

**CHANGING ROLES OF THE GIKUYU WOMEN AND THEIR
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FAMILY**

BY

PRISCAH NG'ENDO MUNYUI

**A PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF A POST-GRADUATE
DIPLOMA IN GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI**

**UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI
INST. OF AFRICAN STUDIES
LIBRARY**

2002

University of NAIROBI Library



0444753 8

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of tables	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Abstract	v
CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION	1
1.0 Introduction	1
1.2 Statement of the problem	4
1.3 Objectives	5
1.3.1 Overall objective	5
1.3.2 Specific objectives	5
1.4 Rationale	5
1.1 Scope and Limitations	6
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	7
2.0 Introduction	7
2.1 Literature review	7
2.2.1 Factors that influence change among the Agikuyu	10
2.3 Theoretical framework	12
2.4 Hypotheses	13
2.5 Definition of terms	13
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	15
3.0 Introduction	15
3.1 Research site	15
3.2 Study population and sampling procedure	17
3.3 Data collection methods	18
3.4 Data analysis	18
3.5 Data interpretation	18
3.6 Problems encountered in the field	18
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS	20
4.0 Introduction	20
4.1 The changing roles of women	20
4.2 New roles	22
4.3 Other findings	25
4.4 Problems experienced by women in relation to their new roles	27

4.4 Conclusion	28
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	29
5.1 Introduction	29
5.2 Conclusion	29
5.2 Impact of these changes on the family structure	32
BIBLIOGRAPHY	34
APPENDIX 1 QUESTIONNAIRE	35

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1	Area of the district by division in square kilometers	15
Table 3.2	Employment by sector and sex in Kiambu as at 1994	17

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the many individuals and organizations that have contributed to the success of this study. These include the SOS Children's Village, Esther Asiko, Esther Wangechi, Einar Lyngar, Mr Denis Burugu and Churchil Peter. Thanks for your love and support throughout my studies.

I wish to acknowledge with great appreciation the role played by my supervisor, Prof. Simiyu Wandibba. Thank you for the scholarly guidance through every phase of my study, the encouragement and never ending advice.

I am grateful to the following lecturers, Prof. Wandibba, Dr Kibiti, Dr Subbo, Dr Nagendo and Mr Were, for seeing me through my course successfully.

Finally, to all the people who have contributed directly or indirectly to my success, Tapu, Uncle, Kucha, Wambui, Izzoh, Loise, Njeri and Amy wanja. Thank you for the moral , spiritual and financial support.

ASANTE SANA

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the many individuals and organizations that have contributed to the success of this study. These include the SOS Children's Village, Esther Asiko, Esther Wangechi, Einar Lyngar, Mr Denis Burugu and Churchil Peter. Thanks for your love and support throughout my studies.

I wish to acknowledge with great appreciation the role played by my supervisor, Prof. Simiyu Wandibba. Thank you for the scholarly guidance through every phase of my study, the encouragement and never ending advice.

I am grateful to the following lecturers, Prof. Wandibba, Dr Kibiti, Dr Subbo, Dr Nagendo and Mr Were, for seeing me through my course successfully.

Finally, to all the people who have contributed directly or indirectly to my success, Tapu, Uncle, Kucha, Wambui, Izzoh, Loise, Njeri and Amy wanja. Thank you for the moral , spiritual and financial support.

ASANTE SANA

ABSTRACT

This is a study on the changing roles of the Gikuyu women and their implications for the family. The study subjects were women from Rwaka sublocation, of Kiambu district. They included: small and large scale farmers, house wives, business women and a key informant who was a leader of the women's group as well as a church elder.

The basic questions addresses by the research project were:

- ◆ What factors are responsible for the changing roles of the Gikuyu men and women?
- ◆ What is the impact of education, career development, salary employment and access to and control of resources by woman on the family structure?

The specific objectives were to investigate and explain the factors responsible for the changing roles of the Gikuyu woman and to find out the impact of these changes on the family. To answer he above questions twenty-five women were interviewed using questionnaires as well as the use of a key informant.

The main findings of the study were:

- ◆ The level of women investments on small and large-scale businesses had increased as a result of the saving groups and access to credit facilities.
- ◆ The change in the Agikuyu family structure ha been influenced by education, western medicine, religion and dual-income earning families.
- ◆ New economic opportunities for women had increased as a result of economic empowerment and economic autonomy.

- ◆ There is an attitude change among women to the extent when there is a de facto man; she becomes the breadwinner without any stigmatization.
- ◆ There has been an improvement on the skill level of women as a result of training and savings mobilization conducted by the women's groups.

Based on the findings the following recommendations were advanced:

- ◆ The extent of empowerment and sensitization of rural women in Kenya should be reorganized and incorporated into the culture of these women to avoid rejection of this brilliant idea.
- ◆ The most productive way of empowering both the men and women to assume their roles as ascribed by tradition without oppressing their human rights is by understanding how the traditional structure was organized before and after the colonial era.
- ◆ Environmental and political factors affecting the empowerment of women and accentuating the change in the family structure should be minimized.

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1.1 Introduction

Kenya is amongst the richest countries globally when it comes to both human and natural resources. With a population of thirty million, with fifty percent of these being women (GOK 1999), she has remained relatively stable politically for over thirty-eight years of independence. However, in spite of this political stability, her economy has been growing at a negative rate. This has been as a result of a number of factors, ranging from poor governance and poverty, to natural disasters such as floods and famines. Since independence, however, the eradication of poverty, illiteracy and disease has been of paramount importance and still remains the major concern.

Kenya is a country with diverse cultures, which is as a result of her more than 48 ethnic groups. One of the ethnic groups is that of the Agikuyu, which is the largest ethnic group in the country. The Agikuyu occupy a geographically distinct area, marked by a high plateau, the surroundings of the Mt Kenya and the Nyandarua Mountains, which form part of the Kenya Highlands. This region has climatic conditions that are suitable for both cash and subsistence farming, most of the them are engaged in occupations that deal with farm produce.

