

**Exclusion, poverty and inequality in decentralized Kenyan  
Forests: Bridging the divide**

**E. Obonyo, J. Mogoi, V. Oeba and P. Ongugo**

**Kenya Forestry Research Institute,  
P.O. Box 20412-00200  
Nairobi**

## **ABSTRACT**

Women's contributions are essential to the functioning of Kenya's economy. However, because women's contributions are not valued in the same way as men's, women consistently find themselves at a lower economic status than men. Women are largely excluded from economic decision-making, face low wages, have poor working conditions, limited employment and professional opportunities. Their unpaid work is also not measured and not valued in national accounts. Women often face inequality due to the fact that they earn less income and face unequal distribution of resources. The situation is further aggravated by lack of access to education and job segregation.

In the forestry sector, women face similar challenges. Despite the African women's role in the management of natural resources, the limited access to and lack of property rights has continued to escalate the cycle of poverty in which they are trapped. The traditional division of labour has also meant that women are almost solely the food providers for their families. In Kenya, this has forced women to depend more on the natural resources and being the main gender that produces food crops, they have a profound knowledge of plants, animals and other ecological processes. This calls for a more integrated approach in the decentralized forest management.

This paper therefore analyzes the situation of women with regard to decentralization of forest management in Kenya. Using IFRI/SANREM approaches, the paper identifies the major problems faced in promoting women's participation in the management of forests, and outlines the roles of women in forest management.

Results indicate that there are marked differences in participation in community projects and social groups/associations. There is an indication of uneven access, control and distribution of property rights and natural resource benefits. The paper further highlights power relationships in gendered environments and its impacts on the dominance of certain interest groups. Finally, the paper recommends strategies that can be used to overcome the constraints faced by women in NRM.

## **Introduction**

Successful local resource management requires local control over making and implementing rules about conservation, use and management of resources, as well as the authority to resolve disputes about the rules (Ostrom 1990). Along this line of thinking, the decentralization process of Kenyan forests has taken the form of Participatory Forest Management where local actors are expected to take

part in decision-making regarding the natural resource. Participation can be seen as an empowering and transformative process, which enables local people to conduct their own analysis and make their own decisions (Chambers 1997; Abdulwahid, 2005; Kerr et al. 2002; Hinchcliffe et al. 1999). It could also take the view of efficiency where beneficiaries have to be involved and participation is enacted through formation of groups, associations, and institutions involving concerned actors. In literal terms therefore, participation simply refers to collective inclusion in decision making (Aggarwal, 2001) of all forest stakeholders or communities. Inclusion and collectivity in this case would therefore mean the direct and indirect participation of all men, women, youth and children in a given community setting in the management of the shared resource.

In Kenya, decentralization of forest services to the community level has seen the formation of Community Forest Associations that should represent all the local actors. Although these forest Associations are meant to include and benefit all members of the community, a majority of the associations have excluded women from decision-making positions and memberships thus affecting equity and efficiency in management and benefit sharing. The decentralized form of governance has therefore raised important questions that need to be addressed especially in areas of exclusion, addressing poverty along gender lines and finally regarding issues of equity.

This paper therefore analyzes the situation of women with regard to decentralization of forest management in Kenya. It examines the position of women in forest organizations or associations to understand exclusion at local institutions. It further evaluates the social and economic factors associated with poverty and inequality that have contributed to the discrimination of women in natural resource management, and identifies the major problems faced in promoting women's participation in the management of forests.

The following section of this paper reviews some literature on exclusion, poverty and inequality in forest management and highlights the new forest policy in Kenya. The third section describes the methodology used for the study. The fourth section discusses major findings and finally, the last section concludes the study and gives recommendations.

## **Kenya's Gender Policies on Forestry and the Environment**

### **History of gender policies in Kenya**

In 1976, the Government of Kenya established a Women's bureau in the Ministry of Culture and Social Services. In 2004, the government established the National Commission on Gender and Development which was later elevated into the Department of Gender. The Department was to advise on the impact of all government policies on gender and work out strategies to eliminate all discrimination along gender lines. The Department was later elevated to a full fledged Ministry with Culture and Social Services whose core function is to promote, integrate and mainstream gender issues in all development activities (Kaudia and Obonyo, 2007).

