



Social capital promotes women's empowerment in Kenya

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Key messages

- **Social capital, together with access to government funds and micro credit/finance, promotes the empowerment of women in rural Kenya.**
- **The Kenyan government must raise awareness of, and help women to form SACCOs and savings groups in order to access credit.**
- **Scholarships, bursaries and loans should also be made available to remove barriers to girls' higher education.**

Eradicating poverty through women's empowerment

Women's empowerment is essential for pro-poor growth and sustainable development¹. When women are economically empowered, a direct path to poverty eradication, inclusive economic growth and gender equality opens up. One way to bring about this empowerment is by building social capital and social institutions².

A team of local PEP researchers set out to understand how and what measures can encourage female empowerment in rural Kenya. The researchers focused their study on women in Gikindu, Murang'a County, where most women work in small-scale crop farming and livestock husbandry, practiced on small family land holdings. The most widely grown crops in this region are food crops, namely maize, beans, potatoes, and cassava. The livestock reared includes indigenous breeds of cattle, goats and sheep.



Photo: C.Schubert

The analysis

The research team measured women's empowerment using three key indicators: domestic decision-making, access to and control over resources, and mobility/freedom of movement³. Domestic decision making is measured by whether a woman makes decisions on her own earnings, major purchases, food cooked, and own health. Access to and control over resources is measured by a woman's employment status, savings, asset ownership (house, land, livestock and household assets), and enterprise ownership. Freedom and mobility is measured by whether a woman is able to make decisions on visiting her family and/or relatives.

They assessed women's social capital in three key areas: groups and networks, trust and solidarity, and collective action and cooperation. The dimension on groups and networks considers the extent to which an individual/household participates in various social organizations, informal networks, and in activities in the community. Women were asked if they belonged to finance/investment, farm, trade, religious, and women groups, if they visited/were visited by friends in the past three months, and if they went out or met a group of friends in the past three months. The dimension on trust and solidarity evaluates how individuals trust their

neighbors and how their perception of trust has changed over time. Women were asked if they trusted their neighbors, how often they stopped to talk to people in the neighborhood, whether they have someone to talk to when in trouble and whether they have someone they confide in. Lastly, women were asked if they were able to participate in a community project in the past year-to represent the dimension on collective action and cooperation⁴.

Using principal component analysis (PCA), these indicators for women's empowerment and social capital were calculated as an index ranging between 1 and 10.

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Analysis continued

Researchers used the Community-Based Monitoring System (CBMS) to collect data in Gikindu. They gathered census data from all 3,479 households in Gikindu, made up of 9,482 individuals. The study focused on the 2,806 women living in these households who were aged 18 and over.

The team sought to answer three questions:

1. Does social capital empower women?
2. Does access to credit and government funds empower women?
3. Does education matter for women's empowerment, and if so, which level of education?



Photo: Alun McDonald/Oxfam

Key findings

Social capital promotes women's empowerment

- An increase in social capital increased the likelihood of women's empowerment by 2.7 percentage points.

Access to government funds and micro credit/finance promotes women's empowerment

- Women who had access to micro credit were 10 percentage points more likely to be empowered than those who did not access micro credit.

Tertiary education promotes women empowerment

- The study found that women who attained tertiary education beyond high school were 17 percentage points more likely to be empowered than those who did not have any formal education.

Conclusions and policy implications

Social capital

- The County Government in Murang'a should raise awareness of social capital, what it is and how it can be generated.

Access to funding

- Women should be encouraged to form SACCOs (Savings and Credit Cooperative Organizations) and women's savings groups that can help them access cheaper credit.
- The government should promote and expand the use of these groups as a form of collateral in the provision of government funding.
- Opportunities for government procurement should be targeted towards women's groups.
- Follow-up work must then be carried out to ensure funding reaches the intended recipients.

Education

- Making girls and their parents aware of the importance of education is just as important as promoting social capital and women's savings groups.
- The County Government in Murang'a should set aside funding for bursaries and loans to enable girls to pursue college education.