economic contribution of women, in the light of changes in the family and society.

### **Study Objective**

This study sought to determine the effects of women engaging in socio-economic activities.

### **Research Question**

What socio-economic benefits do the Kipsigis women get by engaging in group socio-economic activities?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Cultures and communities across Africa and the world, have continually changed and adapted due to various push and pull factors. Different authors have studied and made arguments about changes among the Kipsigis community that have occurred over time. For instance, Ronoh (2000), studied the historical changes of the Kipsigis community from 1895 to 1963, utilising and analysing changes in the community's way of life over time. Ronoh (2000) utilised a combination of structural functionalism, and the historical materialist conception of colonialism, as the theoretical frameworks to analyse the precolonial and colonial periods respectively, focusing on the transition from traditional to formal education, and its impact on the community. Omwoyo (2016) on the other hand, undertook a historical inquiry of agricultural changes among the Kipsigis, utilising the dependency and under development theory, to analyse the impact of the colonial era to the way the fundamental practice of agriculture changed the gender and labour destitution dynamics among the Kipsigis. Such historical studies are useful in providing context and understanding of the patriarchal system of governance and the various socio-economic activities practised by the Kipsigis community, in order to better understand the specific gender relations and distribution of roles, which is relevant to the current study.

Other authors delved specifically on Kipsigis women for instance Koskei (2018), who used feminist critical discourse analysis, to explore and present the stereotypical construction of gender roles among the Kipsigis as captured in secular songs. The study found that female composers mainly advocated for gender subversion and women empowerment, while songs by male composers advocated for female subordination. These songs depicted women as inferior and the men as superior, which influenced the social construction of gender roles in the Kipsigis society as captured through the feminist critical discourse theory. Koskei's study will be compared against Wambura's (2018) study, which analyses the difference in gender roles among the Kuria community. This study observed that whereas men were depicted as active outside the home environment and owning properties of great value, women were portrayed as active indoors, concentrating on beauty, adornment and owning properties of less value. His study was guided by the critical (interpretive) discourse analysis, to review various discourses, including political and media discourses to analyze issues of inequality, oppression and injustice. On the other hand, Koskei (2018) the stereotypical portrayal of women in secular music among Kipsigis of Chepalungu sub-county of Bomet county, borders on gender inequality and the demeaning messages about women conveyed in the songs. In light of this, the writer advocated for the need of the artists to collaborate and compose songs that promote gender equality in the society. Chepng'eno (2020) in her examination of portrayal of women in Kipsigis secular songs, and the stereotypical messages passed for public consumption, tends to push women to the periphery in the society as they are considered not able to produce anything of value from them.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research study took a qualitative research approach, useful in describing and clarifying human experience. The qualitative approach and its tools were used to answer the question on the effects of Kipsigis women engaging in socio-economic activities and its effect on family and society. To realize this, different qualitative research methods were used to investigate the social aspect, and the aspirations of the women and their community activities in their own environment, while

reflecting on other writers' perspectives on the same. To capture the aspirations of the women in as far as their economic activities are concerned, and the welfare of their homes, qualitative research methodology and ethnographic research design was used, and due process followed to realize the same intentions. The population of registered social groups in the two counties were over 2,300 in number and only those aged between aged between 20-70 years were considered for as participants in data collection.

The sample comprised of fifty study participants who were used to provide information through data collection from the different groups. The study utilized the simple random sampling technique which is also known as probability sampling. This is a method that allows for the randomization of sample selection. A small group is selected from a larger group and each member has equal chance of being selected.

## FINDINGS

**Table 1: Women Socio-Economic Activities and Community Gains in Kericho County From Face To Face Interviews**

Activity	Participants	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Knowledge gain	42	84.0	84.0	84.0
Members get recognized	8	16.0	16.0	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The study sought to understand the gains that the community has had as a result of the women socio-economic activities that are undertaken in the various groups in Kericho County. The results indicate that 84% of the respondents felt that they have gained knowledge about the need to be involved in women groups while 16% felt that by being part of a women's groups and taking part in socio-economic activities, they will be able to get recognition as shown in Table 1.

**Table 2: Women Socio-Economic Activities and Community Gains in Bomet County from Face to Face Interviews**

Activity	Participants	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Empowerment	34	68.0	68.0	68.0
Behavior changes	7	14.0	14.0	82.0
Skills/knowledge	9	18.0	18.0	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The study also sought to understand the gains that the community has had as a result of the economic activities that are undertaken in the various groups in Bomet County. The results show that 68% thought that one of the gains for the community would be that of empowerment being enhanced, 18 % agreed on the skills and knowledge gain by the community as a result of women involvement in group socio-economic activities, and 14% thought that one of the other gains would be that of behavior change in the people as shown in Table 2.

