

## ABSTRACT

In every human society, gender relations are an integral part of everyday life. In Kenya, they are crucial in rural development particularly when it is observed from a human development perspective. Based on the foregoing, the study set out to explore the prevailing gender relations and their implication for rural development in Mwingi Central Division, Mwingi District, Kenya. The objectives of the study were: to determine the effect of an individual's decision-making capacity on personal access to community resources; to find out the nature of conjugal property ownership and its relationship to individual empowerment; and to investigate the interaction between gender-based division of labor and individual participation in development activities. Three theoretical frameworks guided the study. In terms of methodology, the study employed triangulation method of social investigation. In particular, the study used three techniques of data collection: survey, key informant interviews and focused group discussions that yielded both qualitative and quantitative data. The quantitative data was analyzed using the computer package SPSS while the qualitative was analyzed manually. Various sampling techniques were used: purposive for the administrative district, division and location; and simple random for the sub locations, villages and households. The study interviewed 130 respondents, 6 key informants and undertook 3 focused group discussions. The study found: glaring gender disparities in favor of men with regard to literacy income, property ownership and decision-making; and various roadblocks with regard to XI access to and use of productive community resources particularly for women safe for credit facilities and immunization services, the latter especially for their children. From these findings, the study concludes that: human development cannot be at par gender wise without a policy shift in the existing gender relations; low levels of income and literacy are as a result of a myriad of roadblocks with regard to accessing productive community resources; and that generally development is set to remain low in the absence of the recommended remedies. Based on the findings and conclusions, two-fold recommendations have been put forward. With regard to policy change, it is recommended that: comprehensive civic education should be undertaken especially through community organization and action to bring about community consciousness; role of micro-credit services should be emphasized and promoted at the grass root level; and that locally available resources should be harnessed to uplift the local people's living standards. With regard to future research, studies with the following foci have been recommended: on areas of rural development other than human development; rural development determinants other than gender relations; on urban development; and those on specific social stratum.