7 Senses

Today it's an idea. Tomorrow it's reality.

THE WOMEN EMPOWERMENT CHALLENGE

Report

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Content

1 Problem Definition

Statistics show that today, women constitute the majority of the poor and illiterate and their human rights are violated on a massive scale. An imbalance in relations between women and men impedes women's attainment of healthy and fulfilling lives and this operates on many levels, from the most personal to the highly public. UN Women states that "empowering women to participate fully in economic life across all sectors is essential to build stronger economies, achieve internationally agreed goals for development and sustainability, and improve the quality of life for women, men, families and communities." For women in particular, the Sustainable Development Goal 5 addresses the achievement of gender equality and women empowerment of all women and girls. When policymakers and practitioners decide that 'empowerment' – usually of women or the poor – is a development goal, what do they mean? How do they determine the extent to which it has been achieved? Despite empowerment having become a widely used term in this context, there is no accepted method for measuring and tracking changes.

One of the principles that offer guidance to empower women in the community is to promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy. The word 'empowerment' means giving power. According to the International Encyclopedia for Women (1998), power means having the capacity and the means to direct one's life towards desired social, political and economic goals or status.1 "It is the ability to influence events and control outcomes in the environment. The crux of power lies in the possession of and/or access to and control over means and resources" (Rao, 1999, p. 33). Empowerment provides a greater access to knowledge and resources, more autonomy and participation in decision making and controlling resources and livelihood, greater ability to plan lives, more control over the circumstances which influence lives, and freedom from customs, beliefs and practices. It is a process of change by which individuals or group gain power and ability to control their lives. (Harish 2014, Narang 2012). Thus, empowerment of women is not just a goal in itself, but key to all global development goals. Empowerment is an active multidimensional process to enable women to realize their identity and power in all spheres of life. Kenya, one of the most populous countries in Africa, has policies and programmes geared towards the improvement of women socio-economic standing and overall development. One of these programmes is self-help groups,

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1 For the definition, see also Digumarti Bhaskara Rao, Women, Education and Empowerment, Discovery Publishing House, 1999, p. 33 and

something that is common in many areas in Kenya, Kisii included. Self-help groups are rotating savings and credit associations that are formed when a group of people come together to make regular cylindrical contributions to a common fund, which is given to one member in each cycle. The members of the group are usually neighbours and friends and the groups provide an opportunity for social interaction and are very common with women (Harper 2002).

The aim of the Women Empowerment Challenge was to find out whether and how these self-help groups have worked for the women (and men) in Kisii. The question we wanted to answer was whether and how women are empowered economically (and otherwise) through the self-help groups. To answer this question, we investigated what benefits if any the community received from these groups and what challenges or barriers they had. We also wanted to find out if one of the barriers was culture-related. This was going to tie back to the previous 7Senses Challenge -the Female Rights Challenge, which we conducted in 2016 where we looked at women's rights with regards to female circumcision.

The aim of the Female Rights Challenge was to find out whether there was a decline of female circumcision in Kisii. Studies have been conducted by human rights scholars, anthropologists and public health scholars adopting a variety of approaches to show the prevalence of the practice. What is missing is an approach which illustrates what strategies have been used by states (or non-state actors) to get the decline and how these tactics have contributed to the decline in the prevalence of the practice. This is very important because the methods used can be evaluated and maybe even emulated in other societies where the practice is still prevalent. A review of the literature showed that female circumcision had declined in Kisii because of training offered by non-profit organizations in the area as well as the involvement of the government. In order to determine whether the practice had declined or was still prevalent and intact as it used to be in traditional times, we wanted to find out whether the law (The Female Genital Mutilation Act of 2011) had sustained this decline. It was also important to determine whether those who practiced female circumcision were aware of its implications to the law and health, and if so, whether these discouraged the practice. The impact of the ban and the sensitization campaigns, which had been launched against the practice, were also examined.

Our findings showed that majority of the respondents, including the leaders were not familiar with the Female Genital Mutilation Act of 2011. They just knew that people would be arrested if caught circumcising their girls. While the community agreed that law was not assisting in the decline of

the practice, and that it should be looked at alongside other issues because it is integrally linked to economic and social realities of everyday life, during the interviews and focus group meetings, most respondents stated that the more pressing issue was enhancing themselves economically. For this reason, we decided to investigate whether female circumcision among other cultural practices were a barrier to the enhancement and empowerment of women. According to literature, female circumcision and bride price can be seen as contributions to the economic development because a girl cannot be married unless she is circumcised or excised. Marriage is considered as an alternative to secure the future for girls and resources for their family because of unemployment and discrimination in the labour market. Consequently, the parents have an incentive to increase the "marriageability" of their girls and invest in desirable characteristics such as female circumcision because marriage can be an important source of income through the payment of dowry or bride price.

Local researchers Mary (left) and Ragogi (right) at work

2 About the Women Empowerment Challenge

The Women Empowerment Challenge took place January – March 2017.

2.1 Methods

Based on this outcome of the Female Rights Challenge –where local women set the first priority as enhancing themselves economically, we decided to look at the different self-help groups in Nyaribari Chache Constituency to identify opportunities for economic enhancement. We concentrated on Kisii Central Ward because this area had previously been identified as problematic because a lot of the people in the community made illicit brews, but then many people started forming the groups. We used semi-structured interviews, observation, focus group meetings and photo elicitation as methods to collect data. We decided to start with a few leaders of these groups and then a few members.

" You have to follow the rules. You have to pay money on time and you can't gossip"

Research participant, about self help groups (Kisii)

Other stakeholders that we approached were county national government workers. The government has different roles both on the county and national level that assist the self-help groups. We also interviewed local leaders and the chief as well as few non-profit organizations that work with the people in the community. Another group of people we approached were women who were not associated with any self-help groups.

2.2 Data Collection

We interviewed 38 people from seven different Self Help Groups (SHG) in Kisii county. While we were investigating what women are doing to empower themselves, we realized we could not do that without also talking to the men, because while some of the SHG consist only of women, some of the women were getting the money to contribute from their spouses and some of the groups also included men. One interviewee said her SHG started out with only women, but the men saw the benefits from the group and decided to join.