The country's Sessional Paper on Gender (Republic of Kenya, 2006) significantly attributes the unequal status between women and men to socio-cultural attitudes held by men and women and their socialization. It also realizes that the conditions of women are constrained by poverty and their work is hardly recognized or paid. Existing laws and customs have further limited their access and control over resources. It recognizes that the processes and results of development programmes affect women and men differently. The Kenya Government is therefore undertaking various concrete steps to address these issues (Kaudia and Obonyo, 2007).

### **Gender Policy on Forestry and the Environment**

The policy advocates for programmes that take into consideration the environment and natural resource management issues that concern women, men, girls and boys (Republic of Kenya, 2006). The Government therefore recognizes that certain environmental issues have specific relevance to women. The policy therefore advocates for women's inclusion in decision-making process on policies, economic instruments and appropriate infrastructures.

There is the realization that there is a strong link between gender relations, poverty, the environment and development (Kaudia and Obonyo, 2007). The integration of demographic and gender factors into environment impact assessments and other planning and decision making processes to achieve sustainable development can be done through promoting and replicating women's knowledge on resource utilization, involving women organizations in environmental education and conservation programmes and evaluating development policies and programmes in terms of environmental impact and the resulting gender differences relating to access and use of natural resources (Obonyo and Kaudia, 2007, Republic of Kenya, 2006).

The new Forest Act of 2005 does not clearly state any particular gender clause, it clearly states in its procedures for awarding contracts that persons suitably qualified for the performance of specified activities would be granted equal rights.

The New Kenya Forest Service has also proposed to work closely with Forest Associations whose membership will be based on existing community structures (The Forests, 2007: Section 37).

The Act also consents to the formation of a forest level management committee consisting of representatives from all actors to implement the community forest management agreement. This would allow for gender-balanced representatives from the different stakeholders (Kaudia and Obonyo 2007). Equity in benefit sharing of forest resources with special consideration to the poor and the vulnerable members of the community (mostly women, aged, disabled and children) is promoted.

### **The question of Exclusion**

Conservation initiatives should take into account the relevance of gender in differentiating user groups and the relevance of these differences in the implementation of conservation programs (Schmink 1999; Rocheleau et al, 1996). Women rarely get to craft rules regarding forest management and neither do they participate in the planning process. This is despite their thorough knowledgeable of the forest resource brought about by their high dependence on the forest for products. They carry out a multiplicity of roles as producers, reproducers, and consumers so they have learnt to integrate complex systems other than specializing. For this reason, women may be more attentive to the ecosystem as a whole (Rocheleau et al, 1996) and have more experience in its utilization. Decision-making regarding the ecosystem should therefore take into account the women's knowledge base and experiences. Consequently, due to exclusion, women rarely benefit from forest conservation initiatives that would enrich their lives.

Exclusion also takes place with regard to species of choice. The nature of plants rights is engendered based on division of labor, and rights that are associated with each sex's distinct obligations to provide goods and services (Howard and Nabanoga, 2005). Women generally have a preference for species that contribute to subsistence economies such as grasses for fodder and other domestic uses. A majority of the men have preferences for species that would eventually provide cash so women's preferences are rarely discussed.

Although the new forest policy in Kenya expects communities to take part in decision making through the Community Forest Associations (CFAs) and therefore represent interests of the whole community, lessons from other parts of the world indicate that a majority of forest associations have left out gender balances in their set up thus excluding a big section of the community. Agarwal (2001) describes forest groups that draw members from whole communities but

are governed by executive groups usually made up of about 9-15 persons. There is participatory exclusions through limited membership of women in these groups and almost no representation in the executive that generally makes decisions on behalf of the group and the whole community. In some parts of Asia, only one household member can be represented in the forest groups and most of these have been male heads or in some cases, women are members by virtue of the husband's membership (Agarwal, 2001).

Experiences from other decentralized forests have shown that less than half of the forest groups have women representatives (Agarwal, 2001). Most of these women representatives had been chosen by other men without consultations and were rarely active in group activities. Some rarely attend meetings called by groups so it is highly unlikely that they would be consulted before any new ideas are adopted. Where women members attend meetings as expected, there has been very little impact since most are passive and their opinions are rarely heard or their issues addressed. It is also rare for women to get benefits accrued from the forest resource due to the decentralized system.