Just like many other Bantu speakers, the Gikuyu community has customs, traditions, and a mentality that make them be recognized as an ethnic group. Their main economic activities are agriculture, trade and crafts. They cultivate both cash and subsistence crops such as coffee and maize, respectively. In the past, the main crops grown were *Sorghum vulgare*, various millets, beans and sweet potatoes. However, maize is the most important crop for subsistence and for sale today. This is due to the fact that there has been a major change in atmospheric conditions and a general shift in the economy.

Their staple diet includes: *githeri* (a mixture of maize and beans) and *irio-* (a mixture of maize, beans, potatoes and vegetables like cabbages and carrots), *mokimo* (a mixture of maize, beans, potatoes and *nyeni sia marengo* or *kahurora-* pumpkin leaves mashed together). Also, things like *guaci* (sweet potatoes), *nduma* (arrowroots) and *muhogo* (*cassava*) were in their main dishes.

The Gikuyu society had a distinct kinship system. The status and behaviour of every individual in the society was determined by three governing principles:

- ◆ Family group-*mbari* or *nyomba*, which was for the people related by blood, that is, man wife or wives and their children, grand children and great-grand children. The purpose of the *mbari* was to govern legal and ceremonial rites regarding the land or the family.
- ◆ Clan-*moherega*, which joins several *mbari* units who have the same clan name and are believed to have descended from one family group in the remote past. However, owing to the polygynous system of marriage, a family or *mbari* unit increased rapidly. This made it impossible for *mbari* to live in a group, causing identities of the blood relation to disappear. The purpose of the *moherega* was to knit together distant relatives and facilitate the feeling of rendering mutual support of all-important matters in the interest and welfare of the clan.
- ◆ Age-grading -*riika*, almost every year thousands of Gikuyu boys and girls went through initiation or circumcision ceremony, and automatically became members of one *riika*, irrespective of *mbari*, *moherega* or district to which they belonged. Thus, in every generation the Gikuyu tribal organisation was stabilised by the activities of various age-grades of the young and the old who together acted harmoniously in the social, religious and political life of the community.

In the Gikuyu family group, there were certain rules of behaviour, which were strictly observed in order to keep the people in harmonious relationships. Even though the *metugo ya nganyuti* (the way of behaving) of the Gikuyu family may seem similar on the

surface with other family settings worldwide. However, they had distinct family kinship and family structures. This can be attributed to certain factors, namely:

- ❖ Matrilineal and matrilineal descent.
- ❖ The divisions of labour.
- ❖ Responsibility between men and women in every society. (Kenyatta, 1937)

Ironically, the productive role of the women was the most important task a woman could perform, seconded by the productive and the communal tasks. Children were greatly desired, and both male and female children were equally appreciated. Since the reproductive role earned a woman the title '**blessed among women**', every woman hoped that she would have as many children as she could manage. However, in spite of the fact that children were greatly appreciated, the Gikuyu woman was allowed to produce as many children as she could manage naturally. More emphasis was placed on having healthy children.

However, times have changed, bringing about great change in the triple roles of women, that is, the reproductive, productive and communal tasks. Women have been granted a major say in their reproductive and productive work. Some of the factors that have influenced this change include education, micro labour and full-time employment. With education, come migration, employment and access to better education facilities.

However, mobility in search of better opportunities is limited to mostly men since the women have other reproductive tasks to take care of (children and homestead). Many men migrate, leaving the Gikuyu woman to take over their responsibilities. The woman now gets to take care of both the husband's roles and the children's roles since the children have to go to school. Thus, the clearly and systematically defined roles disappear, leaving her to take over all the roles and responsibilities of other family members.

On the other hand, she becomes a transformed modern woman who seeks for better education and career development, leading to the disappearing of the traditionally ascribed roles of women. She can no longer afford to give birth to as many children as

she could possibly manage. Her financial status dictates to her how many children she could manage. Furthermore, some careers demand of her to stay away from home for a period of time, forcing the husband and children (if any) to take over her roles and responsibilities. Other factors include the man becoming simply a de facto head of the family since he cannot either afford to be the real head of the family because of migration, financial instabilities or he is persistently absent.

The purpose of this research paper was to highlight the changing roles of the Gikuyu women and their implications on the family structure. Several factors have contributed and influenced the change in roles and values of these women forcing the restructuring of the family, either positively or negatively. These include:

- ❖ Economic factors- women gaining access to credit and ownership of land, dual-income-earning families.
- ❖ Cultural factors- erosion of traditional family structure, frustrating traditional expectations, e.g., female genital mutilation and single parenthood gaining more acceptance.
- ❖ Foreign ideologies –western education and western medicine.
- ❖ Social enlightenment, sexual orientation and contraceptive measures of reproduction.

However, poverty and inflation have also played a significant role in these changes.

2.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Gikuyu communities never experienced gender disparity before the colonial era. This is to say that, as mentioned earlier, they had a system in which both men and women knew what was expected of them. There was clear distinction in the division of labour and every sphere of activities was clearly and systematically defined by sex. However, changes occurred when western ideologies permeated this community.

Financial ability became the epicentre of the family structure, both men and women have to readjust their roles to meet the basic needs of the family. Most of them opted for salary employment to substitute their agricultural earnings. This means they have to search for jobs elsewhere. Women have to work within the community boundaries, hence children

are taken to school at a tender age. With education, full-time employment and micro labour, the Gikuyu family structure has been altered to the extent that the traditional roles of both men and women have become intertwined. This means that more women take over the traditionally ascribed roles of the men and children, as well as being expected to perform their own responsibilities.

Hence, this research paper looked at how the ascribed roles of both men and women have been influenced by modern technologies, education as well as career development. The purpose was to see how modern roles have influenced changes in women and what the implications of these are on the family structure. What then have education, career development, salary employment and access to and control of resources by women affected the traditional family structure? What factors are responsible for the changing roles of men and women in the Gikuyu society?

