

**FOOD SECURITY COPING STRATEGIES IN FEMALE AND MALE HEADED HOUSEHOLDS IN KENYAN SLUMS: THE CASE OF KAWANGWARE, NAIROBI****Griphase Vande Masinde**

Student, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kenya

**CITATION:** Masinde, G. V. (2014). Food security coping strategies in female and male headed households in Kenyan slums: The case of Kawangware, Nairobi. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Entrepreneurship*, 1 (9), 36-54.

**ABSTRACT**

The question of food security has become quite critical in society because the success of all development initiatives depends on how well people are fed. It is obvious that the good health of individuals, families, communities and societies depends on the quality and quantity of food at their disposal. However, strategies for accessing food and those for coping during shortage vary from one area to another and from individual or family to the other. This study sought to investigate and compare food security coping strategies employed by female and male headed households in Kenyan Slums with a special focus on Kawangware slums, Nairobi. The study was concerned with the nature and significance of the coping mechanisms of the households in ensuring food security. The theoretical framework guiding the study was the Capacities and Vulnerabilities Analysis framework (CVA), which describes the existing strengths (capacities) that determine people's ability to cope with critical situations, and weaknesses (vulnerabilities) that make the people more susceptible to crises. The study illustrates important linkages between capacities and household food security coping strategies, and vulnerabilities and food insecurity. A total of 60 respondents, 30 female and 30 male household heads were randomly selected and interviewed using structured questionnaires. The analysis revealed a wide range of factors, which affect food security coping strategies in female and male headed households in slum areas. The study also showed that women are increasingly taking over household/family headship, while men are abandoning their responsibilities for yet to be established reasons. The study recommends the need to create more income generating opportunities as a means of livelihood for the many youth and women in slum areas in order to enhance household food security and also stem the increasing anti – social behaviours.

**Key Words:** Kenyan Slums, Food security, coping strategies, female and male headed households

## Introduction

When food security issues came to the fore in the seventies, the question was whether a nation or a region could command enough food to meet the aggregate requirements of its people. Special attention was paid to fluctuations in aggregate food supply, and food security interventions were primarily concerned with providing effective buffer mechanisms against such fluctuations. In this context, food security measures came to be identified with macro-level instruments such as national and international storage of food and balance-of-payments support for countries facing temporary food shortages (IFAD, 2007).

It was soon realized, however, that this gave a very limited view of the food security problem. A large segment of a population could be living in hunger even if the country had sufficient food in the aggregate during normal times. Likewise, a sizeable section of the population could plunge into hunger during a crisis, even with an adequate national cushion to maintain aggregate food availability. Adequacy at the aggregate level does not necessarily ensure adequacy at the household or individual level.

Based on the above analysis, discussions on food security have been re-directed away from macro-level towards the household, and still further towards the individual. And while the focus on the disaggregated has now become common, there are still varied definitions of food security. According to the United Nations (UN), *a household is food secure when it has access to adequate food, needed for a healthy life for all its members, and when it is not at undue risk of losing such access. Adequacy here is in terms of quality, quantity and cultural acceptability* (IFAD, 2007).

On the other hand, Hulse (2007) defines food security as a state where all individuals, families, and communities enjoy consistent access to foods that, in quantity, quality and biochemical composition, provide hygienic, nutritional adequacy. He also notes that food security requires secure ownership of or access to food resources and income earning activities, including reserves and assets to offset risks, to ease shocks and meet all contingencies. This means all people having access to stocks and flows of food and cash sufficient to satisfy their basic nutritional needs.

The concept of food security cannot be discussed in isolation. It is a constituent part of the broader concept of nutrition security. A household can be said to be nutritionally secure if it is able to ensure a healthy life for all its members at all times in terms of health care, a hygienic environment, safe water sources, and education.

Thus, a much more comprehensive developmental approach is required to ensure that all members of any given household achieve both food and nutrition security. In this regard, several factors come into play including women's education and economic status, improvements in per capita food availability, and the environment (Haddad et al, 1997).

While both men and women have always contributed significantly to the social and economic life of their families and communities, the role of women in development activities still remains largely unrecognized. In terms of food security, women continue to be the primary custodians

over food acquisition, food processing, food marketing and ultimately over household food security (Oniang'o et al, 1999).

Further, Oniang'o et al, (1999) contends that generally, women allocate household income differently than men and favour the provision of basic goods and services required to meet the needs of their family, hence the need to allow them take control of house hold income.

The present study aimed at establishing and comparing the food security coping strategies male and female households in Kawangware slums in Nairobi employ in ensuring that their members are food secure.

