

The Kisii County Government Efforts in Addressing Environmental Conflict Resulting from Women Entrepreneurship

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Abstract: *Women are pillars in most families and communities in the world. For these women to provide for their families they engage in entrepreneurial activities in open air markets. Worldwide, open-air markets have been perceived as making valuable contributions to the local community and diversity in shopping boosting the rural economy. Kenya is one country that believes in women's economic empowerment through entrepreneurship. However most open air markets lack a conducive environment for these women traders to carry out their entrepreneurial activities without conflicts. The objective of this paper is to explore the county government efforts in addressing challenges facing women entrepreneurs in open air markets. Major areas of focus were on provision of infrastructure, clean water and sanitation and market and street lighting. The methodology used was descriptive survey involving a sample of 300 women entrepreneurs randomly and purposively selected. The findings indicated that the county government has tried to address major challenges though there are issues here and there that are not yet addressed. In conclusion this paper commends the county for their efforts but recommends that areas that have not been addressed fully be embarked on*

Keywords: Women entrepreneurs, open air markets, county government, economic empowerment

1. Introduction

Globally, there are more chances of necessity driving women to start entrepreneurial ventures compared to men (Gichuki et al., 2014). Most women who engage in entrepreneurial activities are driven by push factors or situations and hence venture into entrepreneurship as the available option for earning a livelihood as discussed by Zwan et al(2016).. Women worldwide are embarking in entrepreneurial ventures and broadening their percentage of business ownership at an even faster rate compared to their male counterparts (Kamberidou, 2020).Kamberidou (2020) continues to say there is a significant increase in women participation within the labour force. Worldwide, open-air markets have been perceived as making valuable contributions to the local community and diversity in shopping boosting the rural economy. They act as a focal point for the locality by connecting entrepreneurs to others as they interact. They also offer opportunities not only for the locals' economic development but also for employment (Watson et al., 2018).

Regrettably, a lot of these women do not have an enabling environment to undertake their business activities. These women experience conflicts of time, physical space, policy issues such as taxation by the local government agents, and even cultural and institutional barriers (Akinola, 2018). Under these conditions, the women entrepreneurs get forced to devise means to sustain their businesses which have far-reaching implications on the environment. For most of the women who are in business, their survival remains a real problem due to the endless conflicts they get themselves into ranging from economic, social to environmental (Pereira & Pereira, 2015).

Kenya is one country that believes in women's economic empowerment through entrepreneurship. Kenya has made a remarkable improvement in economic performance and is on

the transformation into a newly industrializing, middle-income country, under the Kenya vision 2030 (Estudillo et al., 2019).

1.1 Problem area

In recent years policymakers have been fostering the idea of encouraging women entrepreneurship in order to tackle poverty and empower women. However , the county government has not addressed fully challenges experienced in open air markets.

2. Methodology

This paper adopted a descriptive survey research design to study women entrepreneurship and the efforts of the county to create a conducive environment in open air markets enterprises in open-air markets thus making the design appropriate. Using simple random and purposive sampling techniques, a sample of 300 women was picked.

2.1 Study findings

The findings were answering the following question. How is the Kisii county government addressing environmental conflict resulting from women entrepreneurial activities?The county government has a responsibility of ensuring women entrepreneurs operate on a conducive environment though there are areas where they have not provided the necessary infrastructure like litter bins for depositing garbage before disposal. Women entrepreneurs exclaimed that the county has neglected this important fact and some had this to say;

Litter bins are not provided in all open-air markets under study. Remains of agricultural produce such as cabbage, bananas, onions and fruits are thrown in the same selling area making the place dirty and untidy. This also causes congestion, especially on

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the path walks, inconveniencing buyers. (Source: researcher observation, 2019)

sanitation problems. The extract below shows the poor state of sanitation in Kisii open-air markets

The two plates below is a clear indication of the situation in most open-air markets of the county.



Plate 1

Plate 2

Table 1: Efforts by the county government to identify conflict pressure points and potential flashpoints

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	80	26.7
Disagree	72	24.0
Neutral	119	39.7
Agree	21	7.0
Strongly Agree	8	2.6
Total	300	100
Total	300	100.0

From the above statistics, majority of the women entrepreneurs were neutral on whether the County government had identified conflict pressure points and potential flush points, while 80 (26.7%) strongly disagreed, 72 (24%) disagreed, with 21 (7%) agreed and 8 (2.6%) strongly agreed. This data implies that the County efforts in addressing conflict are not felt by women entrepreneurs; which is an indication of lack of proper machinery of solving conflict

A8 categorically commented that after the officers have collected taxes leave shortly after. By one o'clock they have left leaving us like sheep without a shepherd to attend to them.