1.3 OBJECTIVES

1.3.1 Overall objective

To document the nature and types of changes that have occurred in the roles of the Gikuyu women and how this has affected the traditional family structure.

1.3.2 Specific objectives

- a) To investigate and explain the factors responsible for the changing roles of the Gikuyu woman.
- b) To find out the impact of these changes on the family structure.

1.4 RATIONALE

This study should be of significance to bodies like the Family Planning Association of Kenya and the Kenya Women Trust Fund who are interested in empowering and enlightening the rural women of Kenya. The information should enable them to understand changes occurring in the Gikuyu family structure before formulating and implementing their policies.

Moreover, some studies have gone to the extent of generalising about women's disabilities and capabilities as universal, with total disregard of the unique inequalities in terms of ethnicity, family structures, ascribed roles of men and women and the impact of poverty and education on these factors. Hence, this study should help to highlight the significance of both traditional and new roles of the Gikuyu women and their family structure. This should help policy makers and extension workers in making developmental policies that take into consideration one's ethnicity, family structure and the impact of poverty and education on the ascribed roles.

Non-governmental organisations and other funding bodies will have an insight on how to channel their resources in ways that will directly benefit women. Also, the study findings should be relevant to other researchers for construction of social theories that are useful to the understanding of the Gikuyu society.

1.5 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

This research was done in Rwaka sub-location, a region geographically located in the central parts of the Republic of Kenya. Since this region is geographically central to the nation, it has a mixed population of other ethnic groups, although the Agikuyu constitute the largest number in the area. Hence, the project focussed on the impact of education, religion, career development and access to and control of resources of the Gikuyu women in Rwaka, and what implications the above mentioned factors have on the family.

Due to lack of resources and finance, the research did not cover the whole of Rwaka, but a sample of women in this region. Therefore, the results might not apply to all the Gikuyu women in Central Province and the ones in the diaspora.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of the literature and discusses the theoretical framework used. The literature review illustrates how the traditional Gikuyu society was, in reference to the triple roles (ascribed roles): reproductive, productive and communal tasks. The external and internal factors that have accentuated change have been described. Some of the factors that have contributed to the changes are socio-cultural and socio-economic factors, education, religion, medicine, employment and migration.

The framework used is the Harvard Analytical Framework, which recognises fully or systematically women's contribution to the development process while analysing the effects on their productive, reproductive and communal activities.

2.2 Literature review

The Agikuyu are the largest community in the Republic of Kenya. Linguistically, they are closely linked to other East African Bantu groups. However, it is clear that the traditional Gikuyu community was (is) marked by extreme variation of customs and traditions that distinguished them from other Bantu speakers (Middelton 1972) However, I stress that changes have occurred, mostly in the reproductive, productive and communal activities of both men and women.

Furthermore, some of these changes have been brought about by external factors such as western education, medicine and ideologies, whereas internal factors include things like severe natural calamities like drought, famine and floods. This is not to say that poverty and education have not played a significant role.

The Agikuyu are patrilineal. Men own and control the major means of production and economically significant resources. Land was inherited equally among sons; men and boys acquire exclusive rights to the productive and reproductive services of their wives

through payment of bride wealth. Women usually obtained access to land and other critical subsistence resources through men, and primarily through marriage. However, today, western ideas of private ownership and principles of inheritance, have negative and positive effect on women. Women have been left with less secure rights in land and other economically significant resources, but they are also able to gain control over land through buying.

Before the colonial era, the Gikuyu social system was organised in such a way that all aspects of the human socialisation process revolved around the ascribed roles of men and women. This means that men and women had clear distinctions of their expectations, roles and responsibilities. According to Kenyatta (1965), the distinctive kinship system dictated the status and behaviour of every member of the society.

In his book, **Facing Mount Kenya**, Kenyatta criticized the accusations made by the missionaries and western settlers that the Agikuyu were *primitive and barbaric* in tackling social issues that affect their socialisation processes. He argued that missionaries and colonialists imposed their western ideologies upon the Agikuyu without consideration of their cultural heritage, which was the essential sustainer of their family structure, roles and responsibilities of every community member.

In the productive roles, men and women knew exactly what was expected of them, to the extent that the upkeep of the family was not left to the women alone. The society was (is) organised and functions under the patrilineal system. The *ithe or baba* (father) was (is) the supreme ruler of his homestead; he owns practically everything (custodian of the family), he tilled the land and looked after the livestock. On the other hand, *maito* (mother) has a duty to fulfil by taking care of her husband's property and their children. Unfortunately, the woman's respect was conditional and was only guaranteed when she earned herself the title *maito*. This means she had to take care of her husband, his property and be involved in all the traditionally ascribed roles that were regarded as feminine, thus making the title envied by many.

Each family unit was regarded as an economic unit, and was controlled and strengthened by the system of division of labour by gender. From the homestead to the fields and to the tendering of domestic animals, every sphere of activity was clearly and systematically defined. Hence, each community member knew what responsibilities and roles were required to perform, in their economic productivity and distribution of family resources. This was aimed at the development of the economic prosperity of the family and the entire community.

Children were greatly desired, regardless of their gender among the Agikuyu. Elders regularly offered prayers and sacrifices for a fruitful family of many children. However, women were never allowed to pray for children. A woman's only hope was to have and be able to produce as many children as she could possibly manage (Leakey 1977).

In spite of the fact that children were greatly desired, there were laws and customs that were put in place to ensure that no woman gave birth to as many children as she could produce naturally, since greater importance was attached to having healthy children. This law and custom was there to ensure that no married woman conceived before the other child had been weaned, which took place after 2 years of its birth. Therefore, deliberate spacing of children and polygyny were encouraged.

