Self-Help Groups and Empowerment of Rural Women: Evidence against poverty from Kitui, Kenya

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**Background**

- One of the 47 counties of Kenya
- Arid/semi-arid climate
- Structurally weak (infrastructure, education etc.)
- Main income source: agriculture & livestock
- Very low alphabetization rate (18%)
- Poverty level of 60% - 12th poorest county in Kenya
- Average household size 6.9 persons (Kenya: 4.4)

**Kitui County Features**

![Kitui County Map]

- Challenges: Food insecurity, drought, vulnerability to crisis, scarcity of water & high population growth

**Research Approach**

- Question: In the Self-Help Group approach an example of good practice for the reduction of poverty and food insecurity? What can we learn from the project?
- Methods: Focus Group Discussions, Income & Expenditure Ranking, Expert Interviews, Household Questionnaire Survey (n=405)

**Self-Help Group Approach in Kitui, Kenya**

**Goals**

- Poverty Reduction and Empowerment of Women

**Activities**

- **Goals**
  - Social
  - Economic
  - Political
  - Psychological

**Criteria for classifying the poor**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class 1 (&quot;wealthier&quot;)</th>
<th>Class 2 (poor)</th>
<th>Class 3 (extremely poor)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>1000 KSH/day</td>
<td>Ca. 500 KSH/day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>regular income</td>
<td>wage labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&lt; 100 KSH/day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education of children</td>
<td>To university level</td>
<td>Secondary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>without external support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land and harvest</td>
<td>&gt; 2 acres</td>
<td>approx. 2 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6-30 bags of maize harvest</td>
<td>5-6 bags of maize harvest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livestock</td>
<td>&gt; 100 goats or cattle</td>
<td>2-3 goats / 1 cow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assistance for tending livestock</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing conditions</td>
<td>&gt; 5 rooms, corrugated iron roof, plastered walls</td>
<td>peaked roof, plastered walls on the inside, not outside; floor from stamped clay; perhaps no windows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>inside and outside; furniture; perhaps electricity, TV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Outcomes**

- A solid structure of well organised, active, empowered women on 3 levels: Self-Help Group, Cluster Level Association (CLA) and Federation
- Participants rise out of extreme poverty from "class 3" to "class 2".
- Communities benefit from group activities like food banks, solar light, fight against female genital mutilation and child marriage, investments in infrastructure etc.

**Conclusion**

**Success factors**

- Participation and ownership
- Groups decide about their own activities
- Women have strong support from husbands and communities (project well embedded)
- Homogenous neighbourhood based groups

**Lessons learnt for poverty reduction**

- Approach facilitates sustainable escape from extreme poverty
- Self-Help Group structures can serve as an entry point for other activities, such as trainings, coaching, solid base for political influence
- Group savings are not sufficient for big investments
- Cooperation between NGO and bilateral organisations required for infrastructure development, promotion of value chains (e.g. tomatoes and other vegetables), provision of credits for agricultural production etc.