



Women and liveability – Best practices of empowerment from Kenya

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Abstract

How to survive and make ends meet and how to improve the quality of life are daily and persistent livelihood issues and liveability challenges preoccupying disadvantaged communities in underdeveloped and developing countries. In politically volatile and HIV hazardous Kenya life struggles could be complex and challenging for womenfolk who more often than not are left on their own to cope with daily liveability problems. Through examining the findings from secondary information sources this paper illustrates three cases of how women helped make the best of empowerment projects geared to make the livelihood and liveability of themselves, their family and community better and more meaningful. It also highlights the institutional and organizational traits that were also the success factors of the empowerment projects.

Keywords: empowerment projects, Kenya, liveability, livelihood, success factors, womenfolk

Introduction

Kenya has been described as "the cradle of humanity" following the discovery in the Great Rift Valley of some of the earliest evidence of man's ancestors. Situated on the equator on Africa's east coast (Figure 1), Bantu Swahili culture and trade shaped Kenya from the 1st to 19th century. The Swahili built Mombasa into a major port city and established trade links with other nearby city-states, as well as commercial centres in Persia, Arabia, and even India.

From 1888–1962 Kenya was under British colonialism during which the *Nandi* were the first ethnicity to be put in a native reserve to stop them from disrupting the building of the Kenya–Uganda railway, while the interior central highlands were settled by British and other European farmers, who became wealthy farming coffee and tea. By the 1930s, approximately 30,000 white settlers lived in the area and gained a political voice because of their contribution to the market economy. The central highlands were already home to over a million members of the Kikuyu people, most of whom had no land claims in European terms and lived as itinerant farmers. To protect their interests, the European settlers banned the growing of coffee, introduced a hut tax, and the landless were granted less and less land in exchange for their labour. A massive exodus to the cities ensued as their ability to provide a living from the land dwindled (Mugo Gatheru, 2005). From October 1952 to December 1959, Kenya was under a state of emergency arising from the Mau Mau rebellion against British rule (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenya>)

After independence from Britain in 1963, politics was dominated by the charismatic Jomo Kenyatta. He was succeeded in 1978 by Daniel arap Moi, who remained in power for 24 years. The ruling Kenya African National Union, Kanu, was the only legal political party for much of the 1980s. Violent unrest -

and international pressure - led to the restoration of multi-party politics in the early 1990s. But it was to be another decade before opposition candidate Mwai Kibaki ended nearly 40 years of Kanu rule with his landslide victory in 2002's general election. Despite President Kibaki's pledge to tackle corruption, some donors estimated that up to \$1bn had been lost to graft between 2002 and 2005. Other pressing challenges include high unemployment, crime and poverty.

Kenya was shaken by inter-ethnic violence which followed disputed elections in 2007. Several prominent Kenyans stand accused of crimes against humanity for allegedly inciting the violence, and the authorities are increasingly sensitive to any attempts to stir up communal tension. Fortunately, the elections of 2013 passed off without violence and resulted in victory for Uhuru Kenyatta, the son of independence leader Jomo Kenyatta (BBC News, 2014).

Ecologically, the Kenyan Highlands comprise one of the most successful agricultural production regions in Africa; glaciers are found on Mount Kenya, Africa's second highest peak; unique physiography supports abundant and varied wildlife of scientific and economic value. With its scenic beauty and abundant wildlife, Kenya is one of Africa's major safari destinations. Droughts, however, frequently put millions of people at risk apart from various environmental degradation of water pollution from urban and industrial wastes, of water quality from increased use of pesticides and fertilizers, of water hyacinth infestation in Lake Victoria, of deforestation, soil erosion, desertification and poaching.