Agarwal (2001) discusses participation by women in community forest groups as determined by first, rules of entry where women need to be included in the groups so membership rules need to be more inclusive. They also need to be informed of any changes take place. Second, changes in social norms which include segregation of public space are necessary. Third, there must be changes in social perception especially by men towards women and fourth, property rights favouring women are important to increase the weight of their worth.

It is anticipated that with greater participation in framing, crafting and modifying rules, and where rules are fair and simple, and there are effective mechanisms for punishing offenders, then the decentralization process is likely to benefit all members of the community equitably.

### **Gender and Poverty in natural resource management**

Poverty in Kenya is predominantly linked to the rural households' large dependence on natural resources and inefficient agricultural practices. Around 65% of Kenya's population live in rural areas and depend on agriculture and biological and forest resources for their survival. The problem is further exacerbated by the growing population since only 7% of the country's area is arable land and 0.9% is permanent cropland. Further sub-division of land into smaller units is a growing problem. As a result, communities living adjacent to forests have turned to the natural resource for sustenance.

Many problems have been associated with the declining forest cover in most countries. First, women who are the primary food providers for their families are forced to walk longer distances in search of fuel wood and other products. This in turn impacts on other development activities thus decreasing subsistence income levels. For example, with more time spent gathering women have less time to tend to agriculture and livestock activities that contribute to their household economies. Longer distances traveled by women in search of subsistence products such as fodder and fuelwood have also had negative implications for the girl child who is often forced to assist with these domestic chores. The implication here is that their education is adversely affected thus subjecting them further to poverty.

There are obvious biases regarding resources between male and female-headed households and between male heads and their female partners. First, men and women use these natural resources (forests) for different reasons and in different ways. Women are the main food producers for their families (Chiuri and Nzioki, 1992), so they are more concerned with the subsistence products. Men generally concentrate more on products that are cash oriented. Second, there are differences in property ownership between males and females in most rural settings. Patriarchal social ordering of many societies in African countries makes access to resources tilted in favour of male members of society (Mbote, 2005). Men often own agricultural land, which is the basis of most rural economies, although women may have limited access rights to the land. Whereas access to land may give women the ability to plant food crops, lack of ownership rights may exclude tree-planting activities on the same piece of land. This would therefore mean more dependence on the forest for tree products and where conservation is interpreted as no cutting down of trees, women are likely to suffer even more. Lack of assets especially for female-headed households has further pushed women into poverty. Third, women are generally disadvantaged in labour markets and often earn less than their male counterparts due to the type of work accorded them or even for similar work (Agarwal, 1997).

### **Gender and Land tenure**

In forestry, policies that shape property rights play a major role in either promoting or inhibiting economic growth, equity of distribution, and sustainability of the resource base. It is only by understanding these property rights that it becomes possible to formulate practical policies aimed at economic growth in rural areas (Meizen Dick et al, 1997).

Land is the basis for shelter and community development. Land has always been recognized as a primary source of wealth, social status, and power (FAO, 2002). In most rural settings, access to land is a central issue because it is a crucial asset for food production. Rural women are responsible for half the

world's food production and they produce between 60 and 80 percent of the food in most developing countries (FAO 2002). In sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean, women produce up to 80 percent of basic foodstuffs while in Asia, between 50 and 90 percent of the work in the rice fields is done by women. But even after the harvest, rural women in developing countries are almost entirely responsible for storage, handling, stocking, marketing and processing. Yet they have no control over the land they farm.

Gender differences in land tenure must be recognized since many countries still lack an adequate system to support women's right to hold land rights independently of their husbands or male relatives. Statutory law often does not provide for women's independent rights and when such legislation does exist, mechanisms to enforce it are often absent (FAO 2002)

In traditional or "customary" societies, women's direct right to land especially through purchase or inheritance is rare. But in some societies, their user rights are more open since the household's food production largely relies on them. There are customary provisions for indirect access to land use through kinship relationships and their status as wives, mothers, sisters, or daughters. But user rights do not grant enough security for women and their dependants when traditional family structures dissolve. There is an increasing number of female headed households due to cases of rural to urban migration for employment, divorce, separation, or death. Day to day household decisions regarding food production and household economy have to be made by these women. But only a negligible number have secure land rights since a majority of them have very little or no social powers. They therefore lack a voice in community governance and even security as individuals under traditional or customary laws. Any attempt to change the status quo has often led to conflicts at all levels so whatever rights to access women possess are always at the will of the male relatives. In some cases, single, divorced or widowed women end up dependent on the goodwill of distant family members (FAO, 2002).