### Statement of the Problem

Although poverty remains the biggest challenge among many societies, and especially in Africa, the role of women in household food security has not been significantly appreciated when compared to that of men, thereby stifling their potential in development (FAO, 2003). And while some efforts have been made in the past decade or so to improve the situation of women in most aspects, a lot more remains to be done. In Africa, for instance, women as compared to men continue to bear the brunt of an ever worsening food security situation, particularly at community and household levels. Efforts to emancipate women by increasing both their access to a variety of resources and their participation in decision - making through awareness campaigns have hit a snag as new problems emerge. The new problems include: liberalized economies which have created many cracks through which mostly women fall; fast emerging technologies to which women have limited access, and therefore continue to lag behind; climate change that has adversely affected the agricultural sector, where most women operate, thus increasing their vulnerability; and the HIV / AIDS problem whose social impact has hit women hardest. These and many other problems including increasing single parenthood, and high levels of poverty have greatly compromised the food security situation in many households, with women and children mostly affected, especially in rural and slum areas.

### Literature Review

#### Food Security coping strategies in female and male headed households

Food security is concerned primarily with access to nutritionally adequate food at the household level, and is a prerequisite for adequate dietary intake. In the 1970s, the theoretical debate regarding food security focused on food availability or supply. However, the recognition that some groups of people face food insecurity and famine conditions even where food is available has created an understanding that a household's ability to obtain food is determined by its "exchange entitlements". A household's food entitlements are derived from its own production, income generated in exchange for labour, the gathering of wild fruits, community support (claims), assets, transfers (remittances, inheritance), migration, among others. If these entitlements are eroded or collapse, food security is at risk. This highlights the need to understand how households access food (F AO, n.d.).

An understanding of how households or individuals obtain food to feed themselves on a daily basis is vital for the effective design and implementation of activities and programmes aimed at strengthening people's ability to acquire adequate food supplies. Access to food means that families or individuals are able to acquire food through their own production, purchase, bartering, food for work, gifts, food aid, or loans, enough food for a healthy living.

Food security also implies stability and sustainability of access to food. Stability means that enough food is available on a continuous basis, including when households face a stress such as crop failure, fluctuation in food prices or seasonal changes in cash income or food production. Sustainability means that enough food is available for the long term (FAO, n.d.).

Poorer households are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity, which depends on their resource base and ability to engage in various coping strategies. The relative ability of poor households to cope with shocks and stress is a measure of their resilience. Unfortunately, such households are less likely to have savings to fall back on, assets to sell and or social claims network or kin to help them to recover. Such situations reduce options for coping strategies and increase vulnerability to food insecurity. Even if coping strategies were to be effective, the costs of coping to those affected are sometimes enormous and can lead to a deterioration of people's health status and functional impairment (FAO, n.d.; Kimalu, 2001). The following are some of the coping strategies used by poor households to counter food insecurity problems:

1. Precautionary or Insurance mechanisms. These mechanisms include diversification of livelihoods, consolidation (or building) up of stocks and savings, and social investments in reciprocal or redistributive systems among households. The diversification of livelihoods may take various forms, such as mixed farming (for rural areas), migrating for seasonal employment opportunities, and street vending of small merchandise among others. Diversification, a strategy of engaging in multiple activities, is an important way of promoting flexibility and countering risk and uncertainty among households (Chen and Dunn, 1996).
2. Responsive mechanisms, which are adopted during severe food crises. Such mechanisms include reducing or modifying consumption, postponing other social obligations, liquidating savings and stocks; mortgaging or selling assets, and migration (Chen and Dunn, 1996). In particular, households facing food crises will tend to cut down on the number of meals a day, postpone expenditure on health; previously non-earning members (women, children and the old) are drawn into employment, sending children to eat at neighbours' homes, and children performing poorly in school, dropping out of school to look for food, begging, sale of blood among others. At some stage in the process, some households begin selling off their assets, starting off with consumer inventories, and then moving onto productive assets. When crises persist, the household unit may actually start breaking down through migration or abandonment. Some of these strategies can be personally degrading, immoral or illegal but the only available option (FAO, n.d.; Kabeer, 2006; Kimalu, 2001: 8).

In some cases of severe food shortages, mothers have been known to train their adolescent daughters to find rich men who are able to pay well for sexual favours. In many of these cases, the mothers are usually heads of poor households, whose means of livelihoods are usually pathetically meager. They therefore tend to consider selling their own or daughters' bodies as the only available option to the family. Unfortunately, such options are inherent with risks such as HIV/AIDS and or gender based violence (GBV) in its various forms. For example, in Chawama, a peri-urban low income area of Lusaka, Zambia, mothers are reported to have indirectly told their daughters to sell sex by instructing them to go out and make sure that they come back with food. This, the mothers did while knowing very well that their daughters did not have money to buy food (Kambou, et al, 1998). Thus selling sex by some women in low income urban areas can be a powerful strategy of survival.