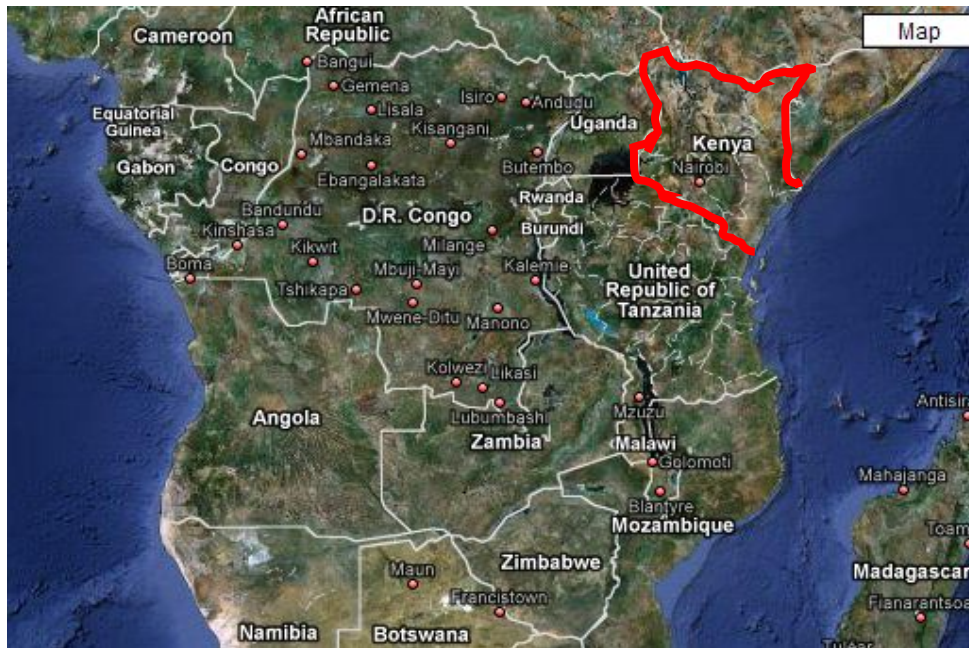


Fig. 1. Location of study

Economic profile

The regional hub for trade and finance in East Africa, Kenya has been hampered by corruption and by reliance upon several primary goods whose prices have remained low. In 1997, the IMF suspended Kenya's Enhanced Structural Adjustment Program due to the government's failure to maintain reforms and curb corruption. A severe drought from 1999 to 2000 compounded Kenya's problems, causing water and energy rationing and reducing agricultural output. As a result, GDP contracted by 0.2% in 2000. The IMF, which had resumed loans in 2000 to help Kenya through the drought, again halted lending in 2001 when the government failed to institute several anticorruption measures. Despite the return of strong rains

in 2001, weak commodity prices, endemic corruption, and low investment limited Kenya's economic growth to 1.2%. Growth lagged at 1.1% in 2002 because of erratic rains, low investor confidence, meager donor support, and political infighting up to the elections. In the key December 2002 elections, Daniel Arap Moi's 24-year-old reign ended, and a new opposition government took on the formidable economic problems facing the nation. After some early progress in rooting out corruption and encouraging donor support, the Kibaki government was rocked by high-level graft scandals in 2005 and 2006. In 2006, the World Bank and IMF delayed loans pending action by the government on corruption. The international financial institutions and donors have since resumed lending, despite little action on the government's part to deal with corruption. Post-election violence in early 2008, coupled with the effects of the global financial crisis on remittance and exports, reduced GDP growth to 2.2% in 2008, down from 7% the previous year.

Low infrastructure investment threatens Kenya's long-term position as the largest East African economy, although the Kenyatta administration has prioritized infrastructure development. Unemployment is high at around 40% placing Kenya at 190 in comparison to the world. The country has chronic budget deficits. Inflationary pressures and sharp currency depreciation peaked in early 2012 but have since abated following low global food and fuel prices and monetary interventions by the Central Bank. Recent terrorism in Kenya and the surrounding region threatens Kenya's important tourism industry. Kenya, in conjunction with neighboring Ethiopia and South Sudan, intends to begin construction on a transport corridor and oil pipeline into the port of Lamu in 2014 (CIA, 2014).

