

Motivation for Collective Action: a Case Study of western Kenya

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Collective action is often pursued as a strategy to access resources critical to the livelihoods of vulnerable families. In rural areas of developing countries constraints are present in daily household activities, as well as when coping with shock event like droughts, floods, or disease. Constraints exist in production, as well as in coping with shock events. This study addresses the motivations that drive participation in groups in rural Kenya. It specifically examines if men and women engage in collective action for different reasons, and whether they mobilize over different resources. In the case of groups externally initiated, it examines if ethnicity and gender stereotypes privilege particular groups over others. Finally, it examines why individuals do not participate.

The study was conducted in a Luo and a Kipsigis village in the western region of Kenya. The analysis is conducted as three levels: community, group and household/individual. Gender and age, ethnicity, and participation in groups were criteria for the design of case studies. Focus group discussions elicited information on which groups are available for people to join, who participates in the groups, how long these groups have been in existence, and the objectives of the groups. Household/individual case studies analyzed the process of participation. Finally, to compare participation in these villages, a random sample of 120 households was conducted. Household interviews provided specific detailed information pertaining to which households participated in groups, who within the household participated, what types of groups they participated in, reasons for joining the groups, benefits from participation, and who did not participate and why. Results indicate that men and women engage in collective action for different reasons and mobilize over different resources. Also, gender roles and ethnicity influenced the type of collective action to engage in. The non-participants included the vulnerable group very poor and sick.

Keywords: motivations, reasons, collective action, groups, participation, gender, ethnicity, Kenya.

1. INTRODUCTION

In many rural households collective action plays a critical role in enabling people to improve their livelihoods. There are many forms of collective action, and these have been vital in enabling people access to credit, micro financing, income, information, technology adoption (Knox et. al 2002; Valdivia and Gilles 2001), coping with illnesses, and in some cases increased agricultural production. Women have used collective action as a way of economic empowerment. In some instances, collective action has been used as insurance against risk (Place et. al 2002, Knox et. al 2002). In Kenya, many grassroots development projects encourage forming groups as key in providing critical areas of support. This paper focuses on group participation in western Kenya as well as examining the motivations why men and women join groups.

The paper will address collective action, gender, and externally versus internally organized groups. Two villages in western Kenya are the case studies, using data collected between January and March of 2005. Issues addressed include: Do women and men mobilize over different issues? How do gender roles influence women’s and men’s ability and willingness to engage in collective action? If collective action is externally initiated, do gender stereotypes privilege particular groups over others?

COLLECTIVE ACTION

Collective action has been defined by Marshall as “action taken by a group (either directly or on its behalf through an organization) in pursuit of members’ perceived shared interests” (1998). Therefore, collective action occurs when more than one individual willingly agrees to contribute to an effort in order to achieve an outcome (Sandler 1992:1, Ensminger 1992:30). Meinzen-Dick et al observe that most definitions of collective action include “involvement of a group of people with shared interest and common action” (2004:4). Collective action is well-recognized as a positive force for rural development in Africa. It plays a key role in accessing and management of natural resources as well as issues of property rights (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2002). In countries that are plagued by famine, and erratic rain fall collective action could act as a buffer against food shortages and pay a crucial role of smoothing consumption (Knox et al. 2002). Additionally, collective action allows the rural poor to gain control over assets they would otherwise not access individually thereby increasing their food security as well as reducing risk. (Knox et al. 2002; de Haan 2001). Groups empower individuals, as well as allow for easier access to markets that increase benefits from transactions result of their participation (Place et al. 2002). Cooperation allows individuals to better cope with risks and provides a safety net that most governments and/or the private sector do not (Place et al. 2002; de Haan 2001). Collective action heavily relies on the social capital existing in a community to accomplish goals and objectives. The social networks embedded in social capital help establish trust that enables people to work together (O’Brien et al. 2000; de Haan 2001). These social networks allow for flow of information and facilitate access to resources that would otherwise be difficult to achieve. Hence the social networks found within groups provide is vital in creating distribution channels that are fair and sustainable. Most people tend to trust information received from their peers and therefore the social networks are vital in creating relationships that would allow for interventions. When these networks are destroyed by factors such as diseases, the households are unable to tap into these social networks. When the social fabric is destroyed, information is lost, and the households are unable to access resources as their social capital weakens.

Since Kenya's independence from the British rule in 1963, grassroots self-help projects, -formal and informal groups- and associations have been formed, highlighting the country's motto “*Harambee - Tuvute Pamoja*”. This is translated as “Pulling Together”. The leaders acknowledged that desired growth would best be achieved through collective action. In her dissertation, de Haan observes that through the *Harambee* spirit people were able to “gain access to resources they would not have been able to get individually” (de Haan 1999:122). She continues to mention that money raised through the *Harambee* spirit helped create social capital (1999). Rural households engage in collective action on a daily basis in order to accomplish projects in their communities and to reach out to one another. It is not uncommon for a *Harambee* to be called to raise money for school fees or for medical bills. This concept of working together to take action has been in existence in Kenya, but it has not been studied extensively to determine who benefits, and how, and its impacts on the participants.

In a conceptual framework discussion, Anna Knox and others observe that collective action can enhance relationships between individuals and “may strengthen the bargaining power of disadvantaged community interest groups” (Knox et al. 2002). They continue to observe that this can be achieved through sharing of information and having common goals and objectives.