According to Ahlberg (1991), this fertility model was to regulate child bearing and family spacing in order to create a family structure that allowed age differentiation and a healthy family. In her book, **Women, Sexuality and the Changing Social Order**, she states that the fertility model was highly valued and respected for several reasons. These include: children being considered as the key determinants of social status, agricultural labour, continuation of the generation line, security at old age, and in case of any death of a family member. Hence, beliefs, taboos, prohibitions, social sanctions and collective pressures were commonly used to regulate sexuality. This was done to avoid conception and childbirth under certain circumstances such as ceremonial rites like mourning.

However, although the fertility model structured the Gikuyu family in acceptable ways, missionaries and other western settlers created a significant change in the traditional family structure, referring to the practices as barbaric and unchristian. Some of the contraceptive measures condemned included:

- ❖ Long post-partum sexual abstinence, therefore encouraging polygyny.
- ❖ Sexual abstinence during occasions considered sacred like mourning and ritual ceremonies.
- ❖ Polygyny and marriage transactions.
- ❖ Controlled sexual play for the initiated but unmarried boys and girls, known as **ngwiko**.

Changes occurred gradually and without design and almost every ethnic group in the republic was influenced. The Gikuyu women were not spared either. Their roles as caretakers were undermined and reduced to productive and reproductive roles which were never recognised as work but biological responsibilities of women (Boserup, 1970). The entire African continent experienced changes. With the coming of western education came a decrease of mortality rates and replacement of informal education with the formal education.

Moreover, the uncompromising stand against African customs and values created a divided society. There was a major campaign against the Gikuyu socialisation processes, which were directed at inculcating new ways of life and values through Christianity, western education and medicine, without proper understanding of the functional role of the various customs supporting and regulating the African social system. Therefore, the missionaries played a great role in the dismantling of the Gikuyu customs and values, which were the important determinants of how men and women related their sexuality and reproduction. Furthermore, this directly undermined the division of labour by sex of the Agikuyu and the position held in the society, especially by women.

2.1.1 Factors that influence change among women

There are several factors that have contributed to the change in roles and responsibilities of the Gikuyu woman. These factors include:

(a) Socio-cultural factors

This is inclusive of the relations by clans or blood relation, with the coming of the Europeans and missionaries, 'individuality' relations were encouraged among them. Since more emphasis was placed on monogamy and Christianity, the family structure was altered when the Agikuyu began associating themselves with western ideologies.

Religion played a vital role in altering the family structure too. However, although they associated themselves with Christianity, their indigenous religion was still observed and to some extent practised. This religion was always on the side of solidarity among the family members. For the Agikuyu, there was no individual affair. Everything had moral and social reference. According to Kenyatta (1965:119), the habit of corporate effort was, but on the other side of corporate ownership, and corporate responsibility was illustrated in corporate work, sacrifice and prayers.

(b) Education

The striking thing in the Gikuyu system of education, is its clear distinction from the European education system. The Europeans gave priority to individuality which was the ideal way of life, whereas to the Agikuyu the ideal way of life, is the right to relations with, and behaviour to other people. Western education promoted individuality, thereby replacing the communal spirit, which in return dismantled the family structure.

With the replacement of the informal education with formal education, women became involved directly, although at first they were very reluctant, this involvement in education enlightened both the men and women. However, the women benefited more. This means, women had to learn the mechanisms of survival in the absence of men.

c) Salary employment

The major economic transformation of the family from polygyny to monogamy, together with the penetration of western and Christian ideas, was that the husband became the ultimate leader, even when he is only de facto head. This has led to the privatisation of the Gikuyu women's problems and needs, although there is also an increase in the economic dependence of the women on their husbands. More women are moving out of the norm of the husband being a breadwinner to the women seeking for salary employment. This has created dual income-earning families where the woman becomes the breadwinner too.

Today, the Gikuyu society has become more complex, and present-day Gikuyu women do not share interests and needs to the same extent as before; neither do they apply the same strategies in pursuit of their aims and goals. The women belong to different socio-economic strata and great difference have been brought about by education, career development, family structure of two children with or without a husband and the accessibility and control of critical resources such as land and family businesses. This has also brought about major changes in the gender relations of the productive work of women, which was restricted to households. Women have secured more opportunities by working outside the household settings, causing men and children to take up women's roles in case of a long-term absence or commitment to their careers.

2.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Harvard Institution for International Development, in collaboration with Women in Development, developed the Harvard Analytical Framework, also known as the gender role framework or gender analysis framework, in the Women in Development (WID) department of the USAID. This framework is one of the earliest gender analyses and planning frameworks since it was based on the WID efficiency approach.

Among others, this framework has been used by Overholt et al.. In their book, they demonstrated that there is an economic rationale for investing in women as well as men.

Also, it was to assist planners or policy makers to design more efficient projects and improve on overall productivity, emphasise the importance of better information as the basis for meeting equity goal, and to map the work of gender in the economy and highlight the key differences.

The framework's main issues provide guidance for data collection at the micro (community/household) level. These include four interrelated components:

- ❖ The activity profile-which provides a useful way of tapping information and which methodology to use in the process. This involves interaction assessment between women and men projects and answers to the question “Who does what?” Also, it includes gender, age, resources spent and the location of activity.
- ❖ The access and control profile- which identifies the resources used to carry out the work in the activity profile, access to and control over the resources by gender. It shows gender-specific activities in production, reproduction and communal tasks.
- ❖ The analysis of influencing factors-looks at the factors which determine who does what in any population, subgroup and what access and control over these individuals have over the resources and benefits.
- ❖ The project cycle analysis –involves the examining of a project in intervention, in light of gender disintegrated information.

The Harvard Analytical framework is relevant to my study since it clearly depicts who does what, when and with what resources, while distinguishing what resources men and women have access to and control over. It, therefore, offers a possibility to see both the traditionally ascribed and modern roles of men and women, thus analysing to what extent they have contributed or transformed the family structure.