- GDP (purchasing power parity): \$61.65 billion (2008 est.); \$79.9 billion (2013)
- GDP per capita (PPP): \$1,600 (2008 est.); \$1,800 (2013 est.)
- Labor force by occupation: - agriculture: 75% (2003), 75% (2007); - industry and services: 25 % (2003), 25 % (2007)
- Population below poverty line: 50% (2000), 43.4% (2012 est.)
- Distribution of family income - Gini index: 44.9 (1997), 42.5 (2008 est.) country comparison to the world: 48

Source: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ke.html>

Social profile

Although Kenya's population has increased from 39,002,772 in 2009 to 45,010,056 in 2014 the growth rate has slowed down from 2.691% to 2.11% respectively taking into consideration the effects of excess mortality due to AIDS which can result in lower life expectancy, higher infant mortality, higher death rates, lower population growth rates, and changes in the distribution of population by age and sex than would otherwise be expected. The national sex ratio is even in 2014 although both sexes have improved life expectancy at birth : male from 57.49 years in 2009 to 62.06 years in 2014 and female from 58.24 years to 65.01 years respectively. Maternal mortality, however, remains high at 360 deaths /100,000 live births (2010), the 30th highest in the world.

With health expenditure at only 4.5% of GDP (2011) it is not surprising that there is only 0.18 physicians (2011) and 1.4 beds (2010) for every 1,000 population. Drinking water source has improved for 82.3% of the urban population and only for 44.9% of the rural population (2012). By contrast, improved sanitation facility access only benefits less than 30 per cent of urban and rural population. For 68.7% of urban and 70.9% of rural population their sanitation facility remains unimproved (2012). Thus, the degree of risk of major infectious diseases is still very high ranging from food or waterborne diseases such as bacterial and protozoal diarrhea, hepatitis A, and typhoid fever, vector borne diseases such as malaria and dengue fever, and Rift Valley fever, and water contact disease, in particular, schistosomiasis (2013). Undernourishment has seen 16.4% (2009) of Kenyan children under the age of 5 years underweight. What is most worrying about Kenyan current health risk is the adult prevalence rate

of HIV/AIDS which stood at 6.1% (2012) the 12th highest in the world. A total of 1.646 million (2012) lived with this disease the 4th highest in the world, and 57,500 deaths in the country were due to HIV/AIDS in 2012 the 7th highest in the world.

Urbanization increases from 22% of total population in 2008 to 24% in 2011. It is encouraging that Kenya managed to spend 6.7% of its GDP (2010) for education, the 28th highest in the world resulting in a relatively high national literacy rate of 87.4% for the population aged 15 and over. The female literacy rate in 2010 is 84.2% up from 79.7% in 2003 while that of the male stagnates at 90.6% for the same years. Both genders enjoyed a school life expectancy of 11 (2009).

Given an adequate span of proper education child labour – the employment of children ages 5-14 which totaled 2,146,058 or 26 % (2000) is significantly lower than Ethiopia's 10,693,164 or 53 % of the population (2005).

Kenya's population is made up of several ethnic groups, namely, Kikuyu 22%, Luhya 14%, Luo 13%, Kalenjin 12%, Kamba 11%, Kisii 6%, Meru 6%, other African 15%, non-African (Asian, European, and Arab) 1%. They profess a wide range of religious affiliations of Protestant 45%, Roman Catholic 33%, Muslim 10%, indigenous beliefs 10%, other 2%. Although Kenya's ethnic diversity has produced a vibrant culture, in the present day this diversity is also a source of conflict.

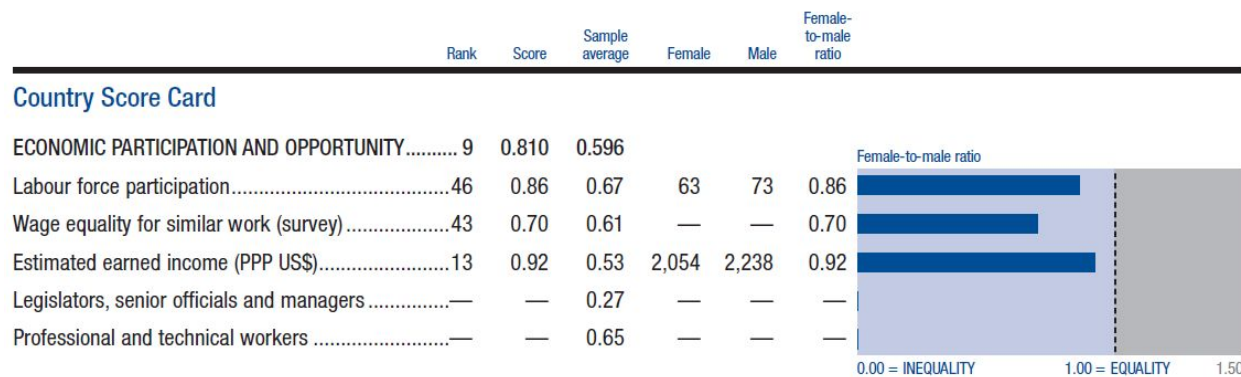
State of socio- economic participation of women in the country