GENDER AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

Gender is an important facet of collective action for several reasons. Men and women engage in collective action over different issues, because their roles in rural households are different. Societal expectations often define men and women roles, in terms of what is feminine and what is masculine, defining individual's specific identities. For example, household chores are designated as feminine resulting in women working hard to ensure that their roles are performed. Additionally, women are also expected to offer care in the household. Thus, in case of sickness or prolonged illnesses such as HIV/AIDS, women and young girls are expected to care of the sick. Societal changes also modify these roles.

As households integrate to markets, and families cannot make a living solely from agriculture, migration of men result in women taking on tasks and activities formerly defined as masculine, like cash cropping for example. The concept of division of labor is fluid, and often women in vulnerable rural communities take on more tasks than men (Ellis 1993:171-180; Valdivia 2001). This division of labor is defined socially (not naturally). Knox et al. observe that in most African countries women perform bulk of the work. In some cases women may be required to “contribute labor to their husbands’ plots in order to gain access to plots for their own production” (Knox et al. 2002). Ownership of assets comes along with a powerbase that dictates labor relations and has led men to demand a greater share of women’s labor in Ghana (Quisumbing et al. 2001). Women’s control is threatened when changes lead to successful male dominated enterprises. Such is the case of the successful expansion of dairy, and decrease of sheep production in the Andes (Valdivia 2004). Place and Swallow (2002) observe that women’s rights over land are not uniform and they might have more rights over one plot than another. For instance, men are more associated with cash crops, thus women may not have rights to that piece of land.

Further, women are associated more with social reproduction, which ranges from childbearing, nurturing, and taking care of everyday material survival of the households. Additionally, women participate in productive activities such as cultivation of food crops for household consumption, keeping small ruminants, food processing, work for pay and related jobs (Ellis 1993:171-180; Valdivia and Gilles, 2001). Based on these reasons men and women are expected to mobilize over different issues, and to engage in collective action for purposes consistent with their roles.

EXTERNALLY VERSUS INTERNALLY INITIATED GROUPS PERFORMANCE

While gender is a factor that shapes collective action, so does culture. Smale and Ruttan in studying cultural impacts on collective action defined some groups as externally initiated while others as internally initiated. Externally initiated are those whose formation is influenced by an outside organization while internally initiated groups are formed by people on their own volition and without external influence. Some groups that are externally initiated sometimes tend to have better management, and in some cases finances are not a problem. Sometimes when the outside influence is not there, the incentive to participate diminishes. Externally initiated versus internally initiated was also studied by de Haan in Tanzania, while evaluating the role of social capital in pass-on goat groups (de Haan 2001). In comparing three forms of social capital she finds that the internally organized group, formed to specifically access new technologies, was effective in distribution because enforcement rules had been developed through past successful projects. On the other hand, groups externally initiated, based on good will, to benefit widows, were not successful. Finally, a group organized along kinship did not benefit the most vulnerable (de Haan 2001).

In comparing four groups externally initiated to pass on the Kenyan Dual Purpose goat in Kenya, a significant factor in success of the pass-on was sense of ownership of the project (Sykuta, Valdivia and N’gan’ga 1998). Notions of control and enforcement of rules were factors in success. Identity with the group, the sense of ownership in collective action, explained success of other forms of collective action in South America (Valdivia and Pichihua 1986).

Groups that are traditionally or culturally formed often can be externally influenced and tend to last longer, as the study in Burkina Faso by Smale and Ruttan (1994) showed. They identified groups in existence in the community for a long time. Although these groups were organized along cultural lines that were very successful, some of these groups can be “renovated” to become progressive. They propose that renovating these traditional organizations rather than replacing them with other institutions might increase the opportunities for technical changes and productivity that are long lasting. Smale and Ruttan (1994) continue to observe that these groups were formed for mutual assistance against famine and disasters, organized horizontally for bonding purposes. They also organized vertically as a “risk-pooling insurance mechanisms” (Smale and Ruttan 1994).

In some communities, culture plays a very important role in collective action. In many African rural societies, the ability to effect a “cohesive community and lessen exposure to risk” is deeply embedded in

cultural practices (Meinzen et al 2002). Smale and Ruttan posit that groups were successful because of the strong culture. Therefore, “cultural endowments may shape the propensity of communities to build or reform institutions that can serve as a vehicle” for effective collective action (Smale and Ruttan 1994). Knox et al (2002) found in many Africa rural societies, kinship and marital practices enable creation of cohesive societies and reduce the exposure to risk. The study in western Kenya clearly shows cultural differences among the Luo and the Kipsigis communities. The collective action is more clan-based in the Luo village while the Kipsigis form of collective action is based on neighborhoods or people with common shared interests.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions are central to this study: Do men and women participate in collective action for different reasons and do they mobilize over different issues? How do gender roles influence women’s and men’s ability and willingness to engage in collective action? If collective action is externally initiated, do gender stereotypes privilege particular groups over others? Finally, is ethnicity a factor in motivation among different groups? The answers to these questions will help determine whether the reasons men and women participate in collective action are largely dictated by gender roles within a household, and their relationship to ethnicity. In addition, the research will also focus on whether there is a disparity between the externally initiated versus the self initiated groups, and whether this influences the group’s performance. For this research, group participation is used as a measure of existence of collective action. Hence, for the purpose of this paper, collective action and group participation will be used interchangeably. The data were collected from two villages in western Kenya at the beginning of 2005.