The county government officials at the market have not so far identified areas where conflict commonly erupt unless the case is beyond the entrepreneur's leadership.

Provision of sanitation facilities in open Air markets

The lack of clean water and poor sanitation has caused many diseases and the spread of diseases such as respiratory problems (Joshi & Amadi, 2013). KIBS (2018), recorded sanitation status in the county where 41.3 percent of households use improved sanitation facilities but the county government has not come out clear on open-air markets. This study, therefore, concurs with women entrepreneurs who revealed that lack of proper sanitation has a serious impact on their businesses. From the FGD interview at Riosiri and Nyakoe open-air markets, several B2s B4s expressed disappointment on how the county is handling

"Sanitation is a big problem we lack toilets to go because the ones that are there are very dirty. Raw sewage flows across the road whenever it rains," "The entire market gets flooded almost every afternoon during the rainy season and the women no longer continue their entrepreneurial activities afterwards. We scoop water from our selling points then spread out our items to sell. In fact, at times it becomes difficult for us to get someone to carry for us our items after it has rained because those who carry ask double the money because of the mud which makes our items dirty "(DarajaMbili market).

Women entrepreneurs always cry out to the county to take action over water and sanitation problems



Plate 3

Another group of women entrepreneurs K3, K1 and K10 aired their concerns general market cleanliness as testified by the extract below.

"Since the committee opened the market without the consent of the county, garbage has never been collected, mud is all over the market being a swampy area. The market lack provision of water and the well that was dug to provide water, the hole is left open exposing entrepreneurs to risk and health officers pass by without taking any action"

Most open-air markets have a limited number of pit latrines let alone flushable ones. Whenever the women want to respond to the call of nature, they need to go to either nearby or distant houses where they can use toilets. The public toilets available are not enough and also they are paid for but still very dirty one of the respondents stated. However, this practice was reported to be causing them urinary infections as captured in the following interview segment.

A1, A3 and A4 “we experience at times health problems by the use of these toilet facilities since they are used by so many people other who are even sick”. There are some of our colleagues who after complaining of irritations they went to the hospital and were found to be sick and they were told to ensure they use clean toilets". We think it is these dirty places we go to help ourselves that have caused us the problem".

From the in-depth interview, the market supervisors agreed that the situation of sanitation is wanting in all open-air markets in the county. For instance, they noted that a market like DarajaMbili receives between 12000 to 15000 people per market day and has only two units of toilets that cannot sustain the number



Plate 4

Plate 5

Plate 4 and 5: The two plates show the pathetic situation at Riosiri open-air market. The upper market supposedly referred to as new, indeed has new toilets but not in use because of lack of water. One of the traders has taken advantage and sells his fruits from there. The situation is worse at the lower market which accommodates most entrepreneurs dealing with all items apart from agricultural products direct from the farm. The two toilets are not enough and are of very poor quality. Plate 14 shows how a woman entrepreneur wonders how to enter inside the toilet. It is terrible and according to the entrepreneurs, it is the best market when it comes to business performance.

Table 2: Provision of Sanitation facilities

Provision of sanitation infrastructure and shelter help in resolving environmental conflict		Frequency	Percent
	Strongly Disagree	68	22.7
	Disagree	116	38.7
	Neutral	83	27.6
	Agree	26	8.7
	Strongly Agree	7	2.3
Total		300	100.0

The analyzed data above shows that 38.7% disagreed that provisional of sanitation facilities will help in resolving environmental conflict, 27.6% remained neutral, 22.7% strongly disagreed, 8.7% agreed with 2.3% strongly agreeing. These statistics indicate that it is not just the

absence of sanitation facilities that cause environmental conflict. It is also possible that due to the inappropriate collection equipment or inability to maintain sufficient collection fleet women entrepreneurs failed to recognize how the provision of sanitation facilities can address environmental conflict in open-air markets. Waste management by the county government is quite in-efficient, unreliable and irregular thus leaving the litter uncollected for long. It is worth noting that the availability of sanitation facilities alone is not a solution to the environmental conflict in open-air markets. Behaviour change among women entrepreneurs is key in the preservation and management of the market environment. Sanitation amenities within the market make the environment attractive to customers because they contribute to a friendly environment (Njuguna, 2019).

