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**WORKING PAPER**

**Gender Dynamics and Water Conflicts in Community Boreholes in Turkana County**

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**Abstract**

Drilling of bore holes by NGOs and County Government has become the main method of ensuring access and sustainable water in Turkana County. This study aimed at illuminating the gender dynamics and water conflicts around communal bore holes in the County. The study specifically examined some of the gender dynamics that impact women, identified stakeholders and their role in provision and consumption of water, assessed the causes of conflicts around the bore holes and explored the strategies that have been put in place to mitigate these water conflicts. The study was exploratory in nature with FGDs, KIIs and Observation Guides being the main instruments of data collection. The study focused on Turkana Central and had a sample size of 200 respondents who included among them national and county government officials, women leaders, girls and boys. The study found out that patriarchy played out to restrict women from fetching water before animals having their fill. Women were represented in Bore hole and Water User Committees but they did not participate in decision making regarding drilling, renovating, managing, access and control of the same. The study recommended the need for gender mainstreaming in water provision to allow for access and sustainable water in Turkana County.

**Key Words:** Gender, Gender mainstreaming, water conflicts, Communal, Sustainable

**Introduction**

Gender dynamics incorporates the inclusion and marginalization that is the process through which various groups are exempted from access to control through participation on resource use in a dominant culture (Avery, 2012). The inequality in the control of resources is dictated by power structure in a society. In most African societies the balance in access and control between women and men is not fair. Women marginalization gets to increase as they gain more tasks through life events including marriage and child birth, while their physical capacity to handle increasing demands declines (Amutabi, 2009). Gender marginalization is contributed by traditional masculine, unemployment, feminine, poverty, class, age and ethnicity.

Turkana County is one of the fourteen of Semi-Arid counties in Kenya where women suffer most in the aspect of marginalization when accessing water points and boreholes, leading to unending conflicts associated to water. The rights of women in Turkana County are violated by

the male child preference syndrome, alongside sexual harassment, domestic violence, and denial of rights to inheritance, free movement, education, employment and politics. Additionally, poor women maintain their economic status as passive citizens, without an understanding of democracy considering that women are the key factors in primary process of socialization Gulliver (2000).

### **Research questions**

1. How does patriarchy negatively affect bore hole water sharing within Turkana County?
2. What are the challenges facing women and children on access to water in Turkana County?
3. What strategies should be employed to bring to enhance gender inclusivity among the pastoralist communities in Turkana County?
4. What policies both at county and national level that have been put in place to support pastoralism in Turkana County?

### **Justification of the study**

In most African societies, community level participation often leaves unacknowledged women voices and concerns. This explains why women are still absent from water related decision making process at all levels in Turkana County. With community expectations that the role of women should just be the mere fetching of water for households, Kaveri (2008) notes that women participation in community based decision making remain a complex and difficult goal to achieve in Turkana County. This is especially in the context of a community with high unequal gender and class relations. This study in Turkana County revealed the need for a careful and thoughtful planning process in relation to gender in the designing of participatory water point access. It was observed in the study that even when women attend boreholes related meetings or any other event they don't get to be free to voice their needs, opinions and concerns because may not be taken seriously.

### **Methodology**

The study utilized an exploratory research design which allowed for the use of mixed methods approach. The study used both qualitative and quantitative method of data collection as it was necessary to identify the different gender groups, men, women, boys and girls. The data collection tools included questionnaires, Observation guides, In-depth Interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) as stipulated by Tromp (2006). The study targeted all the residents of Turkana County with a specific focus on those within the Turkana Central. The sample size for the study was 250 respondents.

### **Theoretical Framework**

A review into the situation in Turkana County brings on board a number of relevant theories of concern highlighting on the different stakeholders. The theory on gender inequality recognizes women's location, experience and social situations that are not only different but also unequal to the ones for men. Liberal feminists content that women have the same capacity as to that of men, moral reasoning and ageing, although patriarchy, especially the sexist patterning of the division of labour, historically has denied women the opportunity to express their reasoning and practice it. Women have been secluded to the private household spheres hence, left without the public sphere voice. In situations where women enter public sphere they still take care of

household duties making liberal feminist to point out that marriage is a gender inequality site and where women do not benefit as men do. More than half of the women interviewed in Turkana County indicated that married women have higher levels of stress as opposed to the unmarried women and married men. The stress was based on the sexual division of labor in public and private spheres that need to be altered in order for women to achieve equality.

Those issues that often times touch on gender face complex dynamics that can be stratified. Gever, (1990) said that stratification is the institutionalized inequalities in terms of wealth, power and status between categories of individuals within a social system of; castes, classes and ethnic groups. The Turkana community is not exempted to this since all human societies are known to exhibit inequalities that are institutionalized based on age, gender among others. In Turkana County the stratification has enhance inequality especially in bore hole water access, control and management where women are the most disadvantaged.

### **Findings and discussions**

The study established that water is one of the strategic resources in Turkana County and therefore the center of tensions. The the sources of water in Turkana county include Turkwel river, Lake Turkana, River Kerio, wells, dams, water pans and boreholes which are not sufficient for the supply of the water in Turkana central. This according to the study has caused incessant conflicts over borehole water use in pitying the Turkana against other groups, men against women and youth against adults. According to the study findings, and to (Davies, 2007), Turkana experiences gender tensions over water, and these conflicts have resulted to deaths and serious injuries on humans and livestock. The study found out that at the center of these conflicts are women and children against herders mostly men for contestation for water for domestic use.