In Kenya, as in many other developing countries, women's access to land and housing is through a male relative. Most land is registered in the name of the eldest male head of the household. The registration process thus excludes most women from property ownership and weakens the position of women because it frees the title holder from the interference of other parties whose interests are not shown on the register (Mbote, 2005). In some communities in Africa, a widow will inherit land in 'trust' for her male children (providing they are minors). In others she will be given a life interest in the land. If she remarries, however, she risks forfeiting all claims to this land. Moreover, such arrangements only grant women access to land and property – not ownership, so they have no right to engage in or influence any transactions related to the land. But it is also



interesting to note that there are few societies where access to land stems from the female line therefore male partners and children may be adversely affected.

For effective equitable access to land, there must also be equitable access to transportation, credit, markets and other related factors. There must also be complete support of legal, customary, and family institutions to ensure effective access for men and women. Property rights regimes must be understood and acknowledged for gender equity to be created. There must also be effective provision of institutional structures that would protect and strengthen equitable access to land within the framework of a society's particular land policy goals (FAO 2002).

Making access to land more equitable does not mean addressing only the quantity of rights allocated. To make use of the rights and opportunities, rights to land must also be enforceable or secured by law (Mbote, 2005).

## ***Methodology***

### ***IFRI/ SANREM Tools***

IFRI (Ostrom and Wertime, 1995) and SANREM (Sustainable Agriculture and Natural Resource Management) research instruments were used to collect the data for the study. These were combined with some Participatory Rural Appraisal methods to collect more information from key informants and some focus group discussions. The IFRI program relates forest users and institutions through informal interviews to collect information on numerous entities that influence forest use. Data was collected from different sites using pre tested IFRI forms (the settlement form, user group forms and the association forms) to collect information on the study site and the community studied. The Association forms were used to collect data on the various forestry associations and gave more details on the gender balance. The data used on the results on Community Forest Associations was collected from 5 forests (Aberdares, Tugen Hills, Mt Kenya's Upper Imenti, Kakamega Forest and Ramogi). Community meetings were also held with members to get opinions and perceptions.

Through the SANREM programme, a questionnaire that collects household information from forest adjacent communities has been developed. This questionnaire supplements the information collected from IFRI. The questionnaire is divided into sections that gathers information on household characteristics, household assets, household well being and risk, household income and expenditure, forest rights and resources and participation in forest groups.

Data on the was collected from 3 forests (Ramogi, Tugen Hills Forest and Aberdares) and households were selected from villages adjacent to the IFRI forests. The selection of the households was randomly done. Chiefs from the sub locations were identified and visited and all the village heads assisted with sampling procedure.

The data was entered in ACCESS Programme and analysis carried out using EXCEL and SPSS programmes.

## **Results and discussions**

### **Social and Economic Factors associated with Poverty and Inequality**

#### **Sex of the household head and type of household**

The sex of the household head in any rural household determines the major decision maker in that particular household. Male and female-headed households have different access to and control over resources such as labour, capital, credit, land, and even trees. The accessibility and use of forest products are also largely determined by gender. Traditions and culture in many parts of Kenya have a large impact on tree planting activities and in many communities, tree-related activities are regarded as a purely male domain. Other than access and control, female-headed households also have fewer resources compared to male-headed households.

Results from this study indicated that 76% of all sampled households from 3 forests were male-headed, 11% were female headed with absentee husbands (mainly due to rural urban migration patterns) and 13 % were female headed but widowed.

#### **Age of household heads**

The age of the household head is important when looking at resources within a rural setting. Often times, the older, male household head has more resources, experience, and accessibility to externally initiated activities compared to a

younger one. In this case, with the new decentralized policy, the older household heads are more likely to be involved in planning and coordinating forestry activities within the village than the younger ones. Older women are also more constrained by cultural expectations compared to younger women because of their attachment to traditional beliefs. While the older women may be more vocal than the younger women, their views are generally ignored especially by men. Older male members of the community are therefore likely to benefit more from the decentralization process. The challenge though is that older people are often more conservative and more set in their ways so they may not be receptive to changes.

The results indicated that majority (27%) of the female headed households were aged between 51-60 years while a majority of the men (24%) were aged between 41-50 years (Table 1).