According to IFAD (2007), the ability of a household to cope with food insecurity is determined by the degree of diversification of its livelihood strategy, that is, the way in which household members allocate their time in pursuit of various means of earning a living. Diversification is an essential feature of livelihood strategy but also depends on household resource constraints and the constraints and opportunities presented by exogenous (or external) factors. The most commonly cited exogenous factors include prevailing economic, ecological, technological and social conditions. However, endogenous (or internal factors) also play an important role in determining a household's degree of diversification. Such internal factors include the composition of the household, especially the worker-dependent ratio; ascribed gender (and intergenerational) roles and relationships, especially as they relate to coping mechanisms; and the degree of intra-household cooperation between men, women and children. Intra-household cooperation is considered as critical to the ability of poor households to tide over seasonal troughs and more severe food crises (Chen and Dunn, 1996).

IFAD (2007) further points out that women play a key role in ensuring the proper utilization of food. When this role is compromised, for example through illness, the ability of households to cope with food related shocks is considerably reduced. Thus the ability of households to cope with such shocks depends on two sets of factors: the availability and the quality of women's health-care facilities and the existence of a support network that can provide help to women in the performance of their domestic chores.

### **Impact of household composition and division of labour on household food security coping strategies**

Evidence gathered through a study carried out in northern Malawi (Kerr, 2005; 67-69) indicated some clear labour patterns based on socially mediated entitlements. The study suggests an unequal bargaining relationship within the household, which adversely affects coping mechanisms in terms of household food security. Women appear to have more work both within and beyond the household in comparison to men, who appear to have more leisure time, especially during the dry season.

In other studies in India (Bilgi, 2006), many women expressed concern about their heavy workload. A day of 17 to 19 hours was not uncommon for most women. On analysis of their time, the women felt that there was scope for reducing their daily workload by introducing time-saving devices.

However, many of the men who were interviewed from some of the households within the study area did not see the point of buying time-saving devices for women. The argument was that women's workload was not excessive as claimed and that hard work had many benefits. They also argued that if women had more time, they would loiter all day, gossiping and back-biting. Yet understanding household diversity and how household characteristics determine a household's well-being is crucial for development intervention (Vlaar and Ahlers, 2006).

The composition of the household also affects its members' well-being. The size of the household, the number and the gender distribution of adults, as well as the age and gender of the children, all contribute significantly to determining the options households have with respect to allocating their available labour to the full range of tasks that need to be accomplished, and to how tasks are divided among household members. Because childcare is viewed strictly as women's responsibility, the presence of young children shapes women's time use and labour market options significantly. Women who have young children tend to withdraw from labour market or to reduce the amount of time they work outside the home. Similarly, the number of older children in the household, particularly girls, reduces the time women spend on various reproductive work activities. Girl children are therefore women's main helpers in tasks such as water and fuel collection and care duties. The existence of other adult female household members also reduces the time each one must allocate to various household tasks and increases the likelihood of their involvement in wage employment or other productive tasks.

Poor households depend heavily on their member's time and labour for the provision of goods and services that are essential for their well-being and survival. When faced with severe time constraints, and lacking the economic resources to access market substitute, these households may have to resort to making tradeoffs between activities which may directly affect their members' well-being in terms of household food security. These may be short-term inter-sectoral tradeoffs as well as intergenerational tradeoffs with far reaching consequences. The negative impact of these tradeoffs can be observed in various dimensions of human poverty such as food insecurity, child nutrition, health, and education. For instance, time spent on care responsibilities may compromise certain tasks in subsistence production and consequently threaten household food security (Kes and Swaminathan, 2005).

### **Factors that influence household food security coping strategies in female and male headed households**

Many studies show that although there is a wide diversity in household production patterns, women in all regions play a predominant role in household food security through various means, for example agricultural food production, small and or petty businesses such as sale of hand-

made wares, second-hand clothing and street food vending (FAO, 2003; Kerr, 2005; Oniang'o, et al, 1999).

The pooling of incomes of household members is often a precondition for survival as neither female nor male share of income that a household member contributes to particular items of essential expenditure are often a function of societal traditions. However, the direct responsibility for household food provision largely falls on women, and that the improvement of household food security and nutritional levels is associated with women's access to income and their role in household decisions on expenditure (FAO, 2003).

This position is further strengthened by Kabeer (2006), who argues that maximizing household income is not always sufficient to maximize the food security of all its members. There is evidence that women appear to take a much greater role in assuring the food requirements of their dependants in situations of economic deterioration. So that where women produce and or control the resources by which their own nutritional needs and those of their families are met are likely to be associated with enhanced food security of all members.