Mixed achievement and performance characterize the state of socio-economic participation of women in contemporary Kenya. While the overall participation of women in the labour force goes down by seven per cent from 76% in 2009 to 63% in 2014 the women's estimated earned income has improved from USD 1,295 to USD 2,054, an increase of 58% (Table 1). Women predominate in services at 75% in 1995-2003 followed by agriculture at 16% and industry at 10% for the same period (UNDP 2006).

Table 1. Gender comparison in economic activity

Gender Gap Subindexes	Rank	Score	Sample average	Sample		Female-to-male ratio
				Female	Male	
Economic Participation and Opportunity	50	0.683	0.594			
Labour force participation	35	0.86	0.69	76	88	0.86
Wage equality for similar work (survey)	13	0.77	0.66	—	—	0.77
Estimated earned income (PPP US\$)	2	0.82	0.52	1,295	1,577	0.82
Legislators, senior officials, and managers	119	0.05	0.30	5	95	0.05
Professional and technical workers	—	—	0.84	—	—	—

Source: <http://www.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap2009/Kenya.pdf>



Source: http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GGGR14/GGGR_CountryProfiles.pdf (p.226)

Women, nevertheless, remain the more hard-pressed when it comes to coping with livelihood and liveability challenges. For instance, although under official law women have the right to inherit land from their fathers and deceased husbands, cultural, informational and institutional barriers often prevent women from claiming their rights. As a result, women are increasingly marginalized and pushed into extreme poverty, negatively affecting their contribution to Kenya’s economic growth. Further, while women in Kenya are well represented in the labor market, gender discrimination in the formal labour sector persists because women’s earnings are less than men’s, women and men are occupationally segmented, women often work under poor conditions, and holidays or leaves are rarely granted. Fear of losing their only source of income often prevents women from seeking legal redress against their employers. Traditional notions of women’s role in society, which often confine women to the ‘inner’ sanctuary of the house while men interact with the ‘outside’ world, mean that women’s understanding of their rights is often limited. At the same time, the institutions charged with protecting their rights often reflect and perpetuate women’s marginalization from local power structures. Consequently, their legal needs are not taken seriously or are indeed ignored. As many of these needs link to economic livelihood, lack of access to justice sends women into an inescapable cycle of poverty and/or dependence.

Best practice project 1: Unlimited Masterpeace-Kenya microcredit loans

Project initiators, location and background

Unlimited MasterPeace Kenya was initiated out of the dire need of creating partnerships and joining hands with impoverished people to alleviate poverty. The organisation is working in three different provinces of Kenya, focusing specifically on five development areas (DA) of Mombasa, Kwale and Malindi, all located in the Coast province, Kibera slum in Nairobi, and Chemorut village in the Rift Valley.

Project design

Most women in developing countries normally do all of the essential work in and around the house (e.g. cooking, raising the children, fetching water, etc.) and they do not generally get involved in any income-generating work. Hence, these women do not have control over the family income. They are also denied the right to own and inherit land or property.

In order to address these issues, Unlimited MasterPeace has implemented a Capacity Building Program that trains women’s groups with various skills, including: book keeping, loan appraisal, micro-enterprise business skills, leadership skills, and the formation of a constitution. In parallel with this

program, the organisation has also started to provide microcredit loans to women's groups, enabling them to establish their own micro-enterprises in order to empower them economically.

In 2008, two volunteers from Give Kids a Chance Foundation went to Kenya in association with Unlimited MasterPeace, and thanks to the generosity of independent donors, microcredit loans were given to women's groups in Kibera, Malindi, Mombasa and Chemorut.