Most rural household classify the responsibilities according to traditional gender roles regardless of the activities they perform (Ellis 1993). This research delved beyond the gender roles to discover what their actual roles were within the household. For example, a woman might say in the survey that she takes care of the household while in fact she is also the decision maker for crops to be planted, harvesting, and marketing of the crops. Consequently, we expect that socially determined roles within the household are expected to influence motives for group participation; and that internally initiated groups are expected to succeed because motives and ownership, foster participation and potentially enforceability of rules.

THE DATA AND METHODS

The data collected was part of a thesis research examining the indirect impacts of HIV/AIDS on agriculture by understanding the effect of long term illness on collective action, and this effect on agricultural production for rural households. Two ethnic groups were targeted. The villages in western Kenya consisted of Luo and the Kipsigis communities. Three different levels and approaches to data collection were used: eight community focus groups, eight in-depth household case studies of participation, and 120 household surveys to capture individual and household characteristics in group participation. Gender defined the selection of focus groups and semi-structured interviews, as men and women are concerned over different issues, separating the groups made it easier to articulate the issues. The focus group participants were identified through meetings with the communities where the purpose of the study was discussed. Gender and participation were the criteria used to organize the focus groups. The objective of focus group discussions was to elicit information on which groups are available for people to join, motivations for participation, who actually participates in the groups, and why people do not participate, how long these groups have been in existence, and the objectives of the groups. Household interviews, both survey and case studies, provided specific detailed information pertaining to which households participated in groups, who within the household participated, what types of groups they participated in, reasons for joining the groups, and how they benefited from participation.

Methods were both qualitative and quantitative. The first method included two approaches, a case study design that was multiple and embedded, to compare how people, individual members of a household, participated or did not participate in groups, in other words to focus on the processes. The second qualitative approach used with community and focus groups to map the variety of types of groups in the community

level, and the perceptions and experiences of men and women in the focus groups. The second, quantitative, focused on statistical and regression analysis (using SPSS) of household surveys recording individual and household participation, as well as their livelihood assets, A summary of methods, subjects, and purpose are presented in table 1 below:

Table 1 – Approach, Purpose, and Research Subject Group

Research Methods	Purpose	Subject
Qualitative - Community level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To identify the universe of groups in the village 	Two community meetings
Focus Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To determine process, and rules to access groups and/or why people do not participate in groups 	Two villages, one meeting in each
Multiple Embedded Case Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gather specific information on by types of households to understand how and when men and women participate or do not participate in groups. 	Eight in-depth case studies conducted.
Quantitative Case Processing Summaries Analysis (SPSS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis of reasons for joining groups 	120 Household surveys

Source: Researcher

QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY RESEARCH

The qualitative approach was used to determine the process by which households join and participate in groups. The questions posed were:

- Who participates?
- What types of groups do households join?
- What are the incentives to participate?
- Is collective action used as a coping mechanism?

The process followed to address these questions consisted of public meetings, key informants' discussions, and focus group meetings in the selected sites. The focus groups selected from the community meeting are listed in Table 2.

Table 2 – Focus Group Characteristics

Group Composition	Gender	Age Range	No. of participants	Status
Women's group	Female	30 – 63	10	Belong to an active group
Men's group	Male	38 – 68	11	Belong to an active group
Women's group	Female	23 – 72	7	Non-participants
Men's group	Male	19 – 55	7	Non-participants

Source: Focus Group discussions

The major objectives of the focus groups were to find out (a) incentives/reasons for participating, (b) reasons for not participating (c) what groups are in the villages. The four focus groups were organized by gender and group participation.

The questions addressed by the focus groups were:

- How many groups are in the village?
- How many are active?
- Who participates? Why do they participate?
- How have groups impacted the community?
- Has participation improved agricultural production?

This study examined motivations for participation in collective action based on gender to determine if this is a factor in the type of group they join; and whether ethnicity explains what motivates participation in groups. The results of focus group meetings and key informant interviews guided the case study research of individual households.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON LUO AND KIPSIGIS COMMUNITIES

In order to understand the environment within which collective action takes place, a brief description of the communities is provided. The two villages in this study are in close proximity to each other. These are village A, a Luo community, and village B, a Kipsigis community. This paper will refer to the areas of research as Luo and Kipsigis villages.

LUO COMMUNITY

The Luo are formerly a cattle-herding, pastoralist culture, they adopted fishing when they migrated south from the Sudan centuries ago (Dupre 1968). In Lake Victoria, mainly using long nets and lines, they draw in the tilapia and other species, including the Nile Perch, whose introduction into the lake in the mid-1960 has upset the lake's delicate ecosystem. As well as fishing, they are agriculturalists, raising subsistence and cash crops, particularly sugar. Today, much of their region, east of Lake Victoria, is the sugar belt of East Africa with mile after mile of succulent sugar cane (Dupre 1968).