"The group forces you to work hard because you have to make your contribution daily."

Male Research participant, about self help groups (Kisii)

We approached seven SHG in Nyaribari Chache, and three others in Kisii town, Tabaka and Mobaracho (the results were put in tables that below) We also interviewed three aspiring leaders, since 2017 was an election year, three journalists, the chief of the area, two workers from the county office and one worker from the national office.

Focus group discussion, Kisii, Kenya.

3 Results

We divided the interviewees into four categories: SHG, National Government, County Government and Administration.

3.1 Self Help Groups (SHG)

The leaders and members of the SHG that we interviewed stated that they received a lot of benefits from the SHG. Below is a table showing the economic and social benefits they received as well as the challenges. Majority of the interviewees stated that the most important benefit they received from the SHG was social support from the other members.

Economical Benefits

Category	Percentage
Education fees	24%
Loans	18% *
Household goods	8%
Feeding kids	3%
Leasing land/ other projects	16%
Saving	8%
Dowry	3%
Free chairs	13%

Social Benefits

Category	Percentage
Social support	63%
Teaching on female circumcision	11%
Education (knowledge)	21%
Teaching kids	5%
Discipline	5%

* The percentages are based on all the people we interviewd

Economical challenges

Category	Percentage
Lack of money	13%
Falling back in payments	34%
Problem with loans	34%
Lack of support	8%
Not enough money to borrow	8%
Leaving without getting money ...	5%
Lack of transparency with money	3%
Misplaced trust in leaders	3%
people who do not contribute	3%
lack of jobs	3%
transportation of chairs	3%

Social challenges

Category	Percentage
Lack of trust	8%
No help for children	3%
No help from political leaders	3%
Getting disciplined	8%
Dislike what has been passed	5%
Less than majority votes	5%
Not having equal chances	3%
Giving advice to older people	3%
Disruption of meetings	11%
People joining than leaving	3%
Meetingtimes	3%
Gossip, drinking & drugs	5%

Figure 1. Economic benefits, social benefits, economic challenges and social challenges of SHG as perceived by its leaders and members.

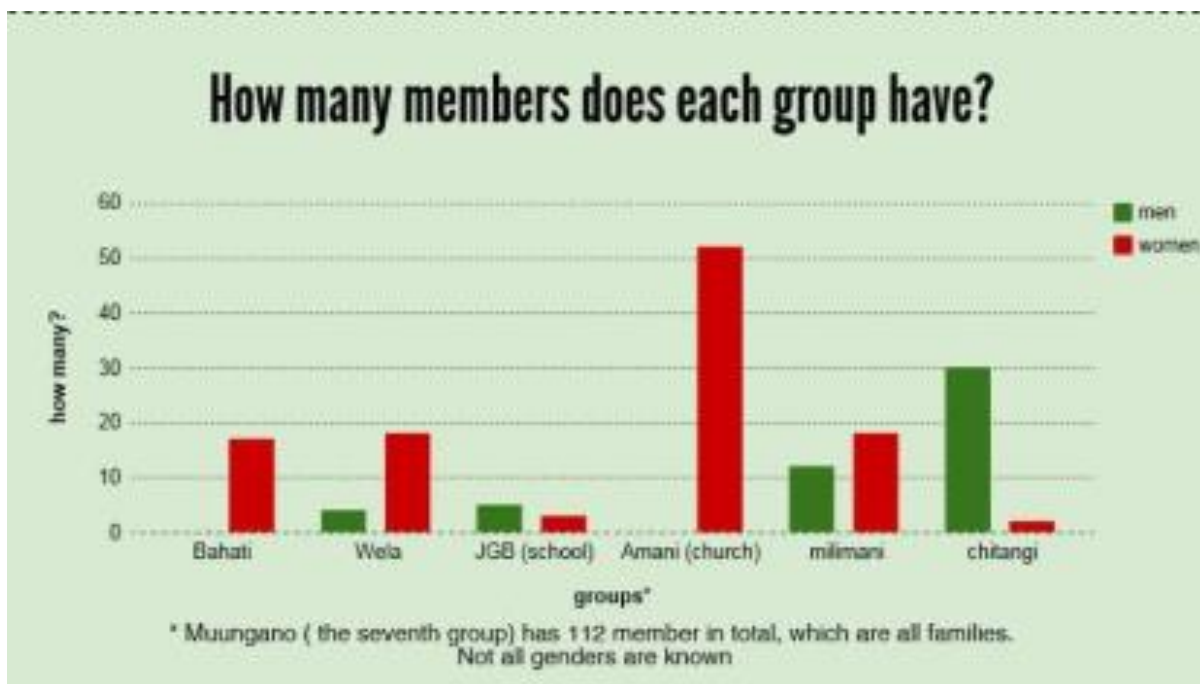## How many members does each group have?

Figure 2. Number of men and women in each of the SHG.

NB: The three SHG in Kisii town, Tabaka and Mobacho were not included.

