

## Gender differentials among tobacco farmers and household welfare in Kuria East and West Sub-Counties, Kenya.

**Muniko Zephaniah Marwa**

Lecturer in Sociology, Department of Social Studies,  
School of Arts and Social Sciences, Maasai Mara University, Kenya.

**Samson Wokabi Mwangi**

Lecturer in Sociology, Department of Peace, Security and Social Studies,  
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Egerton University, Kenya.

**Eric Kiprono Bor**

Lecturer in Sociology, Department of Peace, Security and Social Studies,  
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Egerton University, Kenya.

### ABSTRACT

The main focus of this study was to evaluate the effects of gender differentials between female and male headed households in tobacco production on socio-economic welfare of the household in Kuria East and West Sub-Counties. The social dilemma in this study was that household gender-labour relations were affected by tobacco production, which eventually affected other important household features such as socio-economic status and welfare necessities amongst tobacco farmers in Kuria Sub-Counties. Therefore, at the onset, this study investigated how tobacco production dynamics operated at the household level, mainly premised in gender-labour relations that were anchored in socio-cultural practices. This study was a sociological examination of a tobacco growing peasantry in Kuria Sub-Counties which concentrated on gender-labour relations between men and women for whom tobacco had become an important part of their existence as small-scale agricultural contract producers for the tobacco companies. All this was done at the behest of tobacco multinationals with capitalist hegemony that was supported by Government of Kenya at their beginnings. Specifically, the socio-economic aspects of the household were taken into consideration in the cash crop production, especially tobacco, which has raised interesting welfare issues that led to this study. Several factors were established and lead to the justification of this study. For instance, it was established that gender-labour relations in Kuria Sub-Counties were affected significantly by tobacco production whereby women were twice as likely as men to be involved in tobacco related farming activity in which their labour and welfare imperatives varied from household to household. On the other hand, this study also determined gender distribution of work in the household, that it particularly had bias on women and mainly disadvantaged them in Kuria Sub-Counties. This was premised in the fact that tobacco was a dominant cash crop in the society. It emerged that women needed to be empowered in Kuria Sub-Counties in order to participate fully in household decision making processes. In addition, this study established that female headed households had good welfare considerations in comparison with male headed households. Also, that male heads of households had institutionalized gender restrictions and constrained women regarding access household resources especially the benefits accrued from tobacco sales. This factor seemed to accrue long term significant implications for socio-economic welfare of the male headed households in Kuria Sub-Counties. Thus, the emphasis of this study was placed on gender-labour relations anchored on the socio-economic and cultural changes that have occurred and affected household welfare in Kuria Sub-Counties for several decades.

**KEY WORDS:** Gender Differentials, Tobacco Farming and Household Welfare.

## INTRODUCTION

*The Kuria people are early inhabitants of Kuria region whose gender subject informs this study. They came from both Bantu and Nilotic speakers who brought into Kuria their peculiar cultures. This predominantly agricultural Bantu came into close contact with primarily nilotic pastoralists, thus, a blend of cultures took place among the early inhabitants of Kuria from the start by combining agricultural practice with pastoral pursuits as well as tendencies towards nomadic life. Today elements of Kuria agriculture is much like that of the Abagusii and the Luo while in cattle keeping they have borrowed the practices of the Maasai, Zanaki and Nguruimi (Bwiyere, 2013). Further, during the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, more and more immigrants settled into the region and whether they liked it or not, the earlier communities were forced to interact with the new arrivals or at any rate to confront them. Some of the newcomers were aggressive and would not let their neighbours live in peace as they engaged in raiding for cattle and at times fought for dominance in the region. This meant that the small family clusters that had hitherto lived peacefully in the region shifted location and internal migration and resettlements were a continuous and repetitive process within and around Kuria. In this way, new social groups were formed. The Kuria people were mainly pastoralists in the pre-colonial era but currently the Kenyan Kurians lean towards crop production and the Tanzanian Kurians lean more towards pastoralism (Bwiyere, 2013). The Kuria also keep and love cattle and in the past, this used to lead to inter-clan and inter-tribal clashes over cattle rustling. On the other hand, crop production has been commercialized for several decades in this region and has adopted capitalist features which this study investigates.*

