



**PREFERRED CHANNELS OF INFORMATION FOR EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN FISH TRADERS IN SIAYA COUNTY,
KENYA**

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigated the preferred channels of information for empowerment of women fish traders in Siaya County, Kenya. Globally, there is a renewed trend towards the promotion of women's empowerment for the realization of sustainable development. In that regard, agencies and practitioners are using diverse means for empowering women in order to improve their living standards. One of the barriers to achieving women's empowerment is the already acknowledged information gap across the genders. Women remain information starved, as they often lag in accessing Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Women empowerment remains the most effective development tool. Empowered women traders in particular are able to conduct economic bargaining and make informed decisions. Access to relevant and timely information, however, remains critical. Over the years, women traders in the fisheries sector in many countries worldwide have faced marginalization and isolation in accessing and controlling the fisheries resources. For instance, they have difficulties in accessing credit, relevant information and technology such as fishing gear. They are mostly involved in the indirect, informal and unpaid fishing activities, which are seen as extra household jobs while men control the direct, formal and paid fishing activities.

Key Words: Empowerment; ICTs; women traders; information; informal; capacity building

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INTRODUCTION

The concept and term 'empower' has become a buzzword in all organizations and likewise, all households. Development stakeholders; therefore, view empowerment as the solution to most socio-economic problems. Most development practitioners are no longer discussing infrastructure, theories and resources, especially financial resource; they seek to empower groups in development. World Bank (2014) noted that women empowerment remains the most effective development tool. Empowered women traders in particular can conduct economic bargaining and make informed decisions. Xavier, Manel, Pere & Jaume (2017) also agree that empowerment is a commonly used term in development; he says, 'Since its emergence in the field of social sciences, the concept of empowerment has slowly become much more widely used by a number of scientific and professional groups. One could consider it a versatile term, as people and groups nowadays use it in areas of everyday life. As a concept, 'empowerment' is, however, complex, ambiguous and lacking any clear boundaries, for we can apply it to different situations and processes in numerous ways. While it has been mainly used to refer to adults, over the past two decades, it has begun to be applied to the youth, particularly to those who, for a number of reasons, can be considered to be vulnerable or at risk.'

Empowerment is commonly used to change the lives of the vulnerable groups of people in the society, for example orphans, youth, widows and women, generally with the aim of giving them control over their lives. In his unpublished MBA thesis, Owenga (2013) defines empowerment as, ...the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives. Poverty being multidimensional, poor people need a range of assets and capabilities at the individual level such as health, education, and housing and at the collective level, the ability to

organize and mobilize to take collective action to solve their problems.

The emphasis is on expansion of capabilities, enhancement of their control over resources and the ability to act collectively in solving their problems. While applying the same to women traders, empowering them mean that they receive control and the capacity to act to change their circumstances. Empowerment has been explained as a multi-dimensional social process, as its purpose is to help people to radically gain control over their lives by changing the way that they feel, think about themselves and their problems. In the process of empowerment, the peoples' lives foster self-confidence. Hence, they gain control over their lives and the circumstances troubling their communities and society since empowered people are able to act on the personal and social issues that they regard as a priority or as urgent.

The term empowerment has an elongated history; it is now over three decades old. According to Xavier et al. (2017), people started using it in the 1970s. In particular, they popularized women's empowerment in the 1980s and 1990s as a radical method of seeking to transform power relations, particularly women's vulnerability. According to this definition, the issue with the concept of empowerment is about power, mainly the way that the people with power relate to those without power. The success of empowerment hinges on two possibilities; on one hand, empowerment necessitates power change. That is to say, power relations must change; if there is no possibility of change then realistically, empowerment is absent.

There is a renewed global push towards promoting women's empowerment using diverse means for sustainable development. One of the barriers to achieving women's empowerment is the already acknowledged information gap across the genders. Women remain information starved, as they often lag

in accessing Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). World Bank (2014) women empowerment remains the most effective development tool. Empowered women traders in particular are able to conduct economic bargaining and make informed decisions. Access to relevant and timely information, however, remains critical.