**Table 1: Sex and age of the household head**

Sex of household head	% frequency of age				
	20-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	60+
Male	22	23	24	22	9
Female	10	19	13	27	31

Overall comparison of age between male and female headed households using Mann-Whitney U and Wilcoxon tests showed that mean age rank for male and female headed households were 30 and 27 respectively. This was not significantly different ( $p=0.566$ ) showing that age was not a factor that would affect decision-making regarding natural resource management in the sampled communities. This also implies that issues regarding inequality and exclusion of women apply to all age groups.

### **Education of household heads**

The level of education is an important variable to consider within the forestry resource. It is widely believed that the higher the level of education of a person, the more receptive he/she is to changes, and therefore the more likely he/she is to undertake forest conservation activities. Education may also open up minds to the importance of managing the forest resource by all members of the community irrespective of their gender. In the new decentralized system, the level of education will also play a role in drawing up management plans by the community members for their given forests.

The results showed that majority (72%) of female-headed household had attained primary level of education compared to 41% of the male. None of the sampled female-headed households had attained college or university education (Table 2).

**Table 2: Education level of household heads**

Sex of head of household	% of male and female headed households				
	None	Primary level	Secondary level	College /university	Unknown
Male	13	41	36	8	3
Female	17	72	11	0	0

Result showed that the mean rank of education level for male and female headed households were 32 and 22 respectively. This was significantly different ( $p=0.027$ ) implying that male headed households had higher education levels than the female. This further confirms that women are excluded in opportunities that could improve their bargaining powers and in decision making in natural resource management. The results further prove that the girl child's education in forest communities is adversely affected. A majority of the females dropped out of school after attaining some level of primary education (72%).

### **Occupation of household head**

The heads of households were involved in a variety of occupation types which included full time farming, casual labour and other employment opportunities to supplement their income. The significance of this may be analyzed in several ways. One, that resources/income may differ from one household to another along gender lines. The assumption being that male headed households usually have more resources compared to female headed households. Two, that if the household head is a full time farmer, then he/she may not be overtly exposed to external factors and therefore may be less receptive to changes related to gender inclusiveness in management. Finally it assumed that if the household head has other sources of income, then he/she is less likely to depend on the forest solely for his livelihood and would spend more of his time outside the forest. All these factors have implications in the decentralized management system.

The results showed that 67% of female-headed households were full time farmers compared to 51% of male-headed households (Table 3). Most of the farmers across the region are small-scale peasant farmers. Most of the produce from their farms is utilized at a subsistence level so they are always forced to supplement with income from other sources. The data therefore shows that the

poverty levels of female-headed households were slightly higher than those of the men and corresponds with studies from other areas (Aggarwal, 2001). This implies that they depend more on the forest products and are likely to be more knowledgeable of the forest resource. The results also show that men have more income from external sources and therefore less time to take part in forest activities. But men have more decision making powers regarding the forest resource and are more involved in the day to day management of the forest so women's valuable knowledge and experiences are unlikely to be considered in the decentralization plans.

**Table 3: Occupation of households**

Sex of household head	Full time farmer	Casual labourer	Self employed	Permanent employees	Retired /pensioner
Male	51	13	8	21	8
Female	67	11	6	17	0

There was high correlation (corr. =0.786, p=0.023) between the education level attained and occupation of the head of household. For instance, ALL the household heads who had not attained any education were full time farmers although 55%, and 44% who had attained primary and some level of secondary education respectively were full time farmers. This was further reflected in other occupation levels where those who were permanently employed in government and private sectors had either attained secondary or college/university education.

### **Analysis of farm/land resources**

The ownership of land is important when considering forestry related activities especially within the farm. Land is an important resource for any household and its ownership gives one direct control over its use. Tree based enterprises often imply permanent existence because of the tree component or at least requires some long-term commitment. Land is also a security for the households and can be used as collateral for credit facilities. Access and control of land mostly depends on the landowner who in most cases is the male head or a male relative in case of widows or single females.

The results showed that the highest percentage (over 95%) of the farms belonged to the either a male head or a male relative. The few women who claimed ownership were from a small section of the community in the Aberdare settlement (Aberdare forest) who had been 'given' land by their fathers due to their single status. Others had bought land in the same area from other farmers

or relatives and settled. But it should be noted that they could not dispose of this land without the authority from their fathers or the family patriarch.