Registration at the national government of kenya*

Requirement of registration fees for the self-help groups
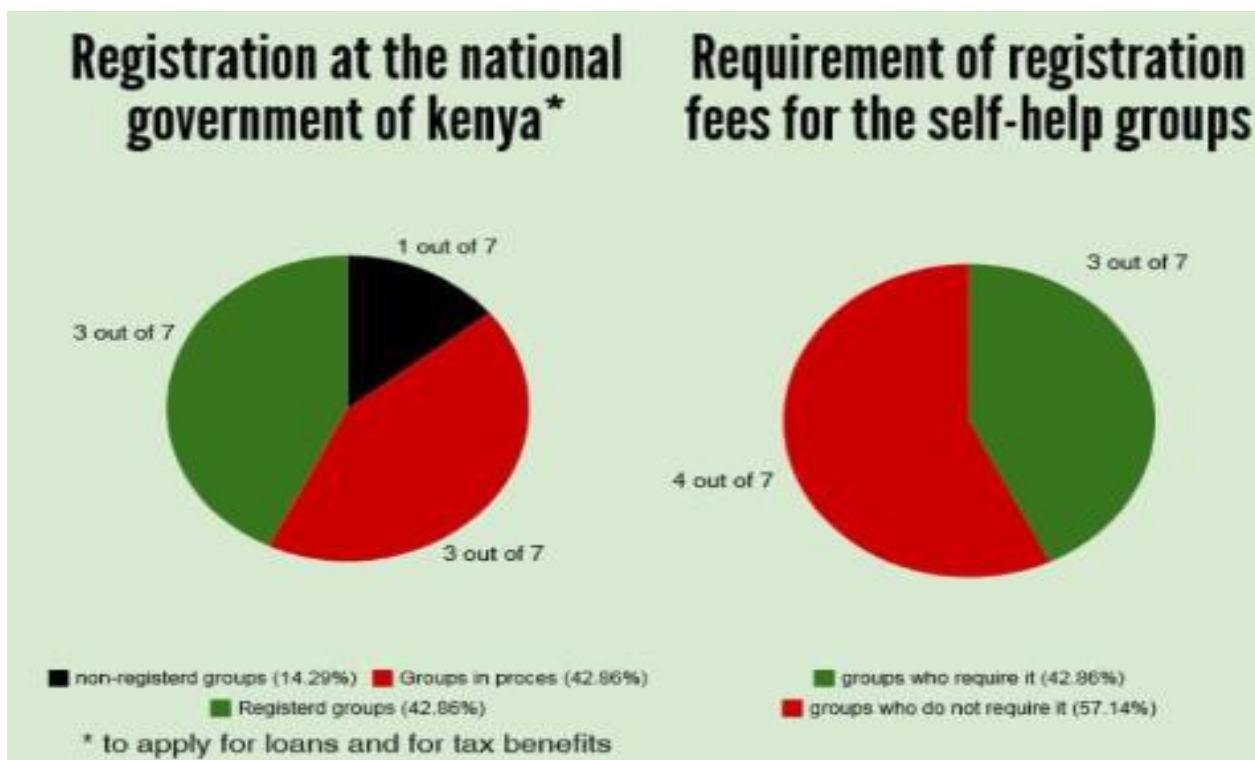
* to apply for loans and for tax benefits

Figure 3. Number of groups registered at the national government and number of groups that require registration fees before someone can join.
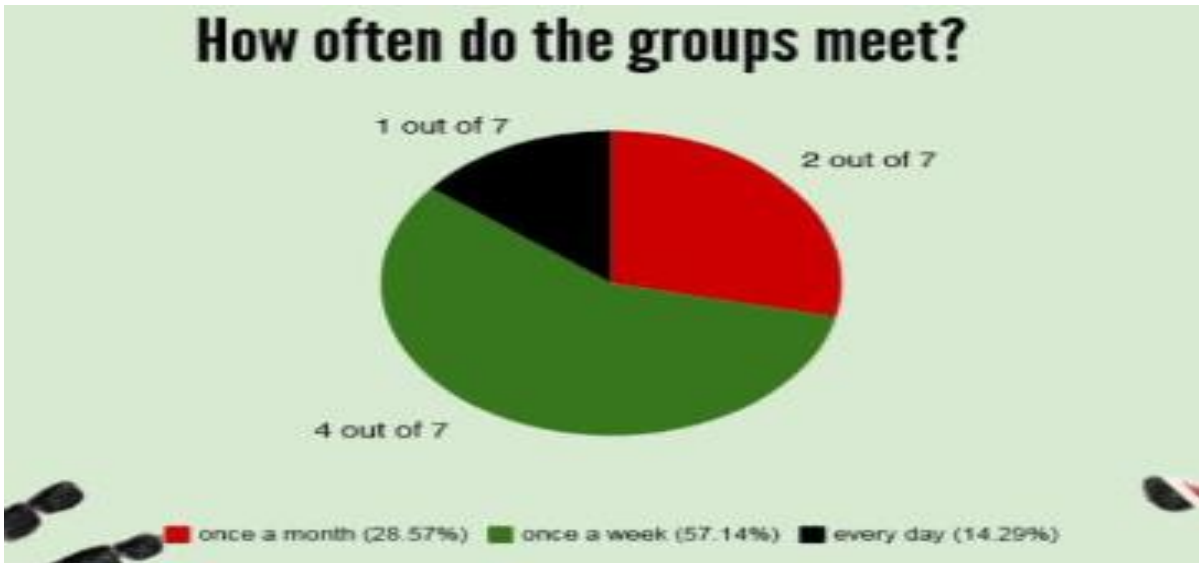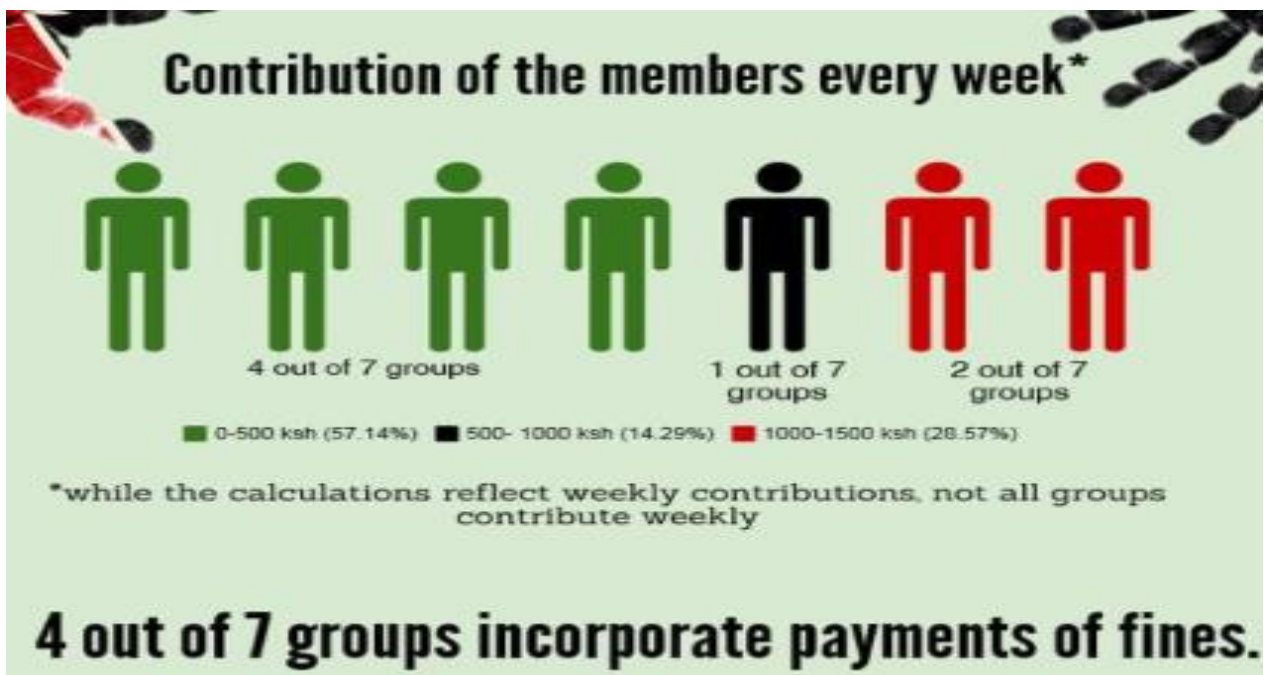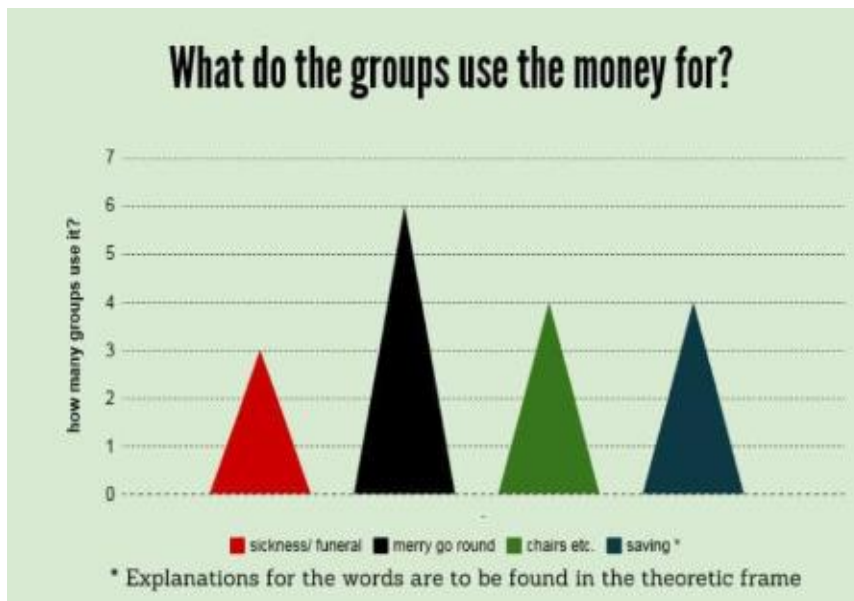
Figure 4. Frequency of the meetings