*The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2011) indicates that the Kuria people are natives of Kenya. They live in Kuria East Sub-County (headquartered in Kegonga) and Kuria West Sub-County (headquartered in Kehancha). The immediate neighbours of the Kuria are the Maasai, Luo and the Suba. Socially, the Kuria are divided into four clans namely, the Abagumbe, Abairege, Abanyabasi and Abakira. The Kuria are traditionally a farming community, mainly planting maize, beans and cassava as food crops. The cash crops grown include coffee and tobacco. This background has offered a good glimpse into the history of the Kuria people, thereby understanding the various socio cultural and economic practices they embraced in the past and how contemporary agricultural changes have come into the community, in particular the new developments and investments found in tobacco production in Kuria Sub-Counties have been highlighted and have formed the basis for launching this study.*

Further, there are two varieties of tobacco grown in Kuria Sub-Counties, the flue and fire cured varieties, which both required heavy fertilizer applications. The flue-cured variety mainly uses heat passed through aluminum pipes inside a stuffed house. A lot of wood therefore is needed to provide fire and heat. Furthermore, heat and humidity control being extremely crucial. This means a 24-hour watch over the whole process involving regular checking and adjustment to the furnaces on an hourly basis. This entailed intensive work for the peasants, which usually had a gendered dimension (KNA, 1965-1985). This study contextualized the types and demands of tobacco varieties grown in Kuria Sub-Counties and confirmed that they determined skewed gender-labour demands in its production. Not only have governments placed greater emphasis on cash crops rather than food crops, but the crop has exhibited numerous significant peculiarities. It is exhaustive and deleterious to the soil. It also causes deforestation and produces infinite wretchedness and misery among those who produce it, turning a fruitful land into barrenness (Akehurst, 1981). Others contend that Africa's inability to develop is mainly as a result of systematic transfer of surplus value through unequal exchange (Palmer and Persons, 1974). In this connection, it is affirmed that cash crops are given more attention by governments despite their various shortcomings. Tobacco production in Kuria begun under sponsorship of the British-American Tobacco Company Ltd. (B.A.T) in

October, 1969 when a group of B.A.T officials toured the Sub-Counties to select pilot farmers. About ten farmers were selected to grow tobacco, which was the first step for B.A.T in extending tobacco farms to the Sub-Counties. There were government agricultural instructors attached to this project (KDMR, 1969). This study obtained background information into how tobacco crop was piloted into Kuria Sub-Counties, meticulously with government of Kenya approval and facilitation. Also, affirmed that tobacco multinationals operate with little government control in the region. Moreover, Boserup (1965) contends that the intensification rarely takes place while possibilities for expansion still exist. Both approaches lead to a similar ending, yet it is the mechanism that differs. The basis of her argument concentrates upon the relation between demographics and technological change. This study was premised on whether tobacco intensification with its intensive land use led to socio-economic change in Kuria Sub-Counties. Therefore, it was confirmed that tobacco production actually affected this aspect significantly. Thus, tobacco has been phased as a cash crop among the Kuria people.

### METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Kuria (East and West) Sub-Counties. The site is located in south western Kenya bordering Tanzania. Kuria society remains one of the poorest Sub-Counties in Kenya despite being agriculturally lush. The area is re-known for its prominent agricultural activities producing both cash-crops like tobacco and coffee respectively. Also, food crops like maize, beans and other cereals are produced in this area (KDDP, 1997-2001). This study adopted both the Cross-Sectional Survey and Ex-Post Facto designs. Thus, Cross-Sectional Survey design was utilized in examining the empirical evidence (Bryman and Cramer, 2001). This is a design that avoids manipulation of data by the researcher. On the other hand, it functions through the collection of contemporary primary data in the area of study, based on information of previous occurrences (Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999). The target population in the two Sub-Counties was 230,000 natives. The number of households was 42,681 (KNBS, 2011). The Sub-Counties have four administrative areas namely: i). Bukira with 12,080 Households, ii). Bugumbe with 14,093 Households, iii). Nyabasi with 10,468 Households, iv). Bwirege 6,040 with Households (KNBS, 2011). Particularly, the total population, which, according to Nachmias and Nachmas (2006) is the aggregate of all cases that conform to some designated set of specifications. Thus, such populations were stratified into four administrative units, named above. Both male and female headed households were considered as respondents of the study. The study used 0.01497 percent to arrive at the sample size. The sample size for this study was 212 households. The sample size was used according to the tenets for sample threshold which states that 100 is the minimum sample size in an academic study (Kathuri and Pals, 1993). The unit of analysis adopted by this study is the household head. The respondents in this approach were heads of households or any household adult member appointed by them to respond on his/her behalf. The data for this study was derived from both primary and secondary sources that were collected in Kuria Sub-Counties. In this study, the household was taken as the unit of study and analysis. They were selected by the use of proportionate stratified random sampling from each of the four administrative areas in Kuria Sub-Counties. The data was collected through the interview schedules and focus group discussion guides respectively. Interview schedules were administered directly by the principle researcher and well briefed research assistants to the male and female household heads. Focus Group Discussions data collection method was employed in this study as an alternative process of collecting information by interviewing a group(s) rather than an individual. On the other hand, the discussions involved a systematic questioning of several individuals simultaneously, which was premised in the ideas of Fontana and Fey (2000) and yielded substantial responses. Further, according to Cohen et al (2004) a group is specially chosen to discuss the issues being examined in the study, a perspective that was complimented by Morgan (1998) which differentiates focus group discussions from other groups. Therefore, this study also considered

different levels of education of the respondents and ensured that they were involved in tobacco farming. In addition, Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003b) presented focus group discussion as one that can be utilized by a study to better understand and interpret information and results emanating from an earlier use of other data collection methods. Pilot survey was conducted as a pre-test exercise in Suba region, an area that borders the Kuria people. This area was selected because it has many similarities with mainstream Kuria in terms of both population demographics and environmental dispositions. In this effort, the articulations of Baker (1994) were considered, which state that between 5 to 10 percent of the sample size is a reasonable number for pre-testing research participants. At the completion of data collection the concept of Fulcher and Scott (2011) was invoked, which indicates that once data has been collected, it must be organized and presented in ways that highlight their relevance for theoretical interests that inform the research. Thus, at the end of data collection which involved 212 respondents, coding and entry techniques were utilized. Further, this analysis utilized the inferential statistical techniques in which relations were explored between various socio-economic and welfare variables. In another case, descriptive statistics were applied, thereby using pie charts, percentages, frequency tables, histograms and bar graphs to illustrate the quantitative aspects of the results. Also, 5 percent significance level was adopted as required in social sciences, especially in taking care of marginal errors and mistakes in the process of data analysis. Besides, FGD data was analyzed by utilizing the tenets of Hollway and Jefferson (2004), an approach which analyzes data using “tell it like it is” common sense approach and evidence. A study permit was obtained and supplied to the various local administrative officers in the study area. Also, considering that this study had a lot of public and corporate interests, confidentiality was taken into consideration. All the respondents of the study were made to understand the academic value and purpose of the study. The conduct of the principal researcher and research assistants during fieldwork were up to expected study ethics and standards.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been encouragement by tobacco multinationals for more tobacco farming around the world, along with government subsidies, led to a glut in the tobacco market. This surplus resulted in lower prices, which were devastating to small-scale tobacco farmers. According to the World Bank, between 1985 and 2000, the inflation-adjusted price of tobacco dropped 37%. Tobacco was the most widely smuggled legal product (*Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, 2001*). Married women’s labour supply could be assumed to be determined along with that of other family members in an effort to maximize household welfare. This model expected the supply of labour to increase with the rise in wage rate, unless the income effect of wage change outweighed its substitution effect (Gronau, 1980). In view of peasants, concern to ensure the survival of the family is founded in the labour behaviour of married women. This may be interpreted as geared towards fulfilling the survival requirements of their respective families. Therefore, married women supply their labour here according to the fluctuating subsistence requirements, so as to attain some level of good standard of living. *This study confirmed that low tobacco prices among other factors affected households’ income and consequently its welfare in Kuria Sub-Counties.* This study also established that tobacco production activities amongst married women exhibited similar characteristics in the region, for instance, they all worked extra ordinarily hard and benefited less at the end of tobacco production cycle.