Kerr (2005) looks at the issue of men and women and food security from a gender and intra-household relations, arguing that it is a critical component of food security analysis. She points out that household members may have different levels of access and control over resources that affect food security, a difference that is often delineated by gender. Household members may therefore use the resources at their disposal to improve household food security, or to worsen it. This is contrary to the assumption by many writers that if income is increased, the overall food security of households will increase, since any income produced will be shared within the household. This assumption ignores household dynamics based on gender, age and differences of power in gender relation. It simply treats the household as an undifferentiated unit.

Women more than men have been affected by the impact of adjustments in social services programmes and the labour market and the informalization of work. Women's relatively low entitlements, such as their restricted access to land ownership, credit and other productive resources, and their limited capabilities resulting from illiteracy and low educational levels are well documented determinants of feminization of poverty. Social and cultural expectations and norms confine women to unpaid household work-linked to their reproductive roles-and restrict their participation in paid production (Kimalu et al, 2001).

Lack of awareness of the specific and different roles and contributions of men and women to food security results in what has been termed as gender blindness. Unaware of these differences, policy makers and planners proceed as if they did not exist, as if the situations and needs of men and women are the same. Thus policy making and planning are built on a partial view of reality (FAO, 2003).

FAO further points out that the lack of collection and dissemination of gender -disaggregated data is one of the under-lying causes of this neglect of women's contributions to productive work and food security in development policies and research. Another root cause of this neglect is the lack of women's participation in policy making and decision- making bodies at national and international levels.

While both men and women, particularly in developing countries lack sufficient access to productive resources, women generally have much less access than men. The causes of this are rooted, to a great extent in: gender-blind development policies and research; discriminatory legislation, traditions and attitudes; and lack of access to decision- making. These compromise women's ability to effectively and sufficiently contribute to food security, whether at household, community or national level (FAO, 2001).

Education is another very important factor in Human Development. It strengthens people's abilities to meet their basic needs and those of their families by increasing their productivity and potential to achieve higher standards of welfare which includes food and nutrition security. Education has also been noted as one of the most valuable means of achieving gender equality and empowerment of women. Furthermore, education inculcates the knowledge and skills needed to improve the income earning potential and in turn the quality of life. This means that educating boys and girls, men and women can improve a number of other human development indicators, including health, nutrition, household income, among others (Republic of Kenya, June, 2008).

According to the Kenyan National Bureau of Statistics, KNBS, (Republic of Kenya, 2008), households whose heads had secondary or higher education showed lower undernourishment levels than those with primary or incomplete higher education. Moreover, food deprivation/insecurity by gender showed that male headed households had 52% prevalence of undernourishment compared to 48% for female-headed households in general.

Gender inequality is another factor that has implications on household food security, not only in Kenya but across the developing world. It places restrictions on women's choices, opportunities and participation in development, thus lowering their socio- economic status, that of their households and the nation at large. This has implications for the well-being of families/households.

According to Due and Gladwin (1991), the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) initiated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have also had a negative impact on both poor rural and urban households by being too macroeconomic in scope. They ignored the reality of life at the grass root and household levels, where male-female power relationships affect who gets access to the means of production and who controls the surplus or profit that results from added incentives to produce. Because of inequality in gender relations and women's relative lack of power, majority of women are not in a position to react with an economically appropriate supply response because they lack access to the factors of production as compared to men. In addition, the consumption-oriented policies within the SAP programs-reduced expenditure for health and education, in particular- have adversely affected female-headed and low resource households in both urban and rural sectors.

Many of these households are forced to bear heavier burdens of food, education, and health costs and are locked into a vicious cycle of poverty.

The inability of many men to fulfill expected roles in their households and communities due to diverse socio-economic changes have largely resulted in loss or decline in livelihoods. These

changes have had significant impacts on the relationships between people and among households and communities. Men are facing difficulties in adapting to these changes of livelihoods, trapped in a stereotypical definition of male identity and unable to redefine their roles in the local economy or within the household. The resultant frustration of being unable to cater to their households' needs is channeled into anti-social behaviour, such as substance abuse and crime, intra-household violence, and mental health problems. Moreover, women are increasingly becoming responsible for their households' income, acquiring a new awareness, autonomy, and a feeling of self-worth. This seems to be an indication of a significant reduction of men's power, leading to their disenfranchisement (Amuyunzu-Nyamongo and Francis, 2006).

The International Food Policy Research Institute, IFPRI, (2005) also argues that empowering women is the key to ensuring food and nutrition security, especially in the developing world. IFPRI argues that placing assets in the hands of women increases household spending, especially on children's nutrition and social needs. It also has the potential to mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS on food security and reduce the spread of the virus by reducing the high-risk behaviours such as transactional sex, the main income earner for some desperate women and orphaned children.