Project impact

By 2009, 20 women's groups have benefited from microcredit loans, for a total of 400 women. This, in turn, means that 260 households have access to credit in order to improve their livelihoods. It is the intention of the organisation to establish Community Based Microfinance Institutions (CMFI) in each of the development areas. These CMFIs will be managed by the women themselves through their various umbrella networks.

Within the various women's groups can be found single mothers, elders and widows; many of whom are directly affected by HIV/AIDS. Mwanakombo, a forty year-old woman who is one of the beneficiaries of the microcredit program, shares the following:

I have been married to my husband for over ten years and I have not been able to give him children, so he decided to marry a second wife. This led to all the attention being given to the second wife and I was neglected and discriminated by my husband, his family and the community at large. Since receiving a microcredit loan from Unlimited MasterPeace-Kenya, I was able to start my own business, hence becoming economically stable and independent. Ironically, now I receive all the attention and respect from my husband, his family and the community, this is because I have become the breadwinner in the house.

Best practice project 2: Women's water resource management project

Project initiators, location and background

MADRE is an international women's human rights organization based in New York, USA that partners with community-based women's groups worldwide facing war and disaster as its sister organizations. Its mission is to advance women's human rights by meeting urgent needs in communities and building lasting solutions to the crises women face. Together with its sister organizations MADRE meets basic needs for food, clean water, and health care. When local women provide these vital services to their community, they build new skills and step up as leaders. This way MADRE also trains grassroots women's groups to advocate for policies based on rights, locally, nationally and globally.

In Kenya MADRE works with the women-led Samburu village of Umoja the Emayian Maasai community of Southwest Kenya to enable families to adapt to climate change and defend their human rights—including women's rights and the collective rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Land degradation and desertification - exacerbated by climate change - are causing protracted droughts that are killing the livestock on which pastoralist Samburu people depend for their food and economic survival. Each day, women from the Emayian Maasai community had to gather water for household use before 9 am. After that, grazing cattle and other animals used the water source.

As indigenous and nomadic peoples, these families have long been discriminated against by the state, which has expropriated much of their traditional grazing land. As water sources dry up, women's tough and time-consuming work of gathering and hauling household water increases dramatically, forcing them to walk for as many as six hours a day for their families' water supplies. Girls' school enrollment drops as they trek longer distances to find water. Risk of being attacked by alligators and other wild animals that congregate at the banks of fresh water rises each time the women are forced to journey further from the

areas they know. The threat of cholera, typhoid and other deadly diseases caused by parasites and microbes that live in contaminated water is heightened when women pull water from new sources.

This project was initiated by a local women's group that had become concerned because their primary water source was shared with livestock, meaning that it became contaminated and the area around it was being eroded due to heavy use.

Project design

In partnership with its sister organization, the Indigenous Information Network (IIN), MADRE supported the installation of a community water collection point and a drinking trough for livestock for the Emayian Maasai community of Southwest Kenya. These innovations protect a local water source and provide clean water to the people drawing water from it. After consulting with community elders and youth representatives, the local Umoja women's group reached out to IIN and MADRE. Eight villages have banded together to form a Water Committee – a representative group which will provide oversight of physical implementation, capacity-building, and expenditures, and report back to community members.

Over the course of several weeks in April 2009, community members worked together to construct a barrier to protect the water source. The barrier has outlets to allow water to flow freely downstream and be carried by pipes to the community collection point and watering trough. Project participants also constructed a water collection point that is easily accessible for community members and the large watering trough for livestock (Fig.2).

As part of the project, participants came together to determine guidelines for water use and how to address the misuse of any components of the water project. Community members also discussed plans to plant native trees in the areas surrounding the water source and collection point in order to prevent erosion and water contamination (Fig.3).