Various concerns have been raised by many stakeholders regarding tobacco production and use around the world. In response to the growth of tobacco use in developing countries, the World Health Organization successfully rallied 168 countries to sign the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. The convention was designed to push for effective legislation and its enforcement in all countries to reduce the harmful effects of tobacco. This led to the

development of tobacco cessation products (WHO, 2008). Women from tobacco estates were further disadvantaged. A report on the tobacco industry in India and Bangladesh exposes the realities of health, sexual and economic abuses faced by female workers (*John and Vaite, 2002*). This study found out that Kenya has many policies and legal frameworks regarding tobacco production controls, especially in curbing the activities of the multinationals, while improving the farmers' welfare imperatives, but was not enforced. This study also proved that women were less likely than men to be land owners and named in agreements with tobacco companies, but were encumbered with intensive tobacco farming responsibilities in Kuria Sub-Counties.

The study by Raymond (1980) presented power relationship as part of the stratification system whereby one dominant gender (male) used macro manipulation, such as the control of social institutions and economic resources sufficiently to make the less powerful (female) fall into line. Whereas the less dominant gender (female) used micro manipulation, such as interpersonal skills and charm to offset the control of the powerful. There are traits and roles associated with men, such as the socio-economic and socio-cultural positions that men hold, are seen as more valuable than those encompassed by the feminine gender-role. The presumption that social structures existed outside individual desires or motives and that social structure at least partially explained human action. This embraced the transformative power of human action (Smelser, 1959). This study established how intra-household socio-economic structures affected its welfare. In essence, this study demonstrated that household power relations informed their welfare dynamics amongst farmers in Kuria Sub-Counties. Besides, contemporary realization that African nations are unable to feed themselves led social scientists to examine the historical roots of rural poverty. Some scholars attributed the contemporary African food crisis to the destruction of traditional economies, which has in turn undermined peasants' reproductive capacity as well as their ability to cope with ecological disasters (Helmunt, 1999). This study ascertained how the agricultural economy in Kuria Sub-Counties found itself prone to tobacco multinationals and whose activities even threatened household welfare, especially food security.

Further, Joan (1975) asserts that gender involves four interrelated elements. Firstly, culturally available symbols that evoke multiple representations, for example, light and dark, purification and pollution, innocence and corruption. Secondly, normative concepts that set forth the interpretation of the meanings of the symbols expressed in religious, educational, legal and political doctrines. These, categorically assert the meaning of masculinity and femininity. Thirdly, restricted use of gender to kinship systems focuses on household and family as the basis for socio-cultural organization. But the same can be extended to include other aspects of society, for example the labour market and gender as a subjective identity. This entails the reproduction of gender, a description of the transformation of the biological sexuality of individuals as they are acculturated. Fourthly, gender is a constitute element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes (male/female), indeed it is the primary way of signifying relationships of power. And so, whenever people are considered different, it is likely that they will be differently valued. Therefore, this leads to socio-economic ranking or stratification which is predominant in the developing countries of Africa. This study proved how tobacco producing households in Kuria Sub-Counties aligned themselves to traditional gender dimensions and how their welfares were affected in due course. Gender relations had very strong linkage with income and its utilization at the household level, which significantly affected welfare imperatives.

In order to have more insight and understanding to this development, a socio-psychological point of view is crucial for this study. For instance, Freud (1931) did emphasize the essence of

gender differentiation, reinforcement and modeling by psycho-analysis. When Freud began to develop his ideas about gender development at the turn of the century, it was taken for granted that men and women were different. In Freud's focus on the subject, it was assumed that psychological differences between the sexes stemmed from differences in reproductive function. This study established that psychological aspects were essentially attuned to the farmer's gender psyche. In particular, this had significance in gender metaphors construction in regard to household economic welfare. This was strongly rooted in Kuria traditional values.