It is, therefore, useful in this research since gave the researcher some series of checklists consisting of key questions to ask and evaluate the extent to which the family structure has been affected by the changing roles of these women. This framework clearly depicts

and distinguishes between control over and access to resources of women. Therefore, it makes women's role and work possible among the Gikuyu community.

2.4 HYPOTHESES

- i) The Gikuyu family structure has changed as a result of the access to and control over resources for the Gikuyu woman

- ii) Education, migration of the male population and employment are responsible for the changing roles in Gikuyu women, which has implications for the family structure.

2.4 DEFINITION OF TERMS

The access to resources of Gikuyu women- they have better chances of education, medical facilities, and job mobility and credit facilities. On the other hand, the control over resources means the ways in which a Gikuyu woman is able to own and have control over property, trade, i.e., family businesses, and land.

For a long time, the Gikuyu woman has been taking care of her husband's property. However, with more and better chances to education and access to credit facilities, she can now have total control over property.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter describes the research site and also the various methods and instruments used during this study. Description of the research site, research design, study population and techniques of data collection and analysis are dealt with.

3.1 Research site

Rwaka sublocation is geographically located in the central part of the republic. It is found in Kiambaa division of Kiambu district (which is the smallest district in Kenya). It borders Nairobi City and Kajiado district to the south, and Nakuru district to the west. The total area covered is 1458.3 square kilometres, and it is divided into five administrative divisions, as shown in Table 3.1

Table 3.1 Area of the district by division in square kilometres

Division	Area (square kilometres)
Kiambaa	191.7
Limuru	290.6
Githunguri	171.6
Kikuyu	239.7
Lari	564.4
Total	1458.3

(Source: District survey office, Kiambu, 1996)

Lari division is the largest in terms of area, but most of it is covered with forest. Kiambaa division is the smallest.

Kiambaa division has two topographical regions, namely, the upper midland region and the lower highland. The lower highland region consists of Limuru, parts of Kikuyu and Githunguri divisions, and is characterised by hills and high level of structural plains. The plains have facilitated easy development of the road network.

Altitude is the single most important factor influencing climate and the distribution of rainfall. With regard to rainfall, the amount received varies from 845mm in Ruiru. The rainfall regime is bimodal, with the long rains occurring between the months of April and May while the short rains fall between October and December. The average temperatures range from 20.4 degrees Centigrade in July-August to 34 degrees Centigrade in January to March. It is important remember that rainfall is reliable and favourable for agricultural activities in this district.

The demographic variables are important in the development process because they determine the allocation and utilisation of resources. The population of Kiambu district was 812,535 persons in 2001, with an estimated annual growth of 2.87% (Government of Kenya 1997). The population distribution is not even; a larger population of the youth and higher portion of females to males is experienced. However, in the youthful population there is more increase in males than females due to the influx of outsiders who come to work in the industries within the district, that is, the Bata Shoes Company and the steel industries in Limuru. However, Kiambaa division has the highest density of 711 persons per square kilometre. This has been influenced by high agricultural potential, which has led to land being fragmented into small pieces, which cannot be tilled economically.

The main occupation is agriculture; the climatic conditions are favourable for the growth of such crops like coffee, tea, and pyrethrum as well as subsistence crops like maize, beans and potatoes. Also, the people are involved in livestock production, mostly dairy farming under zero grazing, poultry, piggery, bee keeping and goat/sheep rearing. Employment levels among the Kiambaa dwellers have been distributed across various sectors. Most of the income is derived from agricultural and livestock sectors as well as

commerce, trade and service. According to the Government of Kenya (1994), the monthly per capita income was estimated to be well over Kshs. 30,000.

Females constitute about 49.6% of the total labour force. However, most of them are engaged in the unpaid family labour category. The males dominate in all sectors except the unpaid family labour. The breakdown of the employment sector according to sex is shown in Table 3.2

Table 3.2 Employment sector and sex in Kiambu as at 1994

Sector	Males	%	Females	%
Public sector	44,939	8.7	18,398	3.4
Formal sector (own business)	7,269	1.4	4,551	0.9
Formal sector (employee)	32,414	6.3	9,260	1.8
Informal sector (own business)	42,546	8.3	22,253	4.3
Informal sector (employee)	27,277	5.3	9,848	1.9
Casual labour	24,755	4.8	16,678	3.3
Unpaid family labour	26,840	5.2	180,308	35.2
Other sectors	19,449	3.8	25,159	4.9

Source: Welfare Monitoring Survey II (C.B.S.) Kiambu, 1994

3.2 The study population and sampling procedure

All the female residents of Rwaka were eligible to make up the study population. Their ages ranged from +85 to 25 years. However, due to the limitations of resources (time and money) this study could not cover every female resident (the study population). Therefore, only a sample was studied.

The sampling design used was that of **probability** or **random sampling**. Since the random sampling method is based on the laws of probability, (can be worked out mathematically), every element has an equal chance of being included.

Simple and cluster random sampling were used. However, due to some logistics problems, **non-probability sampling** was also used in order to collect more information. Non-probability, sampling was mainly used to select key informants.

The study sample consisted of twenty five women. These women included five successful business women, ten small scale farmers, house wives and a key informant who was leader of the women's group as well as church leader. With her assistance, thirty women were reached, although five were not available for interviews due to some inevitable circumstances; they were too busy on the day of the interview.

3.4 Data collection methods

Both primary and secondary data was collected. This included questionnaire administering, face to face interviews and library research. The exercise was carried out between July and August 2002. However, the secondary data used was not supplementary enough since it involved a lot of generalisation of Kiambu District.

3.5 Data analysis

Data analysis was designed to provide critical information in relation to the study. This involved sorting, identifying and transforming of the data for qualitative analysis.

3.5 Data interpretation and presentation

This was aimed at answering the questions, whether education, dual earning families and the impact of career development were the major factors responsible for the changing roles in the Gikuyu women.