Over the years, women traders in the fisheries sector in many countries worldwide have faced marginalization and isolation in accessing and controlling fisheries resources. For instance, they have difficulties in accessing credit, relevant information and technology such as fishing gear, as they are mostly involved in the indirect and informal, if not unpaid fishing activities, which are seen extra household jobs, whereas men control the direct, formal and paid fishing activities.

Further, the women are often excluded from the decision-making processes due to traditional gender roles and activities. Yet, Harper, Grubb, Stiles & Sumaila (2017) argued, women comprise 47% of the global fisheries workforce. In some areas, they contribute 25 to 50% of the small-scale fisheries catch. Hence, the scholars argued, research, management and policy in this sector tend to focus on male-dominated activities since the stakeholders overlook or undervalue the women's contribution. This compromises the outcomes of valuable efforts to rebuild fisheries and improve livelihoods and well-being of fishing communities.

Lwenya, Lwenya, Abila & Omwega (2018) argued that in order to change the narrative, women need economic and social empowerment for effective participation. In their study of gender dimensions, Harper et al. (2017) found that men in the countries comprising 14% of the global catch and 8% of the global landed value control fishing, as communities culturally and socially viewed it as a male job. Women; therefore, stuck in the pre and post-harvest

activities. In addition, fishing organisations tend to exclude women from their councils. Yet, gender-friendly frameworks and organisations existed to enhance gender equality and women's participation in the sector. Only Senegal recorded 5% female leadership in her decision-making organs. South Africa boasted more women's participation in fisheries management and decision-making but, was unclear about their level of involvement and influence.

Harper et al. (2017) conducted the studies in Mexico, Peru, Senegal, South Africa and Vietnam, whose marine fisheries back the national and household food and income security. For instance, Vietnam has 4.7 million people in the fisheries sector; 825,000 are women and they form 80 to 85% of the seafood processors. About 40,000 of them are involved in direct marine capture fisheries and 784,000 are in the post-harvest sector. In Mexico, 7%, approximately 10,500 females are fish processors and traders. They provide 50% to 65% of the seafood industry labour. In Peru, slightly over 3% or 1,350 artisanal anglers are women and another 2,050 are artisanal vessel owners. They also hold 75,600 of the 232,400 marine capture fisheries-related jobs. Interestingly, they avoid joining the trade unions to keep their jobs.

According to Harper et al. (2017), in Senegal, 90% of women, approximately 36,000, are seafood processors. An estimated 1,350 directly catch shellfish for subsistence and/or artisanal purposes. They annually contribute an estimated 10,000 metric tonnes (8%) to the national shellfish catch, which was valued at USD 30.5 million in 2015. At a recent workshop, they formed over 80% of the attendees. Finally, in South Africa, Harper et al. (2017) found, both men and women are involved in various direct and indirect fishing activities. Women, however, comprise 32% of the processing factory workers and small-scale anglers.

Together (Langord, Sumner & Yamin, 2013; Hossain & Islam, 2012; Sterling, 2008) called for studies of women's socioeconomic and demographic statuses for effective empowerment rather than an assumption that women are homogeneous. Musubika (2008) in the Middle East and Sub Saharan Africa (SSA), rural women remain small-scale farmers and traders due to lack of access to information, economic assets such as land and credit services. GIZ (2013) globally, women form most of the almost 70% of the poor rural dwellers.

Empowerment is about access to information and women have various channels of information available to them. Collectively, (Somulu, 2013; Katz, 2012) found that radio is the preferred channel of information for social, economic and political issues, as it is readily available to almost all households. Somulu (2013) in Nigeria, women's uptake to more popular ICTs such as the Internet, mobile phones and Television (TV) is low, particularly in the rural areas.