The study by Mohamed (1987) contributed to the understanding of household dynamics. In support of this, structures needed to be understood comprehensively. This was in the framework of a system whose modes of operation and rules of the game operated in such a way that it was always the poorest and economically weakest that suffered the most serious consequences of the crisis. This study affirmed that traditional values were well socialized amongst the Kuria people, in the sense that, gender relations were significantly affected by these notions. Men were always the strong and women emerged to be the weak and burdened at the household. In fact, female headed households were found to have better welfare parameters. A significant attempt has been made to review literature from various sources that were presented in three tiers. This entailed step by step review that attached the works to the study premised on three objectives of the study.

## RESULTS

The main objective of this research was to evaluate the effects of gender differentials between female and male headed households in tobacco production on socio-economic welfare of the household in Kuria Sub-Counties. This research involved 212 respondents, all of whom revealed that their children were working in tobacco farms. In fact, it was a common practice to have children work in tobacco farms, some at the expense of their schooling time, especially during the pick season of tobacco production. Thus, in some way, children at the household level were affected by tobacco production. Results indicate the type of work done was also under scrutiny. At 90 percent (190) of their time during this stage of the crop husbandry, farmers worked in nurseries while the rest worked in spraying the seedlings. Some 10 percent (22) worked in spraying pesticides in the farms. This describes the type of work undertaken by the tobacco farmers during the time of the study; the major activity was nursery preparations and pesticide spray of the seedlings in the farms. Thus, at the time of the research, it was the beginning of tobacco farming cycle. Results show that basically men allocate socio-economic roles to both genders. Indeed, men are considered not only as heads of households, but also as breadwinners for households, which is considered as a masculine duty. In addition, women are relegated to the feminine nurturer and carer roles in the household, which are actively enormous. In addition, all the respondents of this study were involved in tobacco growing in Kuria Sub-Counties. The duration of tobacco growing was different with 61 percent (130) having dealt with tobacco farming for duration between 1-5 years, 15 percent (32) between 11-15 years, 13 percent (27) over 20 years and 11 percent (23) for 6-10 years.

**Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to their duration of tobacco growing**

	Frequency	Percent
Between 1-5 yrs	130	61
Between 6-10 yrs	23	11
Between 11-15 yrs	32	15
Above 20 yrs	27	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Data (2015)**

Table 1 above indicates the statistics which are indicative of the fact that tobacco farming has been a long term agricultural activity in Kuria Sub-Counties. Most significantly is the fact emerging here that majority of the farmers are new entrants into the activity, that is between 1 and 5 years into the farming activity. This study finds that more youth are joining in tobacco production, which has both economic and cultural effects on them as will be discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter. Further, the nature of tobacco work was investigated and documented below.

**Table 2: Nature of tobacco work done**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Heavy	185	87
Average	27	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Data (2015)**

Table 2 above illustrates that the work was heavy, 87 percent (185) of the respondents concurred with this assertion, whereas, 13 percent (27) indicated that the work was average. Majority of the farmers viewed the work as heavy. Both genders concurred in this regard. Hence, farmers had no option but to put in more hours to meet the demands of this cash crop. For instance, below is a photo (Plate 1) of a female farmer in her new tobacco field that is undergoing tobacco season's initial preparations. Such scenarios are common in the region.