According to oral tradition, each Luo family belonged to a clan, and each clan was made up of families who descended from one ancestor. They formed a lineage. Luo society is patrilineal, meaning that the inheritance of property, children, wives, and power comes from the male side, from father to son (Focus group). The smallest social unit is the family, which is made up of a man, his wife or wives, his sons and daughters, his sons' wives, and his grandchildren. The wealth of an individual plays a significant role in the size of a man's family, namely, the number of wives he has. If a man was known to be rich, his relatives would bring their children to stay with him. It should be noted that traditionally there were no mature, unmarried women or bachelors in Luoland. The Luo believed that everyone should marry, since full social standing and adulthood were only attained by those who were married.

KIPSIGIS COMMUNITY

The Kipsigis community belongs to the larger Kalenjin community located in Kericho District, in close proximity to the Luo village. The Kipsigis are a patrilineal agro-pastoral society. Long ago, the men were associated with cattle and women with cultivation of crops, child-care and household chores (Bulow 1991:6). In a study conducted by Bulow on transgressing gender boundaries of the Kipsigis women in Kenya, the author observes that "the gender division of labor was characterized by complementarity and reciprocity; women had status not only as mothers and wives but also as autonomous producers and heads of 'houses' guarding and managing house property" (Bulow 1991:7).

Collective action is not a new concept among the Kipsigis. In fact, they have practiced collective action since long before colonization. During the colonial period, "the Kipsigis settlement pattern was dispersed with adjacent homesteads forming a neighborhood or *Kokwet*. The *Kokwet* is the basic social unit in the traditional political system of the Kipsigis - a territorial, administrative and economic unit which regulates

social behavior". Historically, the men were not known to participate in groups but rather it was the women. The men were in charge of cattle while women were producers of the finger millet. The introduction of maize and other cash crops, during colonization, weakened the position of women within the household because the men took over the running of the farms and the women had to help the men. The men took over control of the management and the income accrued from the sale of the cash crops and this weakened the women's decision-making power and ability within the household. A female key informant explained that since the subdivision of land, the women were only in control of household plots that only provided for the household consumption. This suggests that women join groups in order to obtain or gain economic power.

3. ANALYSIS

THE LUO VILLAGE

Information gathered from the community meetings (2) and focus groups (8) indicated that in the Luo village there are five groups villagers can choose to join (see Table 3). With the exception of the Clan group, which was started in 1989, all the other groups started between 2002 and 2003. The village elders informed that all members belong to the Clan group by virtue of belonging to the clan. The purpose of the Clan group is to unite the clan by creating order as well as organizing funerals. Members can choose to join more than one group as long as they can afford to pay the membership fees and observe the regulations governing the groups.

The members in this village tend to lean more towards the traditional clan expectation as evidenced by the inclusion of the clan as a separate group. Some groups have been formed along the sub-clan lines. This village is one of the eleven clans in this area. There are four sub-clans and until recently, the Mwenge group membership was strictly for one sub-clan only. At the time of the interview, it had admitted two members from other sub-clans. Table 3 details the characteristics of the groups in the Luo village. The group name and the date of inception are included. With the exception of the clan group, all the other groups were started in the last five years.

Most groups indicated that their main objective was to offer and obtain assistance in times of hardships such as; sickness, medical and funerals expenses. The reasons were similar for most of the groups with the exception of Rita women group, which listed agricultural production and poverty reduction as their objectives. With the exception of the Clan group, all the other groups had a Kshs.50.00 membership fee as well as a monthly contribution agreed upon by members. A member must attend all meetings. Failure to attend three consecutive meetings results in the committee summoning the person and deciding on a course of action which may range from a warning to dismissal from the group. This requirement creates a problem of access for the sick members that cannot make it to the due to illness.

An elder from this village stated that the government encouraged both, formation grassroots groups and more women to participate. Rita and Mwenge groups elevated women in strategic leadership positions with the hope that non-governmental or other government organizations would work with them. Although women were in charge they consulted the male members on matters related to the group. The groups seemed to function well. Perhaps without the external emphasis and encouragement on women's involvement in development, women would not otherwise have been involved. In this respect, externally motivated collective action favored and elevated women to leadership positions within the groups. The Elder's group was internally motivated whose main role was to deal with problems within the clan and maintain order. This group did not have any women memberships, indicating that clan-based some internally motivated groups do not favor women.

Table 3 details the memberships and organization of the groups. The maximum number of membership allowed in a group by the Ministry of Social Services was 20 (village elder's report). The members also mentioned that fewer members are easier to organize and even manage as well as discourage free-riding (participants report). Since the groups in this village are clan-based, the regulations are enforced along their

cultural practices; attendance for most groups is good. The column on gender indicates the distribution of male and female within these groups and finally the age groups represented among the membership.