The Problem

Women's poverty remains distinctively high; therefore, empowerment is necessary to change the status quo. Network News (2014) found that in SSA, more girls are quitting school to take up gender roles.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1: Ages of the fish traders

Age (Years)	Frequency	Per cent (%)
18 – 35	27	42.18
36 & above	37	57.82
Total	64	100

Source: Author, 2018

According to Table 1, the respondents sampled ranged from 18 and over 36 years. 36 year olds and above were the majority (57.82%). In that category,

In that, scholars stated that women and girls, respectively, majorly form the world's adult and youth illiterate populations. They; therefore, do not benefit from the new technologies such as the Internet, computers and smart phones. Thus, radio seems to be the best option for them due to its simplicity in use. World Bank (2014) noted that the oral nature of radio makes it a popular ICT in rural areas in developing countries. Previously, development stakeholders excluded women traders in the establishment of their preferred channels in order to facilitate their empowerment. Hence, the gist of this study seeks to establish the preferred channel as source of information to enhance women's empowerment.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher used a standardized researcher-administered questionnaire with open-ended and closed-ended questions in order to collect as much data as possible. A research assistant read out the questions to the respondents and the researcher wrote the answers. A sample of 64 respondents was interviewed. All the data was analysed in the form of means, percentages, frequencies and standard deviations using MS Excel (2010). The data was presented thereafter as percentages and frequency tables.

most of them are mature people living responsibly in the society. Thus, channels must ensure that the information that they select and broadcast will be

useful; that is, have the potential to enhance one's ability to make decisions that will benefit the individual, family and community.

The study coded the respondents' marital status as married, single/separated and widowed then analysed these to establish their distribution. It presented the findings as shown.

Marital Status

Table 2: Marital Status

Marital status	Frequency	Per cent (%)
Single/Separated	5	7.82
Married	37	57.81
Widowed	22	34.37
Total	64	100

Source: Author, 2018

According to Table 2, the married women fish traders led the study population at 57.81%. The least respondents (7.82%) were the single/separated; 34.37% were widows. Hence, about 91% of the

respondents had families. The message appealing to them; therefore, must be in the context of family household heads and empowerment.

Table 3: Education of the fish traders

Level	Frequency	Per cent (%)
None	3	4.68
Primary	49	76.57
Secondary	12	18.75
Total	64	100

Source: Author, 2018

Table 3 showed that 76.57% of the respondents sampled attended primary school, which Kenya views as basic education. Only 18.75% of the respondents had secondary education. The least respondents

sampled, 4.68%, lacked formal education. Information that will boost their economic wellbeing; therefore, should be simple and practical and use simple technologies.

Table 4: Preferred channel used as a source of information

Channels of Information	Frequency	Per cent (%)
Internet	3	4.68
Radio	49	76.56
TV	10	15.63
Support groups	2	3.13
Total	64	100

Source: Author, 2018

According to Table 4, the women sampled knew various channels of information. The most popular and preferred channel for their empowerment, however, was the radio. 76.56% of the respondents admitted that they trusted it as a source of information, as it broadcasts information regularly, from a central place and constantly updates the information. Upon further probing, they indicated that Ramogi FM, a local commercial vernacular radio station in Bondo Sub County, is their favourite majorly since it broadcasts news about the community and its tribal leaders. Those that listed the TV followed at 15.63%. The least (3.13%) uncertainly named support groups due to the informal nature. The Internet users (4.68%) admitted that they used the Internet for research on do-it-yourself videos, international market trends and exchange rates.

CONCLUSION

Globally, women's poverty has persisted. To improve their participation and performance in all processes of development and sustainable poverty reduction, empowerment is critical. Women empowerment entirely depends on the access of correct, timely and relevant information, which answers their critical questions in development. Information is power in development; therefore, this study established that women traders viewed information as a good source

of empowerment. In the matter of ICTs and mass media to empower women traders in Bondo Sub County, the study discovered that they preferred radio. Ramogi FM, a local commercial radio station, emerged top due to its use of the vernacular in all its broadcasts. Thus, all development stakeholders in Bondo Sub County should consider collaborating with Ramogi FM to relay all available information pertinent to the fish trade. Vernacular radio stations have the capacity to reach all the categories of people: illiterate, semi-literate and the educated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Women's access to timely information is important to improving their participation and performance in development. All development actors in the county or central governments; therefore, must enhance women's access to information.

Vernacular radio should be positively viewed as a source of empowerment. Those who use them for propaganda deny the citizens a tool that they can use for their empowerment.

All development actors should collaborate with the local vernacular radio stations in order to promote sustainable development through the empowerment of women to improve their wellbeing, as well as increase their participation and performance.

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