Figure 5. Amount of contribution given by the members

What do the groups use the money for?

Merry-go-round -Everyone puts in some money when the group meets and all that money goes to one person Some groups have rules on how the money can be spent.

Chairs - The group buys chairs and tents so they can rent them out for events like funerals or weddings.

5 out of 7 groups are still not getting assistance from political leaders and organisations

Figure 6. How the groups spend the money that is contributed

While many stated that they benefited economically, 63% of the participants stated that they benefited most from social support. The support they got was advice on family issues, cultural issues and a bit of education. The main challenges the members had was economic. 34% stated that they were falling behind in payments because they did not have money and another 34% stated that they were not be able to pay back on the loans they received.

" You have to follow the rules. You have to pay money on time and you can't gossip"

Research participant, about self help groups (Kisii)

None of the interviewees mentioned culture as a problem. During the second focus group meeting, some of the women stated that their spouses were initially not happy with them joining the SHG, but changed their minds when they saw the economic benefits that came from the group,

like having money to pay for the children's education or buying household goods. Some of the men even opted to join the SHG (See Figure 1 above).

" We hope that everyone in the group will be self-sufficient. The way to do it is talk to each other and help each other with the contributions we make"

Research participant, about self help groups (Kisii)

Majority stated that they had to register their groups as required by law. Three out of the seven groups in Kisii ward had registered, and three said they were in the process (See Figure 3). Those who had registered stated that it was difficult to do it because they had to give bribes to the people in the National government in order to get registered and obtain a certificate. They also stated that it was difficult to understand what was required and no one was giving straight forward answers regarding what documents they needed to present in order to get the registration. Some of them stated that they went to the chiefs (administration) to ask for information, but were required to pay a bribe there too. During all the focus group meetings, the participants stated that the main challenge, was lack of education and awareness.

3.2 National Government
The interviewees stated that most of the SHG did not get registered because they did not have the right documents. When asked how these documents could be found, the interviewee stated that there were flyers in the offices that the people could take, and the County government had the duty to give advise and monitor the people interested in forming SHG.

3.3 County Government
The two interviewees stated that the County government was supposed to get money from the National government, but this was not happening. This made it difficult for the workers to go in the field as required, because they didn't have the resources. They also stated that the communication between the National and County governments was not good ever since the devolution (this separation started in 2013)

3.4 Administration
The Chief of the area stated that he acts as a middle person, and therefore, based on the needs and concerns of the people in the community, he can invite speakers to the barazas (public meetings) to talk to the people. However, he said that people did not attend the barazas, therefore it was difficult for him to know what the concerns of the people were. The chief further stated that if the people said that they needed

someone to talk to them about the SHG, he would make arrangements to get someone from the national and county government to come and speak to them.