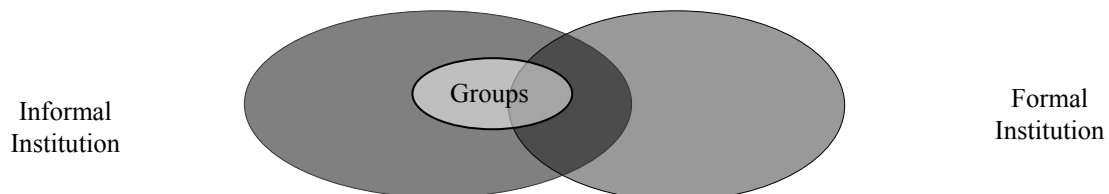
Table 3 – Characteristics of Groups in the Luo Village

Group Name	Objectives	No. of Members	Attendance	Gender		Age Range
				M:	F:	
<i>Mwenge</i> (2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist in Funerals • Assist the sick • Improve welfare 	20	Good	14	6	20 – 50
Elders Group (2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining order 	20	Good	20		50 – 90
<i>Rita</i> Women (2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve agriculture to eradicate poverty • HIV/AIDS awareness • Education • Small scale businesses 	20	Very Good	3	14	30-50
Clan Group (1989)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assisting clan members in hardship • Fundraising for school fees • Unite clan 	20	Very Good			Inclusive
Widows and Orphans (2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping widows cope with death • Creating HIV/AIDS awareness 	12	Fair		12	25-50

Source: Focus groups meeting

Although these groups are registered with the Ministry of Social Services, making them formal and legal in the eyes of the government, they are also bound by the clan rules and regulations. Essentially, both government and traditional rules are important in this community, but the traditional rules seem to take precedence. Although the government and traditional clan-based regulations are supposed to mesh, it is clear that in this village there is a distinction between what is government-regulated and what is clan-regulated. The groups try to balance both traditional and government institutions, however, the traditional regulations seem to prevail. Figure 1 illustrates how the groups operate in the Luo village as reported by the elders.

Figure 1 – Institutional organizations



Kipsigis Village

Information gathered from community meetings, focus groups and household interviews, this village had at least fifteen groups that members could join (see Table 4). Out of these fifteen groups, five of them are women groups. As mentioned earlier, Kipsigis women have been involved in collective action for a long time. Perhaps this historical aspect continues to influence their involvement in collective action. Groups such as St. Paul's farmers are externally influenced and are in their second year of receiving micro-credit facilities for farming inputs. From the focus group discussions, the members informed that the Bursary groups were formed as a result of the government's announcement that funds to assist the poor with school fees would be channeled through these groups. This external influence motivated formation of several groups with the hope that the government will follow through with the promise. Generally, the groups in the Kipsigis village appeared to be well-organized. Perhaps the fact that the group concept was not new to this community helped them organize better.

The information in table 4 shows that this village had more groups whose purpose was mainly agricultural production in addition to other objectives. These groups' objectives were listed as farming, acquiring farm inputs, education of children and merry-go-rounds.

Table 4 – A list of Groups and Objectives in Kipsigis Village

Group Name	Objectives	No. of Members	Attendance	Gender		Age Range
				M	F	
Tilibei Education Bursary Fund	Educating of children within the members	20	Fair	15	5	30-50
Emdit Multipurpose Bursary Fund	Education of children	25	Fair	13	12	25-52
Musaria Women Group (1995)	Farming Merry-go-round	20	Good	-	20	35-50
Sembe Union Group	Tree Planting, Farming	25	Good	13	12	23-34
Tilibei Kolonge Women Group	Farming Merry-go-round	20	Good	15	5	28-60
Cheptangon Kolonge Women Group (2002)	Tea Nursery, Farming Merry-go-round	20	Fair	10	10	28-60
Chebila Women Group (2002)	Farming Merry-go-round	20	Good		20	30-40
Kasyin Bursary(2000)	Educating children	30	Fair	18	12	30-60
St. Paul Tilibei Farmers 2002	Farming Micro-credit	15	Fair	8	7	33-53
Musero Self-Help group (1995)	Farming Merry-go-round	12	Good	9	3	20-25
Kabwos Kolonge (1997)	Farming	16	Good	9	7	24-32
Tapiken Women Group (1966)	Farming Merry-go-round	15	Fair	7	8	30-50
Chepkemel	Farming	20	Poor	20		50-70
Kochochonik (2000)	Farm inputs					
Chemalik Farmers Group	Farming Posho Mill	30	Fair	24	6	40-65
Techlonget AIDS Awareness (2002)	AIDS Awareness and Education on AIDS Prevention	10	Fair	8	2	24-30

Source: Focus group meetings

4. FINDINGS

LUO VILLAGE

Based on information gathered from in-depth interviews and information from focus groups, it appears that most members of the community in this village join groups in an attempt to get assistance for medical related and funeral expenses as well as to improve their standard of living. Although both men and women cited improving their living standards as the overall reason for participating in collective action, they each stated different strategies of achieving this goal. Table 5 summarizes the reasons for engaging in collective action for both men and women in Luo village. The ranking was analyzed using Report Case Summaries in SPSS and findings from focus groups.