Regarding labour use on the farm, there were no significant differences between male and female headed households where 80% of male and 89% of female used their own labour and all household types (100%) prepared land by hand.

### **Decision making on land use**

In regard to decision-making, day-to-day decisions on land use were mostly made by male heads and only 18% of the female-headed households (widows or absentee husbands) made day to day decisions regarding their farms.

These results were further confirmed by 97% of community members who said that women were not included in major matters concerning land use. The implication here is despite their involvement in farm activities, women rarely participated in land use management and would therefore not be expected to make major decisions regarding the forestry resource.

### **Assets/property along gender lines**

The type of house a farmer lives in is an indication of the wealth status of the household. The wealthier farmers live in permanent houses while the poor ones live in grass thatched houses or iron sheet, mud walled houses. But results indicated that there was no significant difference between the house the farmer lived in and the gender of the household head. A majority (44%) of the female-headed households lived in iron sheet roofed houses and only 11% lived in grass-thatched huts. About 46% of the men lived in iron-roofed houses and 21% in grass thatched huts. Further tests implied that there was no significant difference between the type of house that the male and female-headed households lived in ( $p=0.221$ ).

There was no significant difference in other assets owned (cars, mobile phones, motorcycles, televisions) between male and female headed households (Table 4).

**Table 4: Mean number of items owned by male and female headed households**

Items owned by households	Male	Female	P value
	Mean Number		
Cars	1	1	0.4425
Bicycles	1	1	0.0915
Motorcycles	1	0	-
Phone	2	1	0.1316
TVs HH	1	1	0.5928

Ownership of certain household assets or property was therefore not a factor that would affect decentralization policies along gender lines among the sampled communities.

### **Access to information**

The method through which households receive information is important when introducing changes in forest management systems. To be able to effectively create awareness and pass along important messages to both male and female-headed households, one needs to know the best channel or media to use.

All households used radios to get information (both male and female). This showed that there were no differences ( $p>0.05$ ) in accessing information for both male and female-headed households. Regarding the frequency of radio use in each household, 95% of the male-headed households, and 98% for females listened to the radio daily. This again indicated no significant differences ( $p>0.05$ ).

On the other hand both male and female-headed households had no frequent contact with forest agents (Table 5) an issue that is likely to affect their involvement in forest management activities.

**Table 5: Contact with forest agents**

Sex of household head	contact with forest agents		
	none	irregular	regular
Male	54	13	33
Female	56	17	28

Other means of communication such as TV, newspapers, and extension agents among others were barely used by the community members.

## Dependence on the Forest

All female-headed households obtained firewood from the forest. This showed a significant dependence of the forest and the involvement of women would be critical on issues regarding sustainable use of the product. About 94% of female and 90% of male-headed households obtained herbal medicine from the forest. About 67% of female and 64% of male-headed households grazed their animals in forests. About 44% of female-headed households and 56% of male heads obtained honey from the forest. These statistics showed that the involvement of women in forest management must be recognized since they are also involved in the processing and harvesting of various forest products.

## Forest Associations and Gender

### Group membership

As discussed in the earlier section of the paper, the new forest policy in Kenya expects the participation of communities in the management of forests through the establishment of Community Forest Associations (CFAs) that represent the interests of the whole community.

About 33% of male and 22% of female-headed households belonged to a forest association. A bigger number of households (67% male and 78% female) did not belong to any forest association, a critical issue that needs to be addressed. There was no significant difference between male and female households and membership of groups ( $p=0.694$ ). This implied that both male and female-headed households were both likely to be involved in forest activities organized by groups.

About 33% of male heads and 39% of female-headed households were actively involved in various forest activities. While men were mainly involved in protection activities, women were mainly involved in planting seedlings, pruning and thinning (Table 6).

**Table 6: Women's involvement in forestry activities**

<b>Forestry activities</b>	<b>% frequency</b>
Contribute in clearing the forest	7
Take part in planting seedlings, pruning and thinning	23
Active members of forest associations/groups.	11
Taking part in community policing and governance	7
Attended forest related meetings	13
None	39
Total	100



About 75% of women joined groups because they wanted better forest management and more benefits in future (Table 7). Another 25% of the women felt that it was their duty to protect the forest for the community and the future generation but no male headed household had regard for sustainable use for future generation.