3.5   Non-Members

There were people in the community who were not members of any SHG, and we interviewed a few. While a few stated that they were not interested in the politics withi n the groups, most of them stated that they did not have the resources to join the groups.

3.6   Focus Group Meeting

We conducted three focus group meetings. The first one consisted of the leaders from the different SHG. The second one consisted of the members and the third one included stakeholders from the SHG, both leaders and members, people who were not members in any SHG, representatives from the national and county government as well as administration, aspiring leaders and representatives from local organizations.

In the first focus group meeting, we used hypothetical questions to encourage discussions. Most of the leaders wanted to get more knowledge on what can be done to get more income for the groups. Some stated that they did not know how to obtain registration from the national government. We agreed that they would get assistance from the

groups that had done it already, and they would also attend the third focus group meeting with stakeholders from

the national and county governments.

During the interviews, we also used photo elicitation, a method that allows researchers to insert a photograph into the research interview. We asked the members that we interviewed what they liked about the community and if they were to take a picture, what they would like to see improved for themselves and in the community. We got various answers, and we took pictures of the things they mentioned in their answers. Most of the answers were similar. We divided the pictures into 5 categories: Education, personal improvement, business, transportation and spiritual. We then used these pictures for the second focus group

meeting. We took two pictures from each category (See Figures 7, 8 and 9), the left picture representing how life is now, and the right picture representing the improvement they want to see. Most people in the group wanted to get more education and continue to enhance themselves economically. We used the pictures we took to help with the discussion. The pictures were divided among the attendees and they were asked to discuss what can be done to create the improvements that were shown in the pictures. They agreed that they needed first to gain more knowledge through some sort of training or education to be aware of different mechanisms that they can incorporate in their lives and in the groups.

The members in this focus group meeting were also given a short questionnaire to fill out. Among the questions asked was where they got the money to pay for the SHG. While most of them stated that they received the money from businesses they did, during the discussion, they stated that they got the money from their spouses, who had jobs outside of the home. Some said that they did not have jobs because of lack of education. Some of them stated that their spouses initially did not want them to join the SHG, so would refuse to give them money. However, since they still got money for the household, they would budget it in such a way that there was some left to pay to the SHG. They also stated that when their spouses saw the benefits from these SHG (like new items in the house), they realized that the SHG were beneficial. Some of the men then agreed to provide money to their spouses, and others decided to join the SHG themselves.

Figure 7. Education and Spirituality (everybody in the focus group said education was very important and majority said God was important)

Figure 8. Transportation (while motor bikes are the mode of transportation, some wanted a car so they can transport goods)

Figure 9. Personal improvement (from a small fragile house to a steady house made of stone)

Figure 10. Business (from a small temporary shop to a big shop)

During the third focus group meeting, we gave the results that we had gathered to the group consisting of all the stakeholders we had interviewed. After explaining to the group what the different stakeholders had told us, we provided a figure w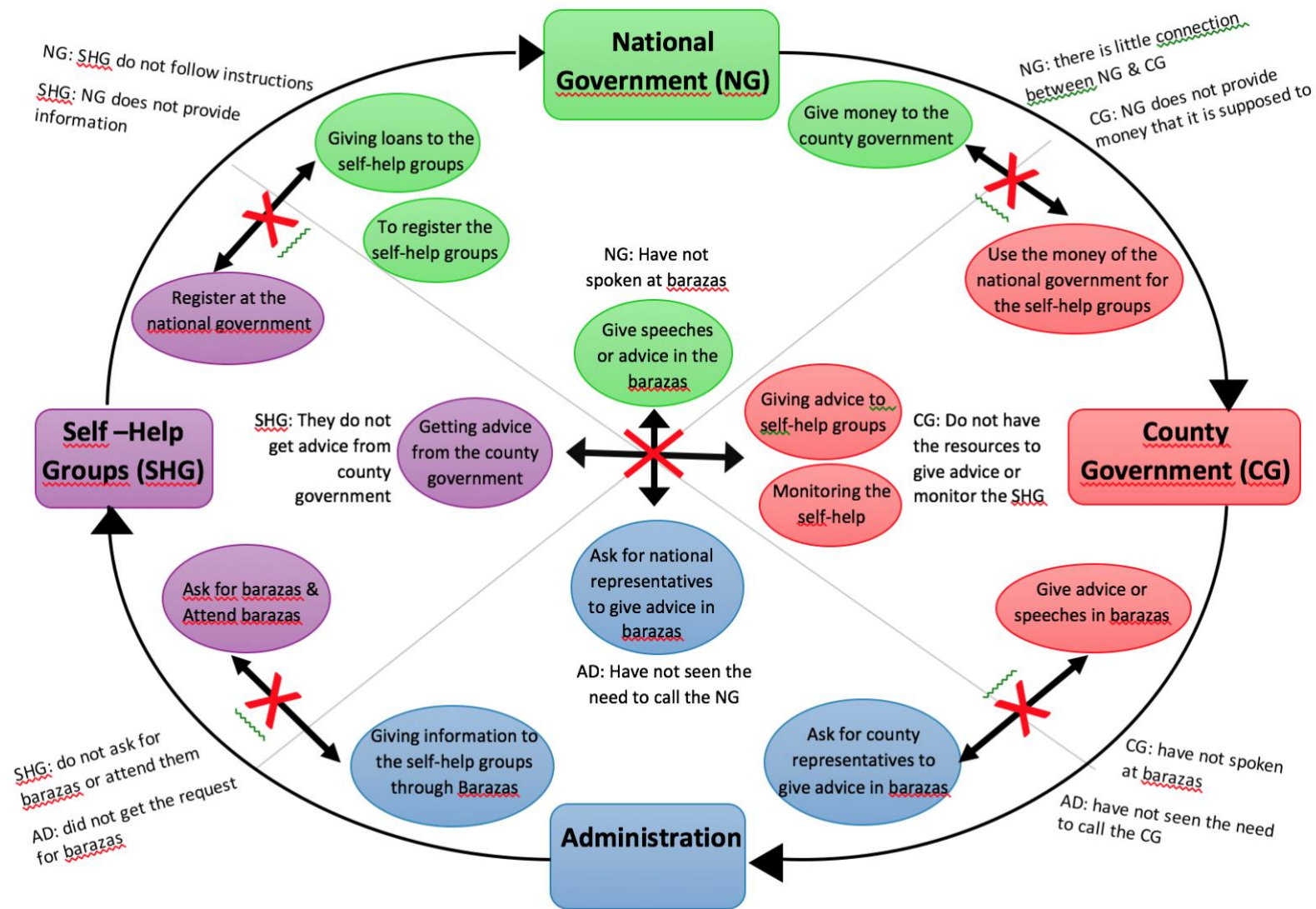e called 'The Circular Chain (Figure 11) that showed how all the stakeholders were linked and what their duties and responsibilities were. We then explained what each stakeholder stated was a shortcoming, or challenge on their part and in connection with the other stakeholders. These challenges broke