IFPR further points out that investing in the human capital women offer is key to sustainable and gender-sensitive food policy. This can be done through education and by removing barriers to the productive use of women's time and energy. Women must also be included alongside men in the design of agricultural and nutrition programs. One effective way of securing women's participation is through networks or group-based programs. These groups help women access critical support services and strengthen their social capital so they can engage in other activities. However, because women are not a homogenous group, particular attention must be given to ensuring that all women can participate effectively in such programs.

### Research Methodology

Both quantitative and qualitative data collection methodologies were used in this study to ensure complementarities in data and diversity.

### Study Site

The site of the study was Kawangware Location, Dagoretti District in Nairobi County. The main occupation of the inhabitants was small-scale horticulture farming on pieces of land averaging 0.05Ha; informal businesses including street vending of groceries, second hand clothing, small hardware shops and other wares.

### Research Design

The design of the study descriptive as it sought to get in-depth information directly from the selected respondents on the various issues under investigation. This would also help in the formulation of important principles of knowledge and solutions to significant problems. The sampling unit (SU) was the household (HH).

### Data Collection Methods

Secondary data/desk research was first done to collect specific data as per the study objectives. The secondary data provided background information to the study. Further, it informed the formulation of guiding questions and assumptions of the study. Primary data was collected using an appropriate mix of both quantitative and qualitative methods. Individual interviews (household interviews using semi-structured questionnaires, direct observation and documentation were used.

### Sampling Design and Sample size

The study used stratified random sampling to select the study sample. This method was preferred because of its more statistical precision and high degree of representativeness of the overall population. The process of sample selection was based on two already existing administrative sub- locations, with each giving 15% of randomly selected respondents, thus yielding 30% households in total as the sample size.

### Data Analysis and Reporting

After the fieldwork and before analysis, all the questionnaires and the data collected from the interviews were checked for reliability and verification. The data was analyzed using qualitative and quantitative techniques. The information generated was able to create descriptive statistics namely percentages, frequencies, mean and standard deviation. The study focused on establishing food security coping strategies in female and male headed households in Kenyan slums Sample sizes of 60 respondents were interviewed and the information presented in form of tables and graphs.

### Research Findings

The study established the following as some of the coping strategies that are employed by the respondents:

#### Household food security coping strategies

##### Sources of household income

The respondents indicated that they were involved in different forms of activities to support themselves. 58.9% reported that they earn their living through informal means. Only 28.6% earned formal wages and 3.6% got support from family members and through NGOs.

The results showed that a greater percentage of female headed households supported themselves through informal means, which included, offering cleaning services in the affluent neighborhoods, street vending of second hand wares, vegetables and cooked foods and to a small extent cereals. Others included making and selling of illicit local brews. Selling of certain parts of slaughtered animals and chicken such as legs and heads, out which soup is made for sale, mostly to drunkards. Although commercial sex was not obvious to observe, a few women intimated that it is part of their survival tactics, as they had no otherwise. They indicated that

sometimes they carry out their trade with willing clients within the study area, but sometimes they are forced to move to the city centre when things are not very good.

The women who clean for the affluent reported that because of competition from other slums such as Kangemi and Kibera, sometimes they don't secure the jobs. Asked what they do in such circumstances, some reported that they send their children to beg in the streets, while some of them trade their bodies for survival. Majority of the women reported making a meagre Kenya Shillings (KShs.) 250 to 300 per day. However, those who trade in their bodies were unwilling to disclose how much they make.

The study further revealed that no female household head had any formal means of supporting themselves. This could be attributed to the general low levels of education, and the limited skills among female household heads.

### **Property ownership**

Property ownership by household heads was considered as another important variable that impacts on food security strategies employed by households. This is because many households tend to resort to disposing off their assets as a coping strategy when need arises. Where the property is agricultural land, others may use it for production of food. From the findings, 60.7% of the respondents said they had no property while 39.3% owned either through inheritance or purchase. A comparative analysis showed that 58.7% of the property owners were male respondents. Female property owners constituted 41.3%.

### **Number of meals per day**

The number of meals a household takes per day may be a good indicator of the level of food security of that household. The study established that majority of the people in the area (at 51.8%) take two meals in a day. Most households skipped lunch. According to them this was meant to save on the meager resources they earn. Only those households with small children and perhaps a slightly better income thought it was important to have three meals in a day. It was further established that the majority of those who skip lunch are female household heads at 52.8%. Male household heads constituted 47.2%.

With regard to the main types of food eaten, the respondents indicated that they prefer cheap foods. These include low grade maize meal, wheat products, beans and other cereals. Pulses were deemed expensive and were therefore avoided by many households. Green vegetables are consumed two to three times a week, particularly during the rainy season when they are cheaper.

### **Social Networks**

Social Networks have been known to provide some safety nets for certain groups of people. The study therefore, sought to find out whether the respondents belonged to any of such social networks. The results showed that more than half of the respondents (56.6%) have access or belong to social networks. These included merry-go-round and self-help groups.