The tasks assigned to the Turkana women are very complicated, they build the Manyatta, fetch firewood for domestic use and deterrence of wild animals, and they fetch water and provide food to the family. These duties affect water provision and bring about violence in the family and community at large. Despite great efforts by women as Baumann (2000) observes they suffer challenges in ensuring domestic water storage. This encourages domestic violence when they cannot avail this important resource. One of the respondents in the FGD explained;

The biggest conflict at the domestic level is that in the event that there is no water in the surrounding environment, the men confiscate water from home which they give to the shots and the calves. We are now left in problem because even if the water is finished, we have to provide food to our husbands and children who do not care where we get this water from. I wish these people who are building bore holes can make some specific ones for domestic use. In that manner I don't think we shall meet with our men on this important resource (KI, A).

Martinson (2010) elaborates on the above by indicating that Turkana women just like any typical traditional women especially those in poor localities are expected to assume primary responsibility for their households' subsistence yet they often do not earn a wage. They are frequently excluded from the decision on spending and children's education. For example in Zimbabwe Africa culture dictate that upon marriage, a woman moves to the husband home and become answerable to him and his community, any wealth she generates usually goes under the husband's name. This is a similar situation that is evident in Turkana County where the woman is seen to belong to the entire community. In an FGD, one of the respondents had this to say;

With natives of Turkana County, it is evident that women, who earn a wage, earn less than men, exposing them to vulnerability due to changes in working environment caused by external phenomenon including climate change. Such changes have brought about scarcities such as food, pasture and water and this has complicated the access to bore hole water yet they are not able to buy the same commodity elsewhere. The bore hole politics in this area are so complicated that sometimes the residents themselves prefer to block them so as to reduce the same. This explains how gender and inequality limits effectiveness mitigation strategies, to address boreholes access (KI, B).

The study indicated that the expectation was that girls had to help their mothers in household task alongside caring for younger siblings meaning that they are more likely to be excluded from educational opportunities than boys. As Hamasi (2016) writes culturally, women and men have a differential access to social, physical goods and resources hence setting presidency on key dimensions of gender inequality. What this means according to the study is that social positioning influences the roles that are expected to support and reproduce centered ideologies around the homes and local community instead of the public sphere. Although this does not mean that women do not play important roles in boreholes management or other activities crucial to sustainable livelihoods to the national economies but the roles they play are umbrella in nature, less visible and attract less recognition from the public on the work they engaged in.

According to the study drilling of boreholes to address water conflicts in Turkana county, has brought about social stratification a process that reveals a systematic denial of entitlement to services and resources to the denial of the right to participate on equal terms in social relationships in social, economic, cultural and political arenas. It occurs at various levels surrounding cities, households, villages and the globe (Kabeer, N 2000). Social stratification divides population into layers that are relatively homogenous with differences in restrictions, privileges, rewards and obligations. This according to the study is what has brought about the presence of social groups that are ranked one above the other usually in terms of amount of prestige, power, rewards and wealth that is possessed by members in Turkana central. The government officials in Turkana County for example belong to a given strata and tend to share a common identity, lifestyles, privileges which include enjoying the use of water from river Turkwel among others.

From an interview with a number of women in Turkana, the study revealed that the access to new technology information and training related to boreholes management remains highly gendered, with most of related initiatives targeting men. On this, Gulliver (2000) notes that despite numerous efforts by government and non-governmental organizations to gender mainstream this effort in particular has difficulty in the resource access, control and management arenas with, and often erroneous expectations that men will convey information to their women. Wadsworth (2010) notes that there is need use different forums such as markets, churches, women groups, organizations and networks in order to increase access to knowledge, information and technologies by women.

The study findings revealed that in Turkana County, community participation in water resources, water points and more specifically boreholes management often favored local elites especially men. However there were also cases when elite women were equally favoured which was an

indication that the conflict over water from the bore holes was for the poor traditional Turkana women. Despite attempts to mainstream gender at international and national levels few women participation in gender issues is rarely central in policy initiatives. Men tend to dominate the activities on decision making process and policy criteria of boreholes access and control. Women are limited in participation in decision making process at international and local level, and as a matter of fact these restrict their capacity to engage in decision making thus impacting their specific needs and vulnerability.

### **Conclusions**

The study concluded that in Turkana central borehole access, control and management was controlled by men making it very difficult for women to get water for domestic use. The reason here was that women were underrepresented at both the county and community level where decisions affecting boreholes services were made. The study concluded that although both county and national government had attempted to drill bore holes, Turkana central still suffered lack of enough Boreholes and as a result the surface water dried quickly as there is lack of adequate storage for run-off water.

According to the study men dominate decision making on water management and manipulated the programme and timetabling to favor livestock more than domestic use and this was a big challenge to women and children. The findings further indicated that the construction of bore holes is not strategic for both gender but skewed against women and inclined in favor of men and livestock consumption. Due to the fact that livestock use more water than for domestic use this there was a lot of tension between men and women because in the event that water dried out, men would rather livestock get water than for domestic use

The study concluded that the distribution of water was uneven because Lodwar is favored compared to other neighboring towns. This was because the study found out that much of the Turkwel water served government officials rather than regular people while majority of the boreholes had fossil water and thus people suffered ill health after using it. The study further concluded that there was gender imbalance in the distribution, access and use of water where men's needs were privileged against women's.

### **Recommendations**

The study recommended the need for sensitization on gender needs in sharing strategic resources such as water in Turkana County. There is need for gender balance dialogue on construction, management, distribution and use of water infrastructure in Turkana County. According to the study, more investment is needed in water supply to eradicate the current water tensions. There is need for investment in water processing in order to minimize health risks from water borne diseases such as typhoid, dysentery and cholera. The study was of the view that women should be engaged in policy making regarding bore hole water sharing within the Turkana county

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