the links between all the stakeholders (marked with a red X) [See Figure 11]. During the interviews, both the national government and the county government representatives stated that there was little communication between the two, even though the national government was supposed to provide funding to the county government. One national government representative stated that the people in the county government were not doing their job. The county government representatives on the other hand stated that the national government was not fulfilling its end of the bargain to provide the funds. While the SHG stated that they did not receive any assistance from the national and county government as well as the administration, the national government stated that the SHG were not following the instructions provided to enable them to be registered, and the administration stated that the members of the SHG did not attend barazas (public meetings) and did not specify what they wanted to be addressed. Thus, the administration did not see the need to ask representatives from the national and county government to come and speak at the barazas.

The group was then given time to discuss these challenges and each stakeholder explained their challenge.

Figure 11. Links and challenges between the stakeholders

National Government (NG)

County Government (CG)

Self –Help Groups (SHG)

Administration

NG: SHG do not follow instructions

SHG: NG does not provide information

NG: there is little connection between NG & CG

CG: NG does not provide money that it is supposed to

Giving loans to the self-help groups

To register the self-help groups

Give money to the county government

Register at the national government

Use the money of the national government for the self-help groups

NG: Have not spoken at barazas

Give speeches or advice in the barazas

Giving advice to self-help groups

CG: Do not have the resources to give advice or monitor the SHG

SHG: They do not get advice from county government

Getting advice from the county government

Monitoring the self-help

Ask for national representatives to give advice in barazas

Give advice or speeches in barazas

Ask for barazas & Attend barazas

AD: Have not seen the need to call the NG

Giving information to the self-help groups through Barazas

Ask for county representatives to give advice in barazas

SHG: do not ask for barazas or attend them

AD: did not get the request for barazas

CG: have not spoken at barazas

AD: have not seen the need to call the CG

As shown in Figure 11, the national government (green), the county government (red) and the administration (blue) each have a role to play to assist SHG (purple). Others who were not included in the chart, but have roles to play are political leaders and nonprofit organizations (NGOs). The national government takes care of the registration and monitors the SHG, the county government is supposed to give advice and monitor the SHG as well. The administration acts like the middle person. It provides barazas (public meetings) through the chief to the people in the community. According to the chief, meetings are planned based on the needs of the people.

The leaders and members of the SHG stated that they do not receive any advice from the national and county government. They stated that when they go to the national government to get registered, they have to give bribes and it takes a while before they get registered. They also stated that the chief (administration) was not much help because he also wanted to get something in order to direct them to where they needed to go. The representative of the national government first stated that the members of the SHG do not get registered because they do not follow instructions. When we told him that the members of the SHG complained about having to give bribes, and the fact that they did not get good information on how to fill out forms and the requirements, the representative stated that the national government is supposed to provide funding go to the respective SHG and monitor their undertakings, but it does not have enough funding to do so. The representatives of the county government stated that they were supposed to receive money from the national government to go to the field, but they did not receive any, so they did not have resources to work with the SHG. One of the chiefs (administration) stated that the people in the community did not attend barazas, so it was difficult to know what they needed so that he could arrange for it. He stated that he was able to arrange for someone from the county or national government to go and talk to the people in the community if needed.

After giving them the information, the floor was opened for discussion. The representative of the national government reiterated how the employees in his department are supposed to monitor the SHG by going to the field to see the plans and make sure the SHG is doing what it has stated in the Article of Incorporation. He stated that the funding was not trickling down to the department dealing with the SHG, and because of that, it was difficult for the employees to go where the SHG are located to make sure that they are doing what they say they are doing in their applications. He said that this made the department ask the people interested in registering the SHG to go to the office instead. He further stated that because there is no funding, they get college students who do internships with no pay to deal with the people going to register, so they are the ones who ask for bribes. However, he stated that there are posters all over the office saying that bribes should not be paid, so people should stop paying it. He said if asked for bribes, people should ask for the manager.

The representative of the county government stated that they receive money from the national government, but the money does not trickle down to the department which is supposed to give advise to groups interested in forming SHG. They therefore do not have any resources to go to the field. The representative further stated that there is no communication between the national government and the county government, something that was different before the devolution (division of the government). The leaders and members of the different SHG stated that they were not receiving any assistance even though they had that the government was assisting people in SHG with funding. Some members of the SHG said that they had to register in order to get the funding, but found it difficult to do so because they were not getting assistance. Others who had registered said the government funding was mainly going to the SHG that were connected to the people issuing the funding, and these providers also benefited from this funding. Others said that in order to get the funding, they had to pay a bribe to the issuers. One participant stated that the corruption was also being encouraged by the members of the SHG because they were willing to pay the bribes. Other participants stated that there were members of the community who were taking advantage of others with little knowledge by asking for their identification cards (one of the requirements for registration), and telling them that they would get money for them. They would then register the SHG, get a loan from the bank or funding from the government, and use it for their personal use. Other participants stated that the organizations that tried to educate the community on corruption were targeted because the leaders and people in the government did not want

the community to be aware of their rights.