The men indicated ‘uniting the clan’ was fundamental for any activities to take place in the village and hence an important reason for joining a group. The fact that this village is clan-based helps explain why this reason would be important for effective collective action. The men also considered solving problems as another important reason. During the focus group discussions, some participants mentioned that if there was no peace among the villagers, nothing would be accomplished. Additionally, getting and giving assistance in times of distress such as sickness, medical bills, death, and funeral expenses was very important for most participants. This village is in a region prone to illnesses that can be life threatening. It is also a region that has recorded increased cases of HIV/AIDS and the highest prevalence 20% in western Kenya (NASCO 2003). It has thus been faced with illnesses and deaths. Some participants expressed the need for participation because they are faced with high medical bills and funeral expenses, hence depleting their resources. This could have been a motivation for starting these groups in order to help people cope with the impacts of these illnesses. From in-depth household interviews, most families had experienced death or knew other village members that had faced such calamities. Additionally, men mentioned school fees as an important reason for joining a group because the group could provide resources through a rotating credit scheme popularly known as *merry-go-round* for families that needed money to pay fees. Although, men mentioned development and overall improved living standards during community and focus group meetings, at the household level the priorities were different. There was no consistency in what members regarded as of high priority between posho mills, water pumps, irrigation, and other small scale businesses. This population also found interaction with others and getting information as important.

The women in this village ranked getting assistance in times of need such as sickness, drought as the most important. Since women do not own land, they have very little in the way of accessing financial assistance. So when they are faced with problems they have no where to go for help. Therefore groups, for these women, act as a lifeline for getting the required assistance. They also viewed increases in agricultural production for household consumption as another essential motivation for joining a group. Since women are in charge of the household chores including providing food for the family, could be the reason why cultivation of food crops is important to them as well as a valid reason for joining a group. In addition, the money from the *merry-go-rounds* allows them to buy food and other items that would otherwise be out of their reach if they just depended on their savings or assistance from their spouses. When asked for other reasons for joining groups, the members present stated that belonging to a group improved their welfare; they are able to achieve more together. This results in a powerbase that allows them to improve their wellbeing. The women reiterated that they have become stronger as a group and the assistance they get from each other helps them achieve more with a few resources available to them.

While most of the other groups in this area were organized almost in the same way, and had similar objectives and organized around the different sub-clans, the Widows and Orphans group was very different. The members’ incentive of joining the group is first of all to connect with the other widows and share their problems. The death of a male in a homestead means that money is not readily available since the men provide for the families (Yamane and Jayne 2002). The objective of this group is to help raise school fees for the affected families, raise money to support their households, seek ways of obtaining adequate medical

care and pay for health expenses, improve their well-being, and assist in building houses for the widows, as well as finding husbands for the widows that have not yet been “inherited”¹.

Although men and women join the same groups, their reasons for participating are different. Table 5 summarizes the reasons why both men and women participate in collective action with the first reason ranked as the highest.

Table 5 – Motivation for Collective Action in Luo Village

Gender	Reasons
Male	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unite Clan • Solve problems • Assistance in times of need such as: hospital expenses, death, funeral • School fees • Development purposes • Agricultural production • Improve standard of living • Information • Interact with others • Learn new ideas • Benefit from group activities • Empowerment
Female	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assistance in times of need such as: sickness, famine • Increase agricultural production for household consumption • Profit from savings and loans (merry-go-round) • Improve living standards • Interact with other women and help each other • Assistance in times of need • Start small-scale business such as; making sisal mats for sale, fish, beans • Empowerment • Development purposes • Happiness and friendship

Source: Focus Groups and Report Case Summaries Analysis

A non-participant focus group comprising of both men and women in the Luo village said they did not participate because they were either too poor to afford membership fee or too sick to attend the meetings. In addition, others in this group mentioned that some members did not disclose to them what was happening in the groups and therefore had no knowledge of the benefits. They also mentioned that they had not seen any tangible benefits from participants and therefore were unwilling to join any group.

KIPSIGIS VILLAGE

Findings from in-depth case study interviews and discussions with focus groups and meetings with key informants established that the Kipsigis community does not organize groups along clan and sub-clan system. The clan does not exist as a geographical unit and clan membership is non-existent. They organize groups along neighborhoods, church affiliations, and villages. Therefore, neighbors, friends, families and next of kin play a crucial role for members of this community. However, the women draw heavily on group associations for help and support in their daily work, during important social events, and in times of crises. The initial groups were started by women and over time the men have followed their lead. Some men do not allow their wives to participate in groups because they claim women “just waste time and loiter around under the pretext of going to group meetings” (Focus group discussion). The men also formed their own groups that were more development oriented. Both men and women have joined one or more groups as a means of

¹ This means that a widow is taken on as a second wife by the surviving brother or the closest male next of kin.

improving their livelihoods. Furthermore, women need the money they get from “*merry-go-round*” to buy household items and clothes as needed.

Both qualitative and quantitative analyses indicated that most groups in this village were formed for the purpose of improving agricultural production and have maintained that objective. In spite of the fact that these groups engage in other businesses, the participants do not lose sight of their main goal of improving agricultural production. Some have even been trained on new farming technologies such as mulching, different ways of making compost, and how to plant new varieties of particular crops, including bananas. Some group participants also have small plots of tea. Tea is one of Kenya’s major export crops and is therefore a valuable source of income. Both men and women in Kipsigis village cited agricultural production as being an important motivation for collective action. However, the men were more interested in the cash crops and livestock specifically dairy cows. On the other hand, the women favored cultivation of a variety of food crops for household consumption that would be healthy. The men cited assistance in school fees and farming inputs as motivation for collective action. During the focus group meetings, the men stressed that the need for school fees usually arises when children are in high school and university. Before then most of them can afford to pay for primary level education because they can sell livestock or produce from their farms to cater to this need. School fee usually is a man’s responsibility this illustrates that the motivation for collective action is largely dictated by the gender roles (Focus group). Additionally, sharing of ideas, getting information and interacting with other men within the groups were other reasons cited by men in this village.

