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## Self-Help Groups and Empowerment of Rural Women. Evidence from Kitui, Kenya

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### Abstract

After the great success of self-help groups (SHG) in India the approach was exported to several African countries. In this context, the German non-governmental organisation Kindernothilfe financed the so called Fumbua Uwezo Project through their Kenyan partner Kitui Development Center. The project aims to mobilise rural women to start saving and thereby unleash their human potential for achieving empowerment of individuals as well as the community in social, economic and political terms in a bottom up process. The article shows how the application of participative poverty analysis contributed to the targeting of ultra-poor women and in how far they profited from the project where they received different trainings on group building, saving/borrowing, agriculture and starting small businesses. The field study used a mixed method approach which consisted of focus group discussions, income- and expenditure rankings, expert interviews and a household survey with over 400 participants. The results demonstrate that beneficiaries particularly profit because, with the help of credits from the SHG, they were able to pay school fees, improve their livestock and purchase inputs for farming. The SHG also improved the access to food and water, led to a rise and diversification in income and strengthened the social cohesion and resilience of the community. The grassroots democracy structure of the SHG operates on three levels by tackling social, economic and political challenges on an adequate scale. The poster will also reflect on challenges like management of the burden of loan repayment and it formulates recommendations for improving the promising approach.

**Keywords:** Empowerment, poverty alleviation, rural development, self-help, women