**Table 3: Community/Residents Opinion on Women Economic Activities – Kericho**

Activity	Participants	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Improve unity and living standards	27	54.0	54.0	54.0
Improve ability of the group	23	46.0	46.0	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The study also sought to get the opinions of residents on women's socio-economic activities and the results from Kericho County indicates that 54% believed that improved living standards would be realized in the community, while 46% believed that the women groups would be strengthened and improved abilities in the women as shown in Table 3.

**Table 4: Community/Residents Opinion on Women Economic Activities – Bomet**

Activity	Participants	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Well embraced and supported	26	52.0	52.0	52.0
Responsible and hardworking	12	24.0	24.0	76.0
Not well supported	12	24.0	24.0	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The study also sought to get the opinions of residents on women's socio-economic activities and the results from Bomet County indicates that 52% have embraced and supported women's group activities, 24% see such group activities as making the women responsible and hardworking while another 24% feel that the women are not well supported in their group economic activities as shown in Table 4.





*Figure 1: Illustration of the Ability of Women to Engage in Individual Economic Activities*

The study also sought to show how a participant has been able to use financial resources gained from women group activities such as merry-go-rounds that women use to empower themselves and provide for their families. Plate 1 shows how one of the women has been able to open a green grocer stall that sells small scale produce.



**Table 5: Focus Group Results on the Effect of Socio-Economic Activities on the Home and Family – Kericho County**

Activity	Participants	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Yes, there is positive effect on home and family	48	96.0	96.0	96.0
No effect	2	4.0	4.0	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The study also sought to find out the effect of women engaging in socio-economic activities on the home and family. The results from women in Kericho County show that 96% indicated that there was a positive effect on family and society as stated in the research outcome, 4% said there was no effect as shown in Table 5.

**Table 6: Women Socio-Economic Effect on the Home and Family – Bomet County**

Activity	Participants	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Yes, there is positive effect on home and family	49	98.0	98.0	98.0
No effect	1	2.0	2.0	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The study also sought to find out the effect of women engaging in socio-economic activities on the home and family. The results from Bomet County showed that 98% of participants agreed that the women involvement in economic activities had a positive effect on family and society. Two percent were of the feeling that there was no effect on the home and family, as shown in Table 6.

**Table 7: Community Mindset Change in Support of Women in their Socio-Economic Activities – Kericho**

Activity	Participants	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Yes	50	100.0	100.0	100.0
No	0	0.0	0.0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The study also sought to find out whether women involvement in economic activities will change the mindset of the community with the view of supporting the women in their endeavor. One hundred percent of the respondents from Kericho County showed a mindset change as a result of women socioeconomic activities in the community. No one was of a different view as shown in Table 7.

**Table 8: Community Mindset Change in Support of Women in their Socio-Economic Activities – Bomet**

Activity	Participants	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Yes	46	92.0	92.0	92.0
No	4	8.0	8.0	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The study sought to find out whether women involvement in economic activities will change the mindset of the community with the view of supporting the women in their endeavor. Ninety-two (92%) indicated that there would be a mindset change while 8% said there would be no change in mindset as shown in Table 8.

**Table 9: Questionnaire Responses on the Significance of Women Economic Contributions to the Community – Kericho County**

Activity	Participants	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Yes	50	100.0	100.0	100.0
No	0	0.0	0.0	
Sometimes	0	0.0	0.0	
Never	0	0.0	0.0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The study also sought to find out whether there was any significance of women's economic contributions to the community and results from Kericho showed that 100% agreed that women contribution is significant. None of the participants indicated on the contrary i.e. no. sometimes or never when it comes to recognizing the significance of women economic contributions to the community in Kericho County as shown in Table 9.

**Table 10: Questionnaire Responses on the Significance of Women Economic Contributions to the Community – Bomet County**

Activity	Participants	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Yes	38	76.0	76.0	76.0
No	3	6.0	6.0	82.0
Sometimes	9	18.0	18.0	100.0
Never	0	0	0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The study also sought to find out whether there was any significance of women's economic contributions to the community and results from Bomet showed that 76% agreed that women contribution to the community was significant, 18% were of the opinion that their contribution was sometimes significant, while 6% saw no significance of their contribution. There were no participants who thought there would never be any significance as shown in Table 10.