However, it was revealed that mostly female household heads belong to social networks (69.7%) while few men (30.3%) belonged to these networks. This implies that most women have a way of pooling together to support one another, especially in times of need. It also goes to explain that women are more strategic than men when it comes to securing food for their families and therefore proves the assumption of the researcher that female headed households are likely to cope better with food security situations than male headed households.

### **Impact of household composition and division of labor on household food security coping strategies**

#### **Presence of dependants in the household**

Evidence from a number of studies shows that the composition of the household does have a significant bearing on household food security as well as the division of labour within the household (Kerr, 2005; Bilgi, 2006; Kes and Swaminathan, 2005).

This study also set out to establish from the respondents whether they had any dependants and how this impacted on their general food situation in the household. 75% of the respondents reported having dependants who were not only below 18 years, but also the aged, disabled and the sick. Only 25% said they had no dependants. This variable was important because the presence and number of dependants in a household impacts on the income as well as the food security strategies of that household. The expenditure in such households tends to be higher on food procurement as well as other utilities such as water, electricity and medical care.

It was also noted that the physical status and age of the dependants plays a major role in the overall wellbeing of the household in terms of food security. For instance those households with young children as well as the aged and physically challenged were more affected than the other households. This was because the household heads and, especially women had to spend more time on taking care of the dependants than on looking for food. This observation ties in well with the argument of Kes and Swaminathan (2005).

The study further established that even in the male headed households, women still bear the burden of ensuring availability of food for household members. Many respondents indicated that most men spend their time and money on alcohol and other leisure instead of supporting their families. This has left women to take over leadership of households/families. This view is corroborated by a study carried out in northern Malawi, which established that women undertook more work within and beyond the household in comparison to men, who had more leisure time (Kerr, 2005). This unequal division of labour in many cases led to household food insecurity. A similar situation was observed in the present study.

### **Factors that influence household food security coping strategies in female and male headed households**

While both men and women experience a wide diversity in the patterns of household production, women play a predominant role in household food security through various means such as agricultural food production, formal and informal employment, small and or petty businesses.

However, such means of raising income for household food security is normally influenced by a number of factors. The following were some of the factors that were found to influence household food security in this study:

### **Level of Education**

The level of education was considered an important factor because it be an indicator of the level and significance of skill acquisition on the part of the household head. It may also point to the ability of the household head to maneuver and take care of the household in terms of food security, especially when faced with shortages. It is also important to take into account the level of education because food choices are a function of biological knowledge and not merely cultural and economic preferences. For instance, an analysis by the Kenyan National Bureau of Statistics, KNBS, (Republic of Kenya, 2008) found that households whose heads had secondary or higher level of education showed lower undernourishment levels than those with primary or incomplete secondary education.

In this study, many of the respondents had high school level of education. This gave insight into the kind of occupation they engage in. It also gave insight into how the respondents cope with food acquisition skills. The level of education may also be a factor to consider when looking at the occupation of the respondents and their level of earnings.

The education level distribution across gender showed that majority of women (80%) had no formal education. Most of them only completed primary school. Among those who completed secondary school, only 5% were women as compared to 95% men. However, the only respondent who attained University level education was a woman. The general trend here depicts that majority of women just attained basic education only, which cannot offer them an opportunity of engaging in productive formal jobs that can enable them improve their food security situation. The findings also point to the fact that women's education is not so valued by society.

### **Decision – making, monthly income and expenditure trends within the household**

The process of decision making in the family depends on whether that person is the principal income earner in the household or not. The principle income earner has always had the final word on issues of food, and especially acquisition, type of food and frequency of intake. This was confirmed in this study with 82.1 % of the respondents being the principal income earners in the households they head and therefore decision - makers. Only 17.9% were not principal income earners and depended on others for their upkeep. The situation was 50/50 as an equal number of respondents; both male and female were found to be the principal income earners.

With regard to the average monthly income distribution based on gender/sex, it was found that 58.8% of those who earned KShs. 5,000 and below were mostly women and as the income cluster increased the number of women decreased. For instance, those earning KShs. 20,001 and above, were 100% men. There was no woman in this bracket. This again indicates that female headed households are mostly confined to low wages brackets due to existing gender inequalities

in society. This hampers their ability to meet not only their food requirements, but also other basic needs.

The expenditure trend showed that on average food takes about 39% of the total monthly income while the other basic needs such as house-rent, water, school fees, clothing and medication account for the remaining 61%.