The women cited increase in agricultural production as the most important reason for participating. Since they are expected to provide food for the family, they are constantly looking for ways to improve and increase the food they produce for household consumption. They expressed the need to improve their crops and even access new technologies in order to provide healthier foods for their families. They also listed *merry-go-round* as another essential motive. The concept of *merry-go-round* was embraced by the women viewed as a key source of savings and credit that gives them a financial base and freedom to spend money on projects of their choice; without depending on their spouses or being accountable to the men. The women felt empowered by the financial independence and freedom to purchase whatever they deemed important to them such as household items. Interaction with each other and getting help as well as supporting each other in times of hardships was very crucial to them. They explained that groups enable them to work together and by pooling their resources, they able start small projects like poultry and tree nurseries. Women mentioned that they shared ideas among themselves and helped each other deal with household issues and marital problems. Table 6 summarizes the reasons for joining groups ranked in the order of importance based on the focus group and household interviews.

Table 6 – Motivation for Collective Action in Kipsigis Village

Gender	Reasons
Male	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural production (increase livestock, tea nurseries and plantation) • Assistance in times of need such as: school fees, farm inputs • Improve standard of living • Get information • Share ideas • Interact with others • Benefit from group activities • Development purposes
Female	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase agricultural production for household consumption • Profit from savings and loans (<i>merry-go-round</i>) • Improve living standards (Household improvements) • Interact with other women and help each other • Learn new farming technologies • Assistance in times of need

Source: Focus groups and Report Case Summaries

Non-participants in Kipsigis village cited lack of information, lack of membership fee, mismanagement of groups, sickness, poverty, and squabbles within the groups as reasons for not joining groups. Also, had not seen any tangible benefits as a result of group participation and therefore did not want to join. Others mentioned that due to old-age and sickness they did not want to be a liability to the group. In some cases where women had young families, they opted not to join because of family obligations. However, a case study interview found that some wealthier families did not find it profitable to participate because they could access the resources that the poor and more vulnerable could not. Hence it was not in their best interest to join groups. Findings from focus groups indicated that, if a man did not participate, there was a likelihood that the woman did not. As reported by some non-participating women, they are required to seek permission from their spouses to join a group. This had an implication for women who wanted to engage in some form of collective action.

5. CONTRASTS AND SIMILARITIES THE LUO AND KIPSIGIS VILLAGES

The results indicate that there is a difference in the way groups are organized between the two villages. Collective action in Luo village is clan-based while the Kipsigis village organizes along the neighborhood, friendships or based on common shared interests of the participants. Perhaps being a woman in Luo village limits the freedom of engaging in collective action as the clan determines what she can or cannot do. The married women in Kipsigis village had to inform their husbands before they could join a group, while the Luo women were expected to participate in the Clan group. Also, men and women do not mobilize over the same resources. The wealth levels of these two regions shows a difference based on the Mwarasomba (2001) baseline reports. This indicates that the degree of wealth is perhaps linked to the types of groups they choose to participate in.

Contrasts

- The Luo village had fewer groups, which were in part formed for the purposes of coping with illnesses. Therefore, most members sold their assets such as cattle, sheep and goats to pay for medical expenses, which combined with their lower income levels results in greater vulnerability. Consequently, collective action seems to address the needs of members to cope with the effect of illnesses. Conversely, the Kipsigis village had more groups with various purposes including agricultural production and bursary groups. There was lower incidence of illnesses, and therefore the members did not have to spend their incomes on medical expenses. Instead, they invested part of their income into agricultural production. Thus, their level of income was higher than the Luos.
- The men from the Luo village indicated that they joined groups in order to unite the clan, solve problems, and get assistance in times of need as well as staying connected with the other clan members. They also cited starting small scale development projects as another reason why they join groups. For this village agricultural production was at the bottom of the list of reasons for joining because they are not an agricultural village. Since the Luos are not traditionally farmers may be a reason why they did not consider farming high on the list. The men in Kipsigis village indicated the most important reasons for joining groups was to improve and increase agricultural production especially livestock and tea plantation. They also cited access to financial capital and credit, sharing of ideas, accessing information and other development projects such as posho mills as reasons for engaging in collective action. The difference between the Luo and Kipsigis is the fact that the Luo stressed more on accessing assistance while the Kipsigis were more interested in accessing financial capital and credits.
- More women from the Luo village participated in groups than men; while in the Kipsigis village more men than women participated. Women in the Luo village appeared to have more freedom of association than their counterparts in the Kipsigis village. Since their lives are structured along the clan regulations, they probably know what they can or cannot do. For women in the Luo village the most important motivations for participation were: to get help in times of sickness and to be assisted with payment of medical expenses. Starting small-scale businesses was another reason that ranked high among these women. The findings showed that women in this village were involved in various small businesses such

as selling dried fish (*Omena*), making baskets and mats from sisal for sale, as well as selling beans and maize. They also wanted collective empowerment, friendships and happiness. The women in the Luo village have their work and lives ordered by the clan. This also means that there are things that these women cannot do unless it has been sanctioned by the clan. This inhibits the women from exploring their potential because of the boundaries set by their ethnicity. This indicates that ethnicity and location are important in terms of the type of collective action that members, especially women, engage in. For the women in the Kipsigis village the most important reasons for participating were to improve agricultural production by acquiring new farming technologies, as well as generate savings through *merry-go-rounds*. These women also mentioned interaction with fellow women as another important reason for engaging in collective action.