According to the women traders, market attendants collect the taxes and remit it to the county head office for budgeting and allocation of resources to all departments. This problem is all over Kenya as reported by Mwithirwa (2011)citing Nairobi open-air markets as being managed by the county government which is responsible for space allocation to entrepreneurs, maintenance of sanitation and hygiene in the market. For Kisii County, no outsourced services are hired and yet the management of the open-air markets is wanting.

Plate 6 passes a message that county governance is wanting modern facilities are wrongly used.



Plate 6

Decentralization of markets to address spatial inequalities

Open-air markets are largely public-owned and in most cases, they are characterized by disorderly and conflicts. Alfred etal (2019) on public spaces echoes that they are sites of contestation or conflict.

Table 3: Market decentralization and resolving of spatial inequalities WE

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	55	18.3
Disagree	96	32.0
Neutral	128	42.7
Agree	17	5.7
Strongly Agree	4	1.3
Total	300	100.0

The study sought to find out whether decentralization of markets would address spatial inequalities and minimize biases in stall allocation. The following responses were recorded; Majority of the respondents 128 (42.7%) were indifferent, 96 (32%) disagreed, 55 (18.3%) strongly disagreed, with 17 (5.7%), and 4 (1.3%) strongly agreed. The huge number of neutral respondents here points to a possibility of failure to understand what decentralization of markets implies and this is linked to the low education standards of the women entrepreneurs as a majority of them are primary school dropouts.

Customers like Luos from Homabay and Migori Counties may not want an interior market. So accessibility is a very important attraction. Nyakoe, Darajambili, Suneka and Riosiri are on the highway and as a result, attract more women entrepreneurs.

An FGD interview conducted K1, K3, K4 and K5 claimed that; Why waste time to such interior markets with no roads and returns are very low. We look at the clientele and business return at the end of the day. I can't afford to lose my customers and returns from markets that are accessible as compared to newly opened air markets by the county.

Such voices are very true given that rain in Kisii is very frequent and rains heavily eroding roads destroying the surface by water run-offs. Besides bad roads attracts high transport cost which women attest would make them incur losses.

Public ownership of markets cause tension and inadequate infrastructure investment

Open-air markets are government utilities run and managed by the counties. If such markets are not safeguarded with proper management can create a loophole for land grabbers to take advantage. A market like Darajambili, women complained that it was big enough to accommodate large numbers of entrepreneurs, well fenced and had lockable gates but today storey buildings are what that can be seen in sections of what used to be a market. Land grabbing before devolution by the councillors was the order of the day and by then there was no proper documentation.

Table 4: Public ownership of market and tension among WE

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	55	18.3
Disagree	94	31.3
Neutral	104	34.7
Agree	38	12.7
Strongly Agree	9	3.0
Total	300	100.0

The above data shows that 34.7% of the respondents were neutral on the role of public ownership of markets in the creation of tension and inadequate infrastructural investment, with 31.3% disagreeing, and 12.7% agreeing. The data further indicates that 18.3% strongly disagreed, and 3.0% strongly agreed. This indicates that the ownership patterns of markets do not in a way contribute to tension and conflict within the operations of women entrepreneurs in the open-air markets. New entrants to the market have no such history except in a few cases when they come to the market and find their space allocation fenced and they cannot operate their businesses. Situations like this cause tension and conflict their businesses being a source of livelihood for survival.



Plate 7

Plate 7: A section of the newly constructed market of Darajambili. A woman cooking food for other entrepreneurs in the open, an environment that is highly unfit for cooking food for consumption. This section of the market has not been constructed as per the agreement with stakeholders. It has no fly-over, no parking area and path walks implying reducing congestion will not be realized.

Among the county government's efforts is the construction of the new Darajambili market- a section that is to accommodate some entrepreneurs to ease congestion. However, it has taken long to be completed. The county partnered with Chase bank and Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) to improve the market and give it a facelift. The construction was to include: a flyover, parking space, modern stalls, retail and wholesale components, washrooms and high mast floodlights among others. The contract stated that Chase Bank was to fund the project while JKUAT does architectural designs. The county intended to increase employment opportunities and also accommodate the overwhelming numbers of entrepreneurs for sustainable livelihoods. As per the researcher's observation, the said elements of the market are not yet constructed and implemented.