3.5 Problems encountered in the field

The main problem encountered during the research study was the language barrier, for clarity and easy understanding, the questions had to be translated into the Gikuyu language. However, one of the villagers was used for clarity and elaboration whenever

the researcher was not able to translate the question into an understandable and explanatory question.

Apart from the language barrier, physical distance from one study subject to the next slowed down the process of questionnaire administration. However, this problem was solved in three ways. The first day was for asking for permission among the women who were later on interviewed. This was followed by questionnaire administration. Finally, the third day was be for the face-to-face interviews..

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the main findings of the research project are reported. As already stated, the data was obtained using the survey method through the administering of structured interviews. The information is presented using the following subheadings: The changing roles of women, their new roles and the impact of economic empowerment to the women.

4.1 The changing roles of women

The trends of empowerment and emancipation of the Gikuyu women for economic gains has created new economic opportunities for the women. This means, they now have access to better education facilities and career development, thereby bridging the cultural notion about women, education, and access to credit facilities and property.

Moreover, education has empowered these women to the extent that the traditional role of men and women in the context of ownership and control of property becomes equally distributed in terms of one's productivity. This has opened up economic windows that were traditionally closed to women. However, this is not to say that poverty and financial crisis in the families has not contributed to the major changes in women's roles.

Today, the smallest economic and social unit in the Gikuyu society is the family. It consists of a nuclear family and, at times, a polygynous family; that is, father, mother (s) and children. The people still strongly believe in the patrilineal system, whereby the male becomes the automatic head of the household, even when he is not always a permanent

resident within the household (due migration or persistent absence because of wage labour, or polygyny). In this case, the woman assumes some roles that were supposed to be fulfilled by the man.

Most of the children start school at 4 to 5 years of age. Because of this, the social and educational functions of the age-set system, which was an important feature of the traditional political life of the Agikuyu, have been weakened. Not only is it weakened but also it is slowly being replaced by the western education system, which encourages socialisation process through schools. The role played by women in the socialising of their children has partially been replaced by educational and religious institutions. This is to say that some of the simplest tasks that were meant for children are now the mother's responsibilities or she has to hire a helper

The financial status of a family has a major contribution to the woman's productiveness. Results from the household interviews indicate different opinions and perspectives of women in regard to their financial ability. Sixty percent of these women agreed that a financially stable homestead produces more income generating activities, creating more opportunities. However, the women agreed with the fact that urban centres attract a greater portion of their male and even female populations, including both the wealthy and the poor. The wealthier women are engaged in the production and selling of imported and local products. This includes selling imported products like clothes, jewellery and beauty products. These items are mostly in the one-stop-shops, commonly known as exhibitions

or sale markets. On the other hand, the poorer women are engaged in petty commodity trade (hawking, etc.) and wage-labour which earns them a daily income.

4.2 New roles

a) Socialisation process

According to the Gikuyu worldview, every youth, as they grew up, gradually passed through the various grades of the tribe's life or rites of passage. According to Hopley (1976), all the boys commence as **kibe**-uncircumcised, then after circumcision they become a *mwanake*- a young man, then eventually they graduate to be a *muthuri*- a man. In all the stages, the boys have to undergo a certain ritual and payment had to be made before the entry. However, with the western education and erosion of traditional values, the stages have become insignificant. Women were never involved in the circumcision rites of boys but due to the fact that most of the traditional values have eroded, many women in Rwaka are now involved in this ritual. Also, it is important to note that the circumcision of boys is a very expensive ritual and most of the households cannot afford it. Therefore, it is done in the hospital and the boys are brought home to be under the close supervision of the father, or relative with the mother being the caretaker- she prepares their food and sometimes helps in nursing the boys till they recover.

Moreover, the *anake*- **circumcised boys**- were traditionally allowed to move out of their mothers' houses into a small hut which they made, called **thingira**. However, this is not happening because of financial constraints. The circumcised boys have to live with their mothers until they are old enough to get their own houses.

Due to the fact that education has become a part of life and every child has to go to school at the tender age of 4 to 8 years, socialisation is now left to the school, the church and, at times, the family. And in case the man is not a permanent resident of his own home, then the woman has to take over his responsibilities of educating the children, including the males. The woman also takes over the children's responsibilities because the children are in school. These tasks include taking care of the small animals, if any, collecting firewood and fetching water.

b) Productive roles

Women have active productive roles in both the rural and the urban settings. In both settings, women are still responsible for the children (if any), the husband, house maintenance and food preparation, in addition to their salary-employment, petty business or wage-labour. This makes it very hard for the recognition of their reproductive roles since these are seen as their obligations. However, due to the financial instabilities in many homes, the productive role of men is seen as being the provision of enough money to the woman, whose work is to budget and use that money to take care of the household. Nevertheless, the money provided by the man is never enough or due to his inconsistency in coming home, the woman is now left to look for other means of maintaining and feeding her family.

In Rwaka, and other parts of the country, leisure time or rest time for the women is less than that of the men. The Agikuyu still hold onto the patrilineal system of the family where the man becomes the ultimate leader of the household, even when he does not

provide for his wife and the children. Some women have to have a man just to fill the place of a husband, but do all the duties. This is because of the stigmatisation of single women. Although the stereotypic negative notions on single women have been slowly eroded, women still prefer to be married to unproductive men rather than stay single and “be talk of the town”, as eighty percent agreed.

After the arrival of the European settlers in the highland area, most of the families were influenced negatively. Many men opted for wage labour on the European farms and forgot their responsibilities in their own houses, forcing the women to take over. The gender relations in the household underwent radical changes; the women who were supposed to be caretakers became providers and decision-makers. Communal work became less significant to the women and most of them got involved in remunerative work. The productive roles of men and women became intertwined. Traditionally, the role of the men was to dig, plough, milk and graze the animals, whereas the women were involved in cultivation and weeding. However, due to socio-economic changes, most of the families are now involved in salary and wage labour, thereby abandoning their farm work.