- The analysis also showed differences in motivation between men and women in both Luo and Kipsigis villages, suggesting that both gender mobilize over different resources.

Similarities

- Both men and women from these villages indicated that they engage in collective action for the basic reason of improving their livelihoods.
- While men from both villages indicated that being able to pay school fees was important, the women did not indicate that as a valid reason for joining groups. Perhaps gender roles were within the household influence the resources women and men mobilize.
- For both gender, regardless of their ethnicity, groups are an important mechanism for accessing markets and information. A summary of reasons for joining groups for both villages and gender are listed in Table 7.

Table 7 – Summary Report on Motivation for Collective Action in Luo and Kipsigis Villages

Gender	Luo Village	Kipsigis Village
Men	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unite clan • Solve problems • Assistance • Development (small-scale projects) • Agricultural Production 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural production • Access financial capital and credits • Share ideas • Get information • Development projects
Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting assistance • Agricultural Production • Improve living standards • Empowerment • Happiness and friendship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural production • Improve living standards • Learn new farming technologies • Merry-go-round • Interaction with other women

Source: Household interviews, focus groups and case studies

Non-participants

The non-participants in both villages were mainly the very poor women who could not afford to raise membership fees. Also, the people that were ill and could not actively participate did not join because they felt that they would be a liability for the group. In addition, the research showed that the very wealthy people in the Luo village did not participate because they did not regard collective action as a good way to spend their time. Both men and women stated that there were no visible or tangible benefits to group participation and therefore did not want to join groups, while in the Kipsigis village more wealthy people participated in groups. In both villages, the most vulnerable group and resource poor did not participate in groups because they could not afford to pay membership fee. Unfortunately a large majority in this group were women. Additionally, most groups had a form of *merry-go-round* that the resource poor could not participate in as it involved contribution of money.

6. CONCLUSION

This research paper examines the motivation for engaging in collective action for the Luo and Kipsigis villages in western Kenya. The results indicate that both men and women engage in collective action for different reasons, an underlying motivation for both genders is to increase production and improve yields with the expectation of improving their livelihoods. For women, assistance in times of need was very important to them. Since women do not own property and therefore are resource poor and have no means of accessing resources except through group participation. In addition, women are in charge of household chores including providing for the families. Therefore gaining access to resources such as information, new technologies, credits and savings from the *merry-go-round* enable the women to take care of their responsibilities. The only group in the study that has been able to access micro-financing has high women membership. This shows that externally initiated groups tend to favor women over men. This indicates that women are acquiring a powerbase that they could not otherwise achieve if it had not been for the group. This may be the reason why engaging in collective action is crucial for the women.

Men participate in groups for various reasons and as the results show, ethnicity and location determines the type of groups they can engage in. For the men in the Luo village, matters pertaining to the clan are held in high regard. In addition, the high incidence of illnesses in the Luo village has caused another motivation or a shift in the original purpose to one of paying medical and funeral expenses. This research found that most members in the Luo village join groups in order to cope with illnesses. In the Kipsigis village, men are more concerned with increasing agricultural production as well as accessing financial capital and credits.

Hence, motives differ in both villages, especially as a result of illness. While collective action is a mechanism for the poor to access resources, for the very poor or sick, groups were not an alternative, as these people are perceived to be a liability. Ethnicity, gender, and poverty interaction impact on motivations to join and act collectively. The results suggest that the reasons that men and women join groups are perhaps largely influenced by the roles within a household. Additionally, the complexity of poverty related situations that the female headed households have to negotiate in the event of absence of the male head of household due to death makes it necessary for women to join groups in order to cater for household responsibilities. The intersection of gender, vulnerability and lack of control of resources, are key in the ability to engage and explain why collective action is the only alternative to engage in and the resources they mobilize in.

Implications

The study found that most group participants are the poor but not the most vulnerable. While those participating can easily be reached through these groups, there is need to find a solution for the very poor that do not participate. Policy makers should design policies that are sensitive to the informal institutions such as traditions and culture. This would ensure that people embrace these policies instead of shunning them if they are deemed to be contrary to their traditions. In addition, a one size-fits-all policy evidently would not work for all the regions as the motives and responses differ. Since the research found women to be most vulnerable, programs geared towards helping women cope with the effects of illnesses as well as interventions that would allow them to access the much needed resources.

Future Research

A suggestion for future research would be to critically examine the performance of externally versus internally motivated groups and how members benefit. Another area of research would be to assess alternative ways for diversification for the rural poor suffering from prolonged illnesses such as HIV/AIDS. In the event that they have to sell their assets, they can have alternative ways to smooth their income. There is also need to conduct an impact assessment of the groups in western Kenya aimed at finding out how the policy makers could use them for education, information dissemination, technology adoption, and for increasing agricultural production. If it is found that they are effective then it would be easier for policy makers to design specific programs aimed at reducing the vulnerability of these households.

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