Street lights and Women entrepreneurs Enterprises Performance

Entrepreneurs need lighting and other energy services for their small retail businesses so that they can harness improved lighting to extend their working days to nighttime operation. Moreover, most women entrepreneurs, especially in the saloon and green groceries sector, rely more on energy and light to run their enterprises. Studies on market lighting have shown that there is an increase in business on market nights, and businesses extended their hours and profits by selling at the market until late as security is improved (Bhardwaj, 2014). To establish the effect of infrastructural factors on women participation and eventual resolving of entrepreneurial conflicts, women were asked to gauge how the installation of street lights has influenced their way of doing business.

Table 6: High mast market lights promote business activities

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	31	10.3
Disagree	137	45.7
Neutral	71	23.7
Agree	36	12.0
Strongly Agree	24	8.0
Total	300	100.0

From the analyzed statistics, the data shows that 137 (45.7%) of the women entrepreneurs felt that the installation of the street lights had not helped in resolving entrepreneurial conflicts surrounding women in the open markets, 71 (23.7%) were neutral, 36 (12%) agreed, and 31 (10.3%) strongly disagreed. Further, 24 (8%) of the women entrepreneurs strongly agreed that the installation of street lights had positively resulted to reduced conflicts among women entrepreneurs. This data implies that street lights did not help in resolving conflicts among entrepreneurial women since they probably stick to their usual programmed time of sell. It may also be an indicator of unchanging behaviour among the customers to the women entrepreneurs. However, the overall impact of the installation of high mast lights as stated by the respondents is the extension in operating time, improved security and to others diversification of their business activities.

The two plates below show the successes and failures of installing high mast lights. Plate 8 shows a very happy woman entrepreneur selling potatoes. She is able to extend her selling time because of the lights and of profit margin is increased daily. The other plate declares complete darkness meaning at times the lighting gadgets get spoiled and maintenance by the county takes too long.



Plate 8



Plate 9

Open-air markets have been installed with lights, an effort by the county that has enabled women entrepreneurs to extend their businesses. Plate 9. The woman above thanks the county government for the lights saying security is enhanced and she is able to extend her selling time. The next plate 9 shows how sometimes the lamps fail the women entrepreneurs. For instance, the one pointed at is not working this can pose a danger because the chokoras can hide and harass these women at the close of business.

In conclusion, the County government has made some strides in supporting women entrepreneurs however much need to be done especially in support of the formation of trade associations among women entrepreneurs, maintenance of market lights, safeguard public markets not to be interfered with. The county, therefore, has the

responsibility of providing what market users need as stipulated in their mandate. Women entrepreneurs feel the county has not done much given the revenue collected is in terms of millions from open-air markets but their development is minimal.

3. Conclusion and Recommendations

As per the Kenyan constitution, among the many functions of the county government is the promotion of agricultural services, health services, control of air and noise pollution, trade development and regulation and county planning and development. For open-air markets to be environment friendly, the county has to address conflicting issues in the markets as it tries to provide necessary facilities. Provision of clean water and proper sanitation is mandatory. The researcher found out that sanitation facilities were wanting, toilets were in a pathetic condition. Some toilets, though newly constructed, were not in use because of lack of water. In fact, some of the toilets were being used as stores by entrepreneurs.

All public open-air markets are owned by the county. It is the responsibility of the county to safeguard such markets by officially owning them. If possible all these markets should be fenced to prevent land grabbers. To ease congestion the county has the duty of upgrading some markets and come up with others, something that they are already doing but roads are very poor. This study suggests that roads being the mode of transport then the county should improve these roads to allow accessibility. Kenya being a twenty-four hour economy, the county has done wonderfully well on the provision of market and street lights. These lights, on the other hand, have improved security and minimized theft cases. Women now can come to the market as early as 5 am in the morning and some close their businesses at 10 pm in the night.

This paper recommends that the county government has not done much as mandated by the constitution of Kenya. The following areas need serious and urgent attention. Proper sanitation should be worked on in all open air markets and provision of clean water is mandatory. All weather roads should be improved to enable women entrepreneurs' access to all open air markets. The county should own open air markets and fence them to prevent grabbing from the rich and politicians.

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