A comparison of expenditure between male and female headed households revealed that the latter spent slightly higher on food than the former. For male headed households, expenditure on food constituted only 30% while 66.7% went to other basic needs. When prodded further what these other needs were, the men conceded that leisure takes a bigger percentage of their income. This corroborated the narratives received, which decried men in the study area as being "married to alcohol", while women took charge of the households/families. The study also revealed that poorer households spend much of their income on food, water and rent compared to other necessities.

### Conclusions

From the study it was established that the major occupation of the respondents is small-scale trade, which involves small retail shops and kiosks, hawking of second hand wares, street food vending and groceries. This means that majority of the respondents depend on food purchases from the market for survival.

Women are the main players in ensuring household food security. Men have increasingly taken to alcoholism leaving the bulk of food production and the overall household food security issues to women.

Most households take fewer meals in a day in order to save on their meager resources, thus enabling them to stretch the resources over longer periods of time. Both male and female headed households favor this as a survival or coping strategy. Most households prefer taking breakfast and supper, while skipping lunch. It is also worth noting that due to their economic status, most households prefer cheaper types of food, not necessarily for their nutritional value or quality, but for the perceived quantity. This raises the question of the nutritional status of the respondents and members of their households.

Apart from their normal household chores, women engage in menial jobs in neighbouring up market estates such as Lavington, Kileleshwa and Loresho to earn an extra income to feed their families. The menial jobs include washing cloths and cleaning houses for the affluent in these estates.

Household composition, that is, the number of household members, including dependants has a profound impact on the level of household food security. The larger the number of members, the more the food consumed and the higher the household expenditure and the chances of conflict to due gender based power differentials. These differences may carry the risk of food insecurity with them.

Overall women are more strategic than men when it comes to issues of household food security. They have a way of pooling their meager resources in order to support one another. This is

mostly achieved through social networks such as the popular merry-go-rounds through which they benefit in turns after making some contributions. Other avenues include self-help groups. However, majority of the network members use whatever they get from these networks on household subsistence activities due to limited entrepreneurial skills. Most of these networks are based on trust. In the event that there is a fall out, some members can easily lose out.

Men rarely come together in groups to support one another. From the narratives, interviews and observations, many men have abandoned their households, with the women taking over as household heads. This raises the question "Why are men increasingly abandoning their families for alcoholic beverages?"

The level of education of the household head impacts positively or negatively on household food security. It determines the type of skills and knowledge one has and the kind of occupation they are likely to engage in.

From the study it is noted that men more than women are favored in terms of education. This may be explained by the attitude of society towards the education of the girl-child. It is still not valued. It also explains why majority of the female household heads in the study area are engaged in informal businesses and also earn the lowest monthly income (less than Kshs. 5,000). This has a significant bearing on their household food situation.

Most of the income generated in the study area is spent mostly on food and other household necessities. These include house rent, domestic water (which is quite scarce), school fees and medication. A negligible amount is spent on personal care, while nothing is saved for a rainy day. This is a pointer to high levels of vulnerability to poverty and therefore food insecurity.

### Recommendations

1. From the study findings, most respondents were of the opinion that the key to household food security in the study area is the creation of more income generating opportunities. Based on this, there is need for the government and other organizations such as NGOs operating in the area to facilitate creation of such opportunities. However, before this is done, there is need to train the respondents, especially women and youth in livelihood skills that will enable them to carry out small businesses to sustain themselves and their families. Such skills may include:
  - a) Growing of green vegetables in sacks and polythene bags known as *multi-storey gardens*. They are so called because different types of vegetables can be grown in one bag at the same time. The bags require minimal space and input and hence a number of them can be accommodated, for example in the small compounds of the respondents. And because this technology does not rely on rain, the people can use kitchen water for sustaining the vegetables and hence have a year round supply, both for sale and household subsistence. This technology is already being used in other slums like Kibera and has well been adopted. Such vegetables as

kales, spinach, onions and local/traditional ones like Spider weed (Sagetti), Amaranth sp. (Terere) and many others are popular with such technology.

- b) Keeping of small livestock and poultry such as rabbits and local chicken. These can be kept in cages, which also require minimal space and feeding, when compared with the larger livestock. Youth and Women groups should be organized and encouraged to undertake such and many other enterprises. They can be a good source of income and food for the households in the affected and other areas with similar situations, thus alleviating poverty and malnutrition. This and other opportunities can also engage the youth especially; in gainful employment to alleviate improve household food security.
2. Given that women are taking an increasing role in family/household welfare, there is great need to empower them. For instance, the social networks they are operating should be legally strengthened so that they can be able to borrow development loans for their members and also cushion one another in the event that there is a fall out. Such loans should be made cheap and easily accessible. And the women should be sensitized about the existence and benefits of such opportunities. This is because during the study, most of them complained that the existing micro- and other financial entities such as the Women Enterprise Fund and the Kenya Women Finance Trust are expensive and discriminatory when it comes to lending. By empowering women, the government and other development partners will be helping build up the socio - economic capital of these women and society at large for enhanced food security in the household.
  3. The government should ban all local/traditional brews which are fast ruining men and the youth. This might help men to refocus attention on their families/households. Alternatively, the Government could legalize these brews and raise taxation to discourage excessive drinking.
  4. Further research into why many men in the study area are increasingly abandoning their families/households and taking to alcohol may be necessary.
  5. In view of the fact that many households prefer quantity to quality of food, there is need to investigate the nutritional status of the residents of the study area as there could be many cases of malnutrition.