Fig.2. *Construction of a barrier was the first step to providing clean water*



Fig.3. *A pipe carries clean water from the source to a collecting point that is easily accessible for community members*



Fig.4. *Livestock now access clean water from a trough*

Expansion and development of a cooperative income-generating project. The women of Umoja make and market traditional Samburu beadwork to help support their families. Profits are invested in a communal sickness and disability fund that enables the women to protect one another through hard times. A plan to strengthen local capacities by providing trainings in the administration of the water system and the management of natural resources. Support to begin a transition from herding cattle to raising camels, which require less water (<http://www.madre.org/index.php?s=2&b=20&p=51>).

Project impact

The bringing of potable water to the village, ended women's hours-long, daily ordeal of collecting contaminated water from a crocodile-infested river. Livestock now access clean water from a trough (Fig. 4). Not only are they developing the skills and resources to survive and adapt to the effects of climate change. They are mobilizing to defend Samburu rights to land, water, health and education services. Their beading project has received international attention and this means the potential of increased revenues coming into the villages. In short, MADRE and partners have created local economic development projects that meet urgent needs in the community, conserve natural resources, and promote long-term solutions based on human rights.

Best practice project 3: New Vision Sewing Co-operative

Project initiators, location and background

Funded entirely by Gale and Shelby Davis, the program is a major philanthropic force in promoting international understanding. Currently, Davis philanthropy partners with 92 colleges and universities to internationalize the American undergraduate experience through scholarships awarded to over 2,000 students. In 2009 Grace Ochieng, class of 2012 at St. Lawrence University, Canton, New York, and a native of Lwala was awarded \$10,000 from the Davis Projects for Peace (Fig. 5) to initiate a social enterprise project in Lwala.

Lwala is a rural village in western Kenya near Lake Victoria with a population of about 1,500 people. The village is located in Nyanza Province, the region of Kenya with the highest prevalence of HIV (15%). Subsistence farming is the main activity. The village does not have running water or electricity. There is a primary school, and a medical clinic opened in April 2007 (www.sonsoflwala.org).



Fig. 5. Grace Ochieng , left, receiving Clinton Global Initiative University Outstanding Commitment Award in the summer of 2010

In Kenya, the lack of sanitary supplies contributes to high rates of school absences and dropouts among girls. The gender gap in education perpetuates structural gender inequality and poorer health among women and children. Poor menstrual hygiene has an immediate, significant impact on the health and well-being of adolescent girls and thus a long-term impact on community health. Through the provision of sanitary pads, Grace Ochieng aims to decrease school absences among menstruating girls and improve the community's health and well-being.

Project design

Grace Ochieng would establish a micro-financed sewing project to produce innovative, reusable, washable, and environmentally friendly menstrual sanitary pads in the rural village of Lwala, Kenya. A People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) support group in Lwala would be trained in appropriate business management and machine sewing skills. Grace Ochieng would work with the twenty-member PLWHA group to establish the project. The group members are active in their community and have been willing to overcome cultural stigma surrounding HIV by living openly with the disease. They have also established adult basic education classes for community members, demonstrating their initiative, drive, and leadership.

Members of the group will be trained on how to sew the pads using a treadle machine, coached on how and where to purchase the materials, and oriented to running a business. Members of the group will take on roles and responsibilities for sewing, managing the expenses and income, distributing the pads to schools, educating students about menstrual hygiene, and developing new markets. They will be encouraged to sew additional pads, to sell them, and to profit by this commerce.

A market for the pads would have to be developed among schools and health care facilities in the area. To encourage this process, the Grace Ochieng would purchase the pads that the women make and distribute them to the schools and health facilities during the first year. After this, the health facilities, schools, women and girls in the village would be encouraged to buy the pads directly from the women. Purchase of the pads was budgeted into the project for the first year while a market was developed. Carrying cases containing 5 pads would be distributed to menstruating girls at local primary and secondary schools during the first year, and girls would be educated about menstrual hygiene and puberty.

Local production of cloth pads would provide a source of income for women and their families. In addition, the project would improve school attendance among menstruating girls in local schools.

The Lwala Village Development Committee, a group of community leaders who currently oversee the clinic's operations would provide continual guidance to the project to ensure its success even after Grace Ochieng returns to the U.S.