3.7 Outcome and Steps Ahead

After the discussion, all the stakeholders agreed that the underlying problem that created the broken links was corruption. The secondary problem was the lack of correspondence among the different stakeholders. Since corruption was a big problem, the stakeholders decided to tackle it in small steps. One participant stated that the problem would be tackled if there was community mobilization. The first step to mobilize the community was to get civic education so that the community members would get knowledge on what they needed to do as citizens and what their rights were. Both participants in this challenge and the female rights challenge stated that people in the community need some kind of education on how to enhance themselves.

Even though some of the organizations that tried to educate the community were targeted by the politicians, the participants stated that there should be a way for the community members to get some education. The representative from the national government was willing to assist the different SHG that had not registered to do so. One of the aspiring leaders volunteered to get a

local organization that provides civic education (Uraia Trust) to start with training the people in the community, and we attended the first training the following week.

" Corruption is difficult to prove. You can't stop corruption as an individual, but as a community. Letters can be written to the Office of Registrar of Political Parties. Also, talk about what you learned when you go home"

Trainer (Kisii)

The second training was to be arranged by the local community. The

stakeholders also agreed to create a rapport amongst themselves.

The program coordinator of ADRA who we got in touch with after the focus group meeting stated that the organization provided adult education workshops to one SHG in particular since most of the members in the different SHG were not educated.. She also stated that the organization spoke to the members of the SHG about the disadvantages of female circumcision and the fact that it is outdated. While this seemed successful, the coordinator stated that the drawback that ADRA had was the fact that they could only reach out to many SHG because of lack of funding. She stated that ADRA would be willing to work with other local organizations to provide education on several topics to the community members.

4 Follow up

We had one last meeting, where the different SHG members agreed to pick two people in each of the SHG and two from the non-members group who would act as the spokespeople.

They agreed to make sure that they give information about the civic education training to the other members/group as well as any communication they would have with the national and county governments and the administration. They also agreed to forward any questions that the members had to these institutions. The spokespeople then signed an agreement and each of the groups got certificates for their participation.

5 Reflection and Recommendations

5.1 Was Culture one of the Barriers to enhancement?

One of the aims of the 7Senses Challenge was to find out whether cultural practices, among them female circumcision was a barrier to the economic enhancement. None of the interviewees mentioned culture as a challenge for enhancement during the interviews. On the contrary, some of the interviewees from the SHG stated that they managed to bring up the subject on the practice of female circumcision during the meetings and discussed how to overcome it. Members from one SHG (Wela) stated that they managed to get workshops from a local organization (ADRA) on female circumcision as well as adult education, and after the workshops, they were requested to act as agents and speak with their families and the community at large about the disadvantages of the practice. This was confirmed by the program coordinator of ADRA who stated that they provided workshops on the disadvantages of female circumcision and the fact that it is outdated, and they combined this with adult education, since most of the members in Wela SHG were not educated. Therefore, based on the findings, female circumcision, as a cultural practice, was not by itself a barrier to the enhancement of women in the SHG. Based on these results,

educating women to become economically enhanced can have an indirect effect on female circumcision, because the education can cover various subjects. Thus, both issues should not be looked at in isolation, but as part of the everyday challenges that the community faces.

Another cultural practice that we considered as a barrier to economic enhancement is the tendency to restrict women to household duties because they are not the "providers" of the household needs. According to the World Bank, constraints related to women's social empowerment have to do with patriarchal attitudes and social norms regarding women's roles that persistently limit women's ability to participate in community life. In some cultures, women's mobility is restricted, they are expected to stay at home, keep quiet in public meetings, and agree with decisions made by men (World Bank 2007).

Culturally in Kisii, as in various other places in Kenya, most of the decision-making is still in the hands of men (patriarchal tradition), regardless of whether they have been educated or not. Some scholars believe that this makes it difficult for women to participate in social, economic and political activities (gender inequality). While privileging men over women in virtually all areas of life reiterates the belief that men are stronger than women, some of the women we interviewed stated that they became creative when their spouses became difficult. When some men were

reluctant to give money to their spouses to pay the fees required by the SHG, for example, the women redistributed the money they got for food and household supplies so that they would still have the money to pay for the fees required by the SHG. The men then saw the benefits of the SHG, based on the contribution their spouses made to the house. They were eventually convinced that the SHG were (economically) beneficial to the household.

Thus, while it started as a barrier, the patriarchal tradition was tempered by the women not giving up, and the men then seeing the benefits that the SHG had to offer, and some even joining these SHG. While the men mostly saw the economic benefits of the SHG, they also realized that the women could make economic contributions in the household just as much as they did. The question however, is whether the men recognized the empowerment of women, expressed through their ability to independently make decisions or their interest was in the economic benefits that they enjoyed.

5.2   Co-Creation of Solutions
Based on the findings, we came to the conclusion that SHG provide benefits for both women and men in Kisii. While the most important benefit is both economic and social support, economic barriers keep them from enhancing themselves. The barriers are caused by lack of money, but mainly by corruption from the national

and county government as well as from the administration. The interviewees also stated that they lack the knowledge to know how to move forward or enhance themselves. We then went a step further, and together with the community, we co-created a solution to start curbing this corruption – through civic education of the community. This would assist them to understand what their rights are, and how they can use these rights to enhance themselves. The representative of the national government also availed himself and said he was happy to explain to the interested SHG what the requirements for registration were. Some of the local organizations were also willing to assist, but the problem they faced was lack of resources. Representatives of different SHG availed themselves to inform and update the other members on the trainings as well as speak on behalf of the groups.

5.3   Importance of Including the Community
Through the Women Empowerment Challenge, we learned that involving the community in the research is very helpful because not only did we determine the pattern and trend of gender related income activities, but also understood the attitude of the community members towards gender development as well as the biases and stereotypes. The people in the community took ownership of their own development. We collected data, analyzed it, and then presented this to

the community during the focus group meetings. The community was able to discuss the results and come up with the fact that it was corruption that was holding them back. Together with the community, we worked on the solution. It was great to see the community get involved in creating the solution. It was also eye-opening to see that culture was not one of the barriers, something that many scholars equate to lack of development.