**Table 11: Questionnaire Responses on how Kipsigis Women have benefited from Engaging in Socio-Economic Activities – Kericho County**

Activity	Participants	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Completely Disagree	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Disagree	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Neutral	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Agree	29	58.0	58.0	58.0
Completely Agree	21	42.0	42.0	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The study also sought to find out whether Kipsigis women have benefited from engaging in socio-economic activities and results from Kericho County indicated that 58% agreed that women had benefited, and 42% of participants completely agreed that women have benefited from the economic activities they had been undertaking. There were no participants who indicated that they completely disagreed, disagreed or were neutral in claiming that women had benefited from engaging in socio-economic activities as shown in Table 11.

**Table 12: Questionnaire Responses on how Kipsigis Women have benefited from Engaging in Socio-Economic Activities – Bomet County**

Activity	Participants	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Completely	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Disagree	5	10.0	10.0	10.0
Disagree	3	6.0	6.0	16.0
Neutral	21	42.0	42.0	58.0
Agree	21	42.0	42.0	100.0
Completely Agree				
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The study also sought to find out whether Kipsigis women have benefited from engaging in socio-economic activities and results from Bomet County showed that 42 % completely agreed of the benefits to the women, another 42% agreed, 6% were neutral and 10% disagreed that Kipsigis women had benefited from engaging in business activities. Bomet County had no participant who completely disagreed on the same as shown in Table 12.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusions

As Muthami (2017) stated, women in socio-economic developments, aids the stabilization of families in terms of financial provision that brings harmony in the families, as violence due to lack of finances is reduced. In the same breath, the efforts of Kipsigis women in Kericho and Bomet to bring financial change in their respective families, resonates well with the public, and hence positive support of women involvement in economic activities like farming and business among others. In a wider scope, Tinker and Zuckerman (2014) noted that, socio-economic transitions have been altering family structure and drawing greater attention to gender relationships. This was in consideration that women were invisible in earlier economic developments, which was influenced

by a prevailing developed world-class, view. Due to the limited research on women's lives in developing countries, this contributed to the false idea that women did not work. So, the positive outcome of the socio-economic activities by the women in Kericho and Bomet as seen in the results of section five of this study, attest to the fact that women work hard for the betterment of the family, society, and the country.

The outcome of the most significant changes resulting from income gained by women engaged in group socio-economic activities, was noted in the positive results attained in the research. As qualitative research is interpretive, the outcome of the results was indicative of the responses gained from the participants to the questions on women socio-economic activities in Kericho and Bomet counties, where these women groups were domiciled. Different themes were addressed that touched on women and the public. These ranged from: what the community had so far gained from the women economic groups; opinion of residents on what they thought of women performance in their groups; effects these activities had on the family and society; community mindset on women economic activities; significance of women economic contributions to the community; and Kipsigis women benefitting from the project undertaken. The community mindset to support the women from both areas of research, indicated a high level of support for women group economic activities. The same goes for the significance of women economic contribution to the community which showed the commitment women had made in their respective economic groups, thus convincing the public that women were an asset to them, and merited their total support.

### **Recommendations**

There is an acknowledgement among the Kericho participants that the community stood to gain from the women group economic activities, that they involved themselves in. The indication was that most of the participants were of the opinion that knowledge was gained as a result of women involvement in group socio-economic activities, while others thought of being recognized as important people. In the same breath, results from Bomet on empowerment, and skills that women got as a result of engaging in group economic activities was quite high. Others thought of behavior change, as a result of the women involving themselves in social economic groups. Women empowerment was also very important and should be supported for it to thrive and be strong. The other qualities indicated by other participants showed that women efforts were recognized and appreciated by the community in Kericho and Bomet. This can be an indicator of future entrepreneurs, starting group economic activities to cater for their needs and that of family and society, as a result of the appreciated efforts of women groups economic activities.

Community and public opinion on women economic activities showed that, living standards would change in most homes, women groups would be strengthened further, women would be more responsible and hardworking because of the exposure, and their abilities will be enhanced even more, as indicated in the results. So, exposure is a contributor to the women performance in their economic groups. A very small percentage of participants believed that women were not well supported in their activities, and in that way, cannot make any headways in their new undertaking of socio-economic activities.

The researcher used pictorials to illustrate the women efforts, despite the hard work they do in their respective homes. Under the observation tool was a pictorial showing a lady selling



vegetables and fruits in a small kiosk. From seeing the pictures and what women go through to attain self-sufficiency economically, this can be an example to emulate.

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