Grace Ochieng would improve her skills at machine sewing with specific emphasis on sewing the reusable pads and how to teach this to others. She would consult with willing faculty advisers and experienced Peace Corps workers about how to train villagers to successfully manage a business. She would also explore the purchase of needed materials in Kenya and the U.S if necessary: technologically appropriate sewing machines, quality scissors, special fabrics, thread, accounting books, etc. In addition, she would consult with the Forum for African Women Educationalists in Nairobi, Kenya, an NGO that has completed a similar project and has published information about best practices for sewing the pads and teaching menstrual hygiene; coordinate the construction of a Project Site in the village where women can manufacture pads ; train members of the PLWHA group in needed skills and start the manufacture and distribution of pads to students; report on the people trained, the sewing and business skills acquired, the pads produced, the pads distributed, and the plans to expand the market; and continue (unfunded) to monitor and support the PLWHA group by reviewing monthly reports for at least one year. The Lwala Clinic Director will facilitate this review by scanning and emailing reports prepared by the PLWHA group (<http://www.davisprojectsforpeace.org/projects/2009/292pro.pdf>)

Project impact

Grace Ochieng pilot-tested the reusable pads and conducted a user acceptance pilot study in 2008. The pads, which have four cloth layers including cotton flannel, cotton batting for absorption, waterproof fabric, and a fleece outer layer, were sewn in the United States using a pattern developed by Goods4Girls (www.goods4girls.org). Kits containing five cloth sanitary pads were distributed to 47 menstruating girls at the Lwala primary school during a day of hygiene and sex education facilitated by the staff of a local clinic. Instruction on pad washing and use was provided.

After three months, Grace Ochieng conducted a controlled follow-up survey. Forty-three of the 47 girls given reusable pads were interviewed as well as a control group of 48 girls from a neighboring primary school. All girls who received the pad kits were using them, were pleased, and were no longer missing school because of their periods. Every girl reported having sufficient water for washing pads, and over 90% of girls had adequate privacy for washing and drying pads. In the control group, 69% of the girls reported missing school regularly because of their periods. Instead of pads, 40 girls used only pieces of cloth, while three girls used grass.

The expected impacts of this project after 2009 are fourfold : (1) empowerment of women in a rural Kenyan village through the enhancement of business skills and the creation of an income source; (2) an enhanced local economy; (3) improved girl-child school attendance in local primary and secondary schools; and (4) improved community health through the empowerment of women and the education of girls. Overall, this project will bring a measure of peace to a village in western Kenya through the economic and social empowerment of marginalized individuals.

By 2011, New Vision Sewing Co-operative has eight women in full-time employment and 12 in partial employment as subcontracted tailors. About 2,000 menstrual pads were manufactured, and the project coordinated the manufacture of 400 school uniforms for girls in Class Six to Class Eight in Kadianga, Minyenya, Lwala and Kameji Primary schools. The organisation made about half of the uniforms and sub-contracted parent tailors at each of the primary schools to make some of the others. About 2,000 cotton bags were also manufactured in conjunction with the project's partner, Thistle Farms. an American social enterprise run by women who have survived violence, prostitution and addiction. New Vision's partners are working to change lives by supplying sewn sanitary pads and uniforms to pupils (http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/?articleID=2000035535&story_title=To-the-rescue-with-sanitary-pads).

Conclusion

Socio-economic empowerment projects have enabled disadvantaged Kenyans to cope better with their livelihood and liveability challenges. Physical and mental health is pre-requisite of economic empowerment and health education enhances personal, family and community wellbeing.

Women are particularly instrumental in the empowerment projects not only because they are the inheritors of the issues and challenges but also because they have proven to be capable of making the projects doable. The Kenyan cases point to the fact that respect for the women's existential right makes the difference, and that faith in women as effective leaders for change in their families and communities secures success of projects. A special emphasis on remotely located women, on chronically neglected and physically disabled women adds value to the projects.

The Kenyan experience also underlines the vital role of prudent management and organization of liveability empowerment initiatives. Here, when a collectively felt need justifies the efforts ready funds pave the way for their implementation, sometimes with the help of a global-local network. Then an efficient on the ground mechanism guarantees implementation by inventing and utilizing creative techniques to ensure women's accessibility to the empowerment projects, and by training them to make the projects work.

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