By using Participatory Action Research, we presented the results to the community through the focus group meetings without pointing at individual people. The participants themselves deduced from the results presented in the third focus group meeting that corruption was the main problem in the community.

5.4   Corruption in Kenya

Corruption is a topic that is well known in Kenya. While the subject of corruption was not brought up during individual interviews, it came up during the focus group meetings. The leaders of the SHG said it was difficult to get assistance from the national government and the leaders. The members stated that they were told they would get some funding after establishing the SHG, but didn't get any. During the last SHG, several participants stated that only the SHG that were affiliated with the people who were giving funding would get any. The funding was unfairly distributed, even though some of the members felt that they had fulfilled the requirements. Furthermore, both women and men in the community experience corruption on a day-to-day basis. The authorities (the chief and police force), for example have been trying to stop the brewing and drinking of an illicit alcoholic brew (chang'aa), which is said to extend the problem of poverty. They do this by conducting spontaneous raids in the community, and arresting those brewing and drinking it. However, the same authorities have made arrangements with some of the brewers, so they get payments from them, and therefore do not raid these homes.

Corruption, as experienced in and defined by the community, covers a wide range of exploitative practices, such as both the giving and taking of bribes, which are perceived as strongly linked to non-delivery of services and poor leadership. Thus, corruption in this case is perceived as misuse of power and illegal actions. This kind of corruption thus acts as a bottleneck preventing women (and men) from accessing other forms of services and opportunities, like bank loans and government funding. The participants stated that there was nothing much they can do because they are unable to protest. Thus, they lack voice in the political system and are afraid to speak out.

5.5 Strategies of Combating Corruption

The participants perceived that their groups need education (through capacity building) and information in general on how they can obtain registration for their SHG, their rights and how to increase productivity in the groups. During the third focus group meeting, the representative of the national government stated that he was happy to assist the SHG to obtain their registration by ensuring the that information related to laws on SHG is easily accessible, and can be practically utilized by local communities. The representative also raised awareness by stating that the people going to inquire about registration of their SHG should not accept to pay a bribe, but should instead ask for a supervisor. The representative also stated that there are signs in the national office asking people not to pay bribes, and people should make use of them. Further, the representative stated that another effective strategy would be community mobilization. The participants agreed that this can be achieved by first educating the community about bribery's impact on the everyday lives of both women and men.

Based on the results, the participants agreed during the third focus group meeting that the government and local organizations need to train community organizers to disseminate information about laws and mechanisms to redress corruption. The national government representative stated that the national government representatives can work with chiefs to host public dialogue forums so the community members can discuss and report corruption, thus ensuring that elected leaders understand local contexts and develop constituencies among grassroots groups. The program coordinator of ADRA stated that the organization works with the government, and would like to cooperate in issues of educating the community.

In looking at the benefits and challenges of the different SHG, we realized that both women and men in the community yearn for access to knowledge and resources which can contribute to more control over the circumstances which influence lives.

6 Conclusion

The Women Empowerment Challenge aimed to find out whether and how women in Kisii are empowered economically (and otherwise) through the self-help groups. From January to March 2017, we used a Participatory Action Research trajectory where we interviewed several stakeholders and held three focus group meetings and a concluding meeting in order to find out the benefits and challenges of SHG membership. Observation was used to help us get the feel for how things are organized and prioritized, how people interrelate, and what are the cultural parameters during one of the SHG meetings and during focus group meetings. Photo elicitation was also applied in order to allow the participants to use the images to explain their thoughts, feelings and experiences. Results from these methods showed that women and men in Kisii, Kenya are finding that there's strength in numbers: if they pool their resources together in SHG of their own creation, they can radically change their lives and the lives of their families and communities. Based on the research, we concluded that both women and men benefited from the SHG and women sometimes needed the help of men to be able to empower themselves. The two main challenges in the community were lack of education (awareness) and corruption.

While patriarchy and male domination as a culture are visible in ways in which households in Kisii make decisions that affect women's access to social, political and economic institutions to the ways in which male-dominated policy-level leadership makes decisions about who can access these institutions, the findings showed that some of the men were initially hesitant about women joining the SHG, but they changed their minds when they saw the benefits they enjoyed from these groups.

Corruption is an issue that has substantial impact on the community members in general. This leads to limited access to resources, especially for women because of their domestic responsibilities. The Challenge findings showed that the Kisii women and men remain exposed to corruption and the existing national mechanisms are inadequate to address the issues faced by the Kisii community around this issue. It is in this context that promoting grassroots participation becomes vitally important. Participants agreed that both women and men in the community should be mobilized and educated to bring the issue of corruption to light. One organization (Uraia Trust) volunteered to provide civic education, and even organized one training during our PAR trajectory –the Women Empowerment Challenge. Another organization, ADRA, which has provided adult education as well as training on the dangers of female circumcision before, was willing to continue working with the community

if funding is provided by the government.

Corruption at the point of service delivery that affects the community and, by extension, denies the women and men of Kisii access to essential public services, should continue to be targeted through education and creating awareness. The community should continue to capitalize on the momentum created through this Challenge and the commitments made during the third focus group meeting, mainly the education provided by Uraia Trust. During the third focus group meeting, the national government representative stated that individuals should take actions to combat corruption by resisting demands for bribes and reporting the activities of corrupt officials when trying to register for the SHG. This can reduce abuse of power by public officials and improve economic efficiency. People can also accelerate tackling this problem by asking questions and refusing to deal with corrupt businesses and government representatives. Local organizations can also take the initiative to monitor public works and investigate the extent to which public officials have fulfilled their commitments.

It is not only important but essential for citizens to be empowered to fight corruption because they are the ones who bear the brunt of it, have direct experience of it and suffer from it. Fighting corruption requires continuous effort. In Kisii, this can involve the continuous training by Uraia Trust and identification of other training needs. Increased awareness and better reporting are fundamental to increasing knowledge and learning in the community.

7 References

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