## References

- Amuyunzu-Nyamongo, Mary and Francis, Paul (2006) Collapsing livelihoods and the crisis of masculinity in rural Kenya. In Ian Bannan and Maria C. Correia (Eds.), *The Other Half of Gender: Men's issues in Development*. Washington DC: The World Bank.
- Anderson, M. and Woodrow, P. (1989) *Rising from the Ashes: Development Strategies in times of Disaster*, Paris: Westview Press, Boulder Co.
- Bilgi, Meena (1998) Entering Women's world through men's eyes. In Irene, Guijt and Meera, Kaul Shah (Eds.), *The Myth of Community: Gender Issues in Participatory Development*. London: International Technology Publications.
- Chen, Alter and Dunn, Elizabeth (1996) *Household Economic Portfolios*. Washington DC: Management Systems International.
- Due, Jean M., and Gladwin, H. Christina (1991) *The Gendered Impacts of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) in Africa*. University of Florida: American Agricultural Economics Association.
- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (2001) *Feeding Minds, Fighting Hunger: A World Free from Hunger*. Rome: F AO.
- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (2008) *Food Security Information for Action: Vulnerability Indicators: Learners' Notes*. Rome: FAO.
- Hovorka, Alice and Lee-Smith, Diana (2006) Gendering the Urban Agriculture Agenda. In Rene Van Veenhuizen (Eds.), *Cities Farming for the Future: Urban Agriculture for Green and Productive Cities*, Ottawa: International Development Research Centre.
- International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) (2005) *Women still the Key to Food and Nutrition Security*. Washington, DC: IFPRI.
- Joseph, H. Hulse (2007) *Sustainable Development at Risk: Ignoring the Past*. Ottawa: International Development Research Centre.
- Kimalu, Paul (2001) *A situational Analysis of Poverty in Kenya: Working Paper No.6*. KIPPRA: Nairobi.
- Rachel, Bezner Kerr (2005) Food Security in Northern Malawi: Gender, Kinship Relations and Entitlements in Historical Context. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 31 (1) 3-19.
- Republic of Kenya (2002) *Analytical Report on Gender Dimensions, Vol. XI*, Nairobi: Government Printer.
- Republic of Kenya (2008) *Food Insecurity Assessment in Kenya*. Nairobi: Government Printer.
- Republic of Kenya (2008) *Well-being in Kenya: A Socio-economic Profile*. Nairobi: Government Printer.
- Sonja, Vlaar and Rhodante, Ahlers (1998) Gender-blind or Gender-Bright: Targeting of Projects in Cambodia. In Irene Guijt and Meera Kaul Shah (Eds.), *The Myth of Community: Gender Issues in Participatory Development*, London: International Technology Publications.
- United Nations (1991) *Women: Challenges to the year 2000*. New York: UN.

## Internet Resources

- Food and Agriculture Organization, FAO (2003), *Gender and Food Security: Synthesis Report of Regional Documents: Africa and Asia* (Accessed on 5/12/2011) Available from [www.fao.org/docrep/xOI98e/xOI98e03.htm](http://www.fao.org/docrep/xOI98e/xOI98e03.htm).

- International Fund for Agricultural Development, IFAD (2007) *Food Security, Poverty and Women: Lessons from Rural Asia* (Accessed on 29/12/2010) Available from [www.ifad.org/gender/themati/rural](http://www.ifad.org/gender/themati/rural)
- Naila, Kabeer (2006) *Women, Household Food Security and Coping Strategies*; a Paper Presented at the SCN 16th Session on Women and Nutrition (Accessed on 5/12/2010). Available from [www.unsystem.org/scn/archives/npp069/ch22.htm](http://www.unsystem.org/scn/archives/npp069/ch22.htm).
- Oniang'o, K. Ruth and Kimokoti, Agnes (1999) *Trends in Women's Contribution to Agricultural Productivity: Lessons from Africa*; a Paper Presented at the Conference on Roles, Constraints and Potentials of Women in Agricultural Development held at the Centre for Social Development between 26-27 August, 1999 in Bonn, Germany (Accessed on 5/8/2011). Available from [www.uneca.org/POPWgateways/women/](http://www.uneca.org/POPWgateways/women/)