Education and religion have also played a significant role in the productive roles of both men and women. However, many women agreed with the fact that the man is still the determinant of the family size, although they both decide on the number of children and whether to use contraceptives. With the effects of changing lifestyles, income and upbringing of the children, most of the families decide to have a smaller number of

children, ranging from 3 to 5. The education of the woman and what she wants for her family influence this. However, children are considered as a gift from God and how much you can provide for them.

In the case of ownership of land and access to and control of property, eighty five percent of these women still use their husbands' or fathers' land. The opinion of the male on the property ownership in male-headed households still counts. The men argue that since they are the heads, the women do not need to own land. However, there has been a major shift in how ownership of property is being viewed by both men and women. It is a cultural respect for the married woman to use her husband's land. However, also it is an honour and source of security for the woman to own land and have access to credit for her children and her own security. In case of any eventuality like death, divorce or separation.

4.3 Other findings

Western education and religion have been the significant determinants of women empowerment and enlightenment. However, it is also important to note that, several factors have been responsible for these major changes on women and the way they have access to credit facilities and control over property. These factors include:

a) Access to credit

Most of the women in Rwaka are beneficiaries of the Kenya Women Trust Fund (KWTF). KWTF is a non-profit making organisation whose main objective is to advance and promote the direct participation of economically active women, already involved in

business, to achieve sustainable financial and non-financial services. It also, provides training for women entrepreneurs in business management and record keeping.

In Rwanda, women who have benefited from this credit facility are mostly involved in wholesale business, agricultural production and leasing of business and residential premises. Most of the wealthy women in terms of thriving businesses and homesteads use several credit facilities. However, their husbands are either employed in the urban areas or they themselves are de facto heads of the families. Due to the fact that most of them are from female-headed households, various factors on the changes of women status have been highlighted. These include the fact that female-headed households and single parenthood have gained more acceptance among the Agikuyu.

b) Self-help groups

Traditionally, Gikuyu women had their small self-help groups, which were used to ridicule mothers with unhealthy babies or shower praises on those with healthy babies. This communal self-help group was to boost the confidence and encourage more Gikuyu women to take care of their husbands and homesteads according to the ascribed roles. However, these groups have been transformed from a social gauge to a financial scheme that is to enable women establish sustainable businesses or in investments. The *itate*, as they are known, are the main source of money for most of the women. They are formed at all levels and no official registration is required apart from the consent and commitment of each member.

The *itate* have enabled these women to furnish their houses, equip their kitchens and even improve on their businesses. This means that, women who belong to the *itate* are able to sustain their families with or without their husbands' help. However, some of the self-help groups do not give money for investment. In such a case, the women have still to rely on their husband's monetary contribution.

c) Saving groups

These groups are just another example of how well the Gikuyu women are adapting to the changing times and conditions. By pooling their limited cash resources into the rotating saving societies, better known as the '**merry-go-rounds**', they are able to buy their daily necessities such as kitchen utensils, clothes, fertilisers, seeds, etc. Each member receives a small fixed amount of money in turn from the other members, which she uses to buy her needs. Not only does this reduce the dependency of the wife on the husband but also it gives her certain autonomy in economic matters. And, as a result, she gains more respect and dignity from him when there is a little amount of money at her disposal.

My key informants described her savings group as follows:

We are 20 born-again women and we meet in turns in each other's home. We share our problems and provide solutions. Apart from that, each member has to contribute a certain amount of money for the tea and the *mandazis* we shall have during the meeting. This is roughly 5 shillings each. We meet every second and last Sunday of the month. At every meeting a member is supposed to contribute 50 shillings, which go to the trust fund and on the last Sunday of the month, one woman benefits from the 1,000 shillings collected. This money is used to refurbish businesses, buy clothes or even pay school fees.

4.4 Problems experienced by women in relation to the new roles

The new roles women get when they assume their children's and husbands' responsibilities in addition to their own triple roles include:

- ❖ The negative outcome of socialisation of the children, especially boys, due to the fact that the father is not around to discipline the male children and also the girls at times. The children tend to disrespect their mothers or become bullies in the homestead and notorious in school.
- ❖ Due to the limitations already occurring in the women's triple roles, there is less productivity in the women's ascribed duties, which are then replaced by wage or salary employment.
- ❖ The harsh economic conditions on the family's productivity, have impacted negatively on the market for both purchasing and selling of agricultural products, forcing Kenyans to go for cheap imports and substitutes.
- ❖ The case of eventualities like death and sickness in some families has forced some women to stretch their little income to feed the orphaned children. This has mostly occurred where both parents have died of HIV/Aids.
- ❖ The lack of enthusiasm and commitment among some members; this mostly occurs due to the fact that some members cannot afford to raise 100 shillings per month for their contribution or have large arrears.

4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that the changing roles and values of the Gikuyu women, especially those ones residing in Rwaka, have been greatly influenced by how much education and access to credit one has.

- ❖ The negative outcome of socialisation of the children, especially boys, due to the fact that the father is not around to discipline the male children and also the girls at times. The children tend to disrespect their mothers or become bullies in the homestead and notorious in school.
- ❖ Due to the limitations already occurring in the women's triple roles, there is less productivity in the women's ascribed duties, which are then replaced by wage or salary employment.
- ❖ The harsh economic conditions on the family's productivity, have impacted negatively on the market for both purchasing and selling of agricultural products, forcing Kenyans to go for cheap imports and substitutes.
- ❖ The case of eventualities like death and sickness in some families has forced some women to stretch their little income to feed the orphaned children. This has mostly occurred where both parents have died of HIV/Aids.
- ❖ The lack of enthusiasm and commitment among some members; this mostly occurs due to the fact that some members cannot afford to raise 100 shillings per month for their contribution or have large arrears.

4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that the changing roles and values of the Gikuyu women, especially those ones residing in Rwaka, have been greatly influenced by how much education and access to credit one has.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION.

