CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN IN THE SUSTAINABLE EXPLOITATION OF NON TIMBER FOREST PRODUCTS IN KABARU FOREST: NYERI COUNTY

By

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ABSTRACT

Non Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) are major sources of livelihood for many women living adjacent to Kabaru Forest in Mt. Kenya West and they constitute any commodity, useful substance or material obtained from the forest that does not necessitate cutting down or harvesting trees. Large amounts are harvested and traded every year but due to limited information and lack of co-operation and co-ordination among value chain actors, players and stakeholders, there are many challenges facing women in the rural areas living adjacent to the forest and have an interest in sustainable exploitation. The purpose of the study was to determine the challenges facing women in the sustainable exploitation of NTFPs in Kabaru Forest, Nyeri County. The research determined whether lack of appropriate technology in value addition affects sustainable exploitation of NTFPs. The research also established if competition with other livelihood activities done by women affect sustainable exploitation of NTFPs. The research further looked in details whether the forest laws interfere with sustainable exploitation of NTFPs e.g. Forest Act 2005, EMCA 1999. The case study was applied and simple sampling technique was used to determine the sample size. Data collection instruments like questionnaires, oral interviews and focus group discussions were used to balance the quantity and the quality of the data collected. The researcher applied both descriptive (frequency and percentages) and inferential (multiple linear regression analysis) data analysis techniques. Standard ethical considerations were applied throughout the process including obtaining research permits from relevant authorities who included the St. Paul University, NACOSTI and education county officers. The findings established that women collecting NTFP in Kabaru were middle aged women and majority harvested grass/fodder, herbs, tree seeds and soil on monthly and weekly basis. Women collecting the NTFP were engaged in other economic and livelihood activities like agriculture. This included: farming, milk selling, poultry keeping, cattle rearing, nursery seedlings, selling of fruits. The study attempted to establish whether competition with other income generating activities affected sustainable exploitation of NTFPs. However, majority of the women were not involved in value addition activities of the products harvested and sold them as raw materials. The challenges experienced by the women included: walking long distance, harassment by grazers and KFS rangers, lack of appropriate technological tools for NTFP harvesting and collection, attacks by wild animals, and seasonality of some of the products including harsh weather ranging from dry to rainy seasons. The study concluded that most of the women involved in the NTFPs collection were in the age range of 35-50 years, showing that they were adults beyond youthful years. Women aged over 50 years were the least participants in the NTFPs activities.51per cent of the women were primary school certificate holders or had no formal education at all.80per cent were not involved in any value addition and 85.6per cent were collecting the non-timber forest products on a weekly basis and 89 per cents attested on market availability. The research also concluded that NTFPs contribute significantly to poverty reduction by providing safety nets which reduce the vulnerability of disadvantaged poor women in the ASAL region.The study made recommended that Government which includes the KFS, civil society organisation and the private sector to support and encourage NTFP and nature based enterprises as part of the diversified livelihood strategies and the challenges faced by women in the exploitation of NTFPs should be addressed adequately by stakeholders. The research also made recommendations for further research related to the sectorlikeconducting baseline ecological studies of NTFPs for the respective individual tree species and various ecological zones and the systems that sustains them.

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