**Table 7: Reason for joining forest groups**

Reasons for joining the group	% frequency	
	Male	Female
Increased access to forest products	22	0
Better forest management and more benefits in future	67	75
Access to other benefits e.g government support donor program	11	0
My duty to protect forest for the community and the future	0	25

There were a variety of reasons that hindered community members from joining groups. Farmers who had not joined forest groups provided a number of reasons (Table 8). The major reason for both male and female headed households was lack of formal groups.

**Table 8: Main reasons for not joining the forest groups/association**

Reason for not joining forest groups	%Male	%Female	Frequency
No formal or informal groups exist in village	65	50	103
New in the village	3	0	3
Members belonged to other groups	3	5	6
Cannot afford the time	14	20	27
Cannot afford the cash contributions	13	21	27
Group membership would restrict use of forest	1	2	2
Did not believe groups to be effective in managing forest	3	2	4
Total	100.0	100	172

### **Executive membership**

Results from a total of 7 forest associations spread through different forests in the country indicated that women were not well represented among the officials or executive members of these groups or associations. Out of the total number of officials across the groups/associations surveyed, only 65 (28%) were female compared to 164 (72%) who were male. The results therefore indicate that women representation in leadership positions (executive, officials) in forest groups across the country remains very low. Since the executive makes

decisions on behalf of the community, women's ideas and needs are rarely taken into account.

Results further indicate that representation by women in forest groups has only happened within the last few years which implies a history of male domination among local forest groups. About 44% of the associations had elected at least one woman as a member of the executive within the last 5 years. But the researchers also found out that there has been external influence from donors and from Kenya Forest Service officials to have more women represented in the executive. This could explain the high number of women in official capacities within the last 5 years.

Results further indicated that despite having positions in the executive, women were excluded from higher leadership positions in most associations. Only 17% of the associations had ever elected women as chairlady or president of the groups and this happened within the last 5 years, an indication of external pressure.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This study has focused on issues of exclusion, poverty, and inequality in the management of forests in Kenya. The paper concludes that there is need for direct involvement of women in decision-making regarding the forest resource. Women's strategies, opinions, livelihoods, opportunities and constraints must be considered for successful implementation of decentralization strategies. The study recommends issues that would directly improve livelihoods and enhance better opportunities for women to participate in forest management.

The efforts on gender policies in forestry that have been made so far, though commendable, have still not been enforced. The new forest policy has positive implications for gender balances, but so far, women are still excluded from management forums due to lack of clear guidelines aimed at inclusion. The government should come up with clear policy guidelines that would compel their inclusion in management.

Women in Kenya are generally resource poor. A majority of the women living adjacent to forests depend exclusively on the forest for most of their subsistence needs. While they have extensive knowledge and experiences of the forest, these potentials are not fully utilized. Women are rarely included in decision-making forums regarding forest conservation and management. Concerted efforts need to be put in place to ensure that their economic and intellectual capacities are enhanced. Mainstreaming gender issues in forestry would therefore ensure that policies within the forestry sector and within all the running

programmes are passed and managed ways that would lead to sustainable use of the resource and equitable distribution of benefits.

Training at community level for all members is important to improve women's knowledge base and increase their productivity in tree and nursery technologies, forest business and marketing. Gender training at the community level would also empower women to take part in management decisions. The formation of forest management groups, in accordance with the Forest Act, by women, youths and minority ethnic or cultural groups could improve the bargaining power of women and give them a better chance of defending their interests. The government should also allocate enough resource for gender issues. Gender budget initiatives with gender equality commitments are necessary.

Insufficient information and lack of awareness on women's rights of access regarding the forestry resource and other related issues such as land have over the years left women poorer. With the changes in the forestry sector, the government has proposed to work even more closely with communities but a majority of the community members are not aware of the proposed changes. More awareness creation and information sharing (using the right channels of reaching forest adjacent communities) regarding these changes and encouraging more women to be part of the process is imperative.

Women as well as men should be targeted for information, discussions, technology awareness, credit facilities, participation in associations and farmer groups. It would also be important to focus on the small women groups to increase full participation and perceptions of women.

According to the new Forest Act, the decentralization of the forestry sector will see more efforts being put towards including more women and other marginalized groups in decision-making. More women are therefore encouraged to join groups and campaign for leadership positions through which their needs and rights will be well taken of. The groups or Forest Associations will also eventually co-manage the forest together with forestry professionals and make decisions regarding the forest as proposed in the new Forest Act.

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