5.0 Introduction

In this final chapter of the research project, an attempt to reach conclusions based on the research findings is made. Recommendations and suggestions on areas for future studies then follows

5.1 Conclusion

a) Factors responsible for the changing roles of the Gikuyu women

i) Education

Since 1963, when Kenya got her independence, education has been of paramount importance and a major concern to the growth and development of Kenyans. Although, eighty five percent of the study group know the basics of reading and writing, a section of the group are still illiterate. For a sustainable development to be achieved and poverty to be alleviated, illiteracy has to be addressed as a major concern.

More than sixty percent of the study sample were semi-illiterate, this means, that the little knowledge or education they have is not enough to root out gender inequalities. Knowledge is power. Therefore, there is need for the government to re-introduce adult education. These women bring forth generations and generations and if they cannot keep up with the changing trends, then it means they will bring up children in ignorance and illiteracy. Furthermore, for economic sustainability among these women, enlightenment and empowerment are essential for their development and growth.

Many women complained about how the current government has imprisoned them on their own farms. Fifty percent of them blamed the current regime for the harsh economic conditions and the high rates of school drop outs among the girls. They strongly believe that the current education system has made people have materialistic goals, ignoring the family.

ii) Socio-cultural factors

There has been a general weakening of the blood relations among the Agikuyu. With education and career development, materialistic and individualistic attitudes have been incorporated with culture the Gikuyu culture. More families are basing their foundation on western ideologies and cultures, creating modern lifestyles that ignore the importance of the extended family structure.

Traditionally, it was only accepted for men to offer sacrifices and prayers to the gods of fertility. However, Christianity it has brought a different perspective of how the family structure should be, that is, it encourages monogamy.

Western medicine, has brought a major improvement among the women in Africa, meaning that many have been able to benefit from low mortality rates of their children, creating a situation whereby the life expectancy increases. Moreover, the same women can now be engaged in other activities that are not categorised as reproductive work. This includes career development and salary employment. Also, modern medicine has given the woman a chance to have autonomy over her sexuality. This has a greater impact on

the family structure, when a woman gains control over her sexuality, it means she can now have a choice on whether to contracept or not and also, she can decide on the number of children she wants to have.

5.2 Impact of these changes on the family structure

It is evident that Gikuyu women have been adapting to the environment they are pushed into. They have had to adapt to changes caused by the coming of the colonialist, the missionaries and the then settlers. They have shown enough survival skills which were achieved through deliberate action, that paved way for individual autonomy, for example, by sending the girl to school. Education has helped the girl child to gain freedom and to avoid observation of the rigid customary law. This, in turn, has promoted flexibility in an individual's behaviour, promoted by personal initiative and strength.

The changing roles of women from the traditionally ascribed roles to modern roles has both negative and positive impact on the family structure. The triple roles of women in the rural settings have never been understood fully. This has resulted in wrong assumptions and generalisation of the rural family unit as homogeneous. For a rural woman to be empowered more studies must be done according to the cultural context and affiliations affecting her.

Women have been able to find a way of emancipating themselves from poverty. This has been through the *itate*, self-help groups, saving groups and other financial bodies interested in empowering women to gain sustainable economic growth. Women have, therefore, shifted from the norm of a man being the breadwinner to empowering

themselves and others to not fully depend on the man's ability. This has encouraged them to be contented with what they gain and encourage ambitious dreams for their families and themselves.

A lot of campaigns have been made on women empowerment and enlightenment, thereby creating a sensitised population of women. However, not much has been done in terms of gender disparities, meaning some women have been misinformed when it comes to issues of gender equality. Such women create tensions and disputes in families. Therefore, the financial institutions that cater for women's needs should put more emphasis on understanding the family structures of the rural women before deciding to support them. This will help them gain the grass-roots perception and problems women face.

5.3 Recommendations for future research

There has been a major shift for women from the traditional ascribed roles to modern roles, which gives the woman more autonomy financially in her own homestead. However, instead of the workload of women being reduced from that of the triple roles to lighter duties and responsibilities, women are gaining more duties from being caretakers, to being decision makers and bread winners of their homes. Therefore, future research on these subjects could focus more on:

- ◆ The extent of empowerment and sensitisation of rural women in Kenya on the family structure.
- ◆ The most productive way of empowering both the man and the woman to assume, their roles as ascribed by tradition without oppressing their human rights.
- ◆ Environmental and political factors affecting the empowerment of women and accentuating a change in the family structure.

Bibliography.

Ahlberg, B. 1991 Women sexuality and the changing social order: The impact of government policies on reproductive behaviour in Kenya. Philadelphia: Gordon and Breach

Middleton, J. and Kershaw, G 1965 The Kikuyu and Kamba of Kenya. International African Institute, London.

Davison, J. 1989. Voices from Mutira. lives of rural Gikuyu women., Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner

Kenyatta J, 1965. Facing mount Kenya. London: Secker & Warburg

Government of kenya, Strategic Project Paper of the year 2000-2001.

APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE

Please indicate

1. Background information of the interviewee:

A) Name

B) Marital status.....

C) When were you born?

a. Before colonial era.....

b. During the colonial era.....

c. After the colonial era.....

D) what is your occupation?.....

2. What is your level of education?

a.. none

b . Primary.....

c. Secondary.....

d. University or diploma.....

3. What is the structure of your family?

a. Polygynous.....

b. Monogamous.....

c. Single parent.....

4. Who is the decision maker and the bread winner of your family?.....

5. What sort of financial assistance do you have that is obtained from outside the household?.....

6. Comment (why) on your above answer

.....
.....
.....

What is your opinion on women and education.....

.....

Has there been a major change in the family structure from the time you got married?.....

.....

How and why

.....

What are the general problems you experience in regards to the productive and reproductive traditional roles of women?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Any other comment?

.....
.....
.....

LIBRARY