**Plate 1: A female farmer nurturing her tobacco farm in Kuria Sub-Counties**

**Source: Field Data (2015) - Photo by Principal Researcher**

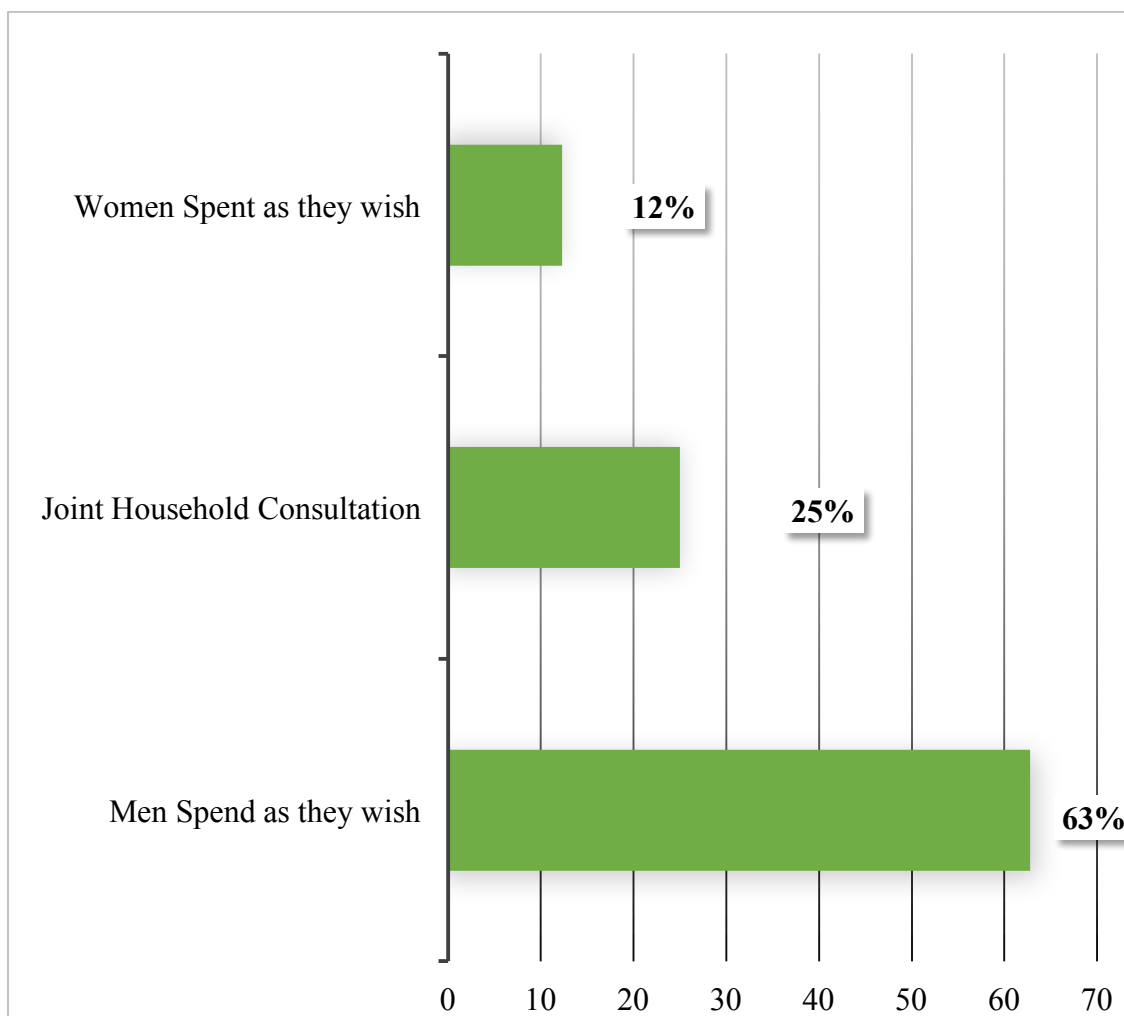
Plate 1 above shows a female tobacco farmer moving through her new tobacco farm with a machete. There are some stages of the crop husbandry that are considered feminine thereby involving intense female labour input. For instance, in this stage of tending the seed bed soils, women are obliged to do most of the work.

**Box 1: Summary of regional excerpts on female versus male headed households in welfare**

“Majority of female headed households had welfare selflessness”  
“Female headed households benefited more in household welfare”  
“Male headed households experienced cash spending dominance over women” “There are some household male desertions during harvesting seasons”

**Source: Field Data (2015)**

Box 1 above has 4 qualitative summaries of regional excerpts (translated into English from Kuria). The FGD exercise involved both men and women in the discussion cluster and all of them were facilitated and encouraged to participate equally. Welfare essentials came into limelight especially in terms of comparison between male and female headed households. Female headed households emerged to be benefiting more than male headed households in terms of welfare imperatives. Thus, the FGD discussions assert the differentials in welfare aspects between the two types of household heads. It agrees with the previous standpoint. Hence, the two approaches have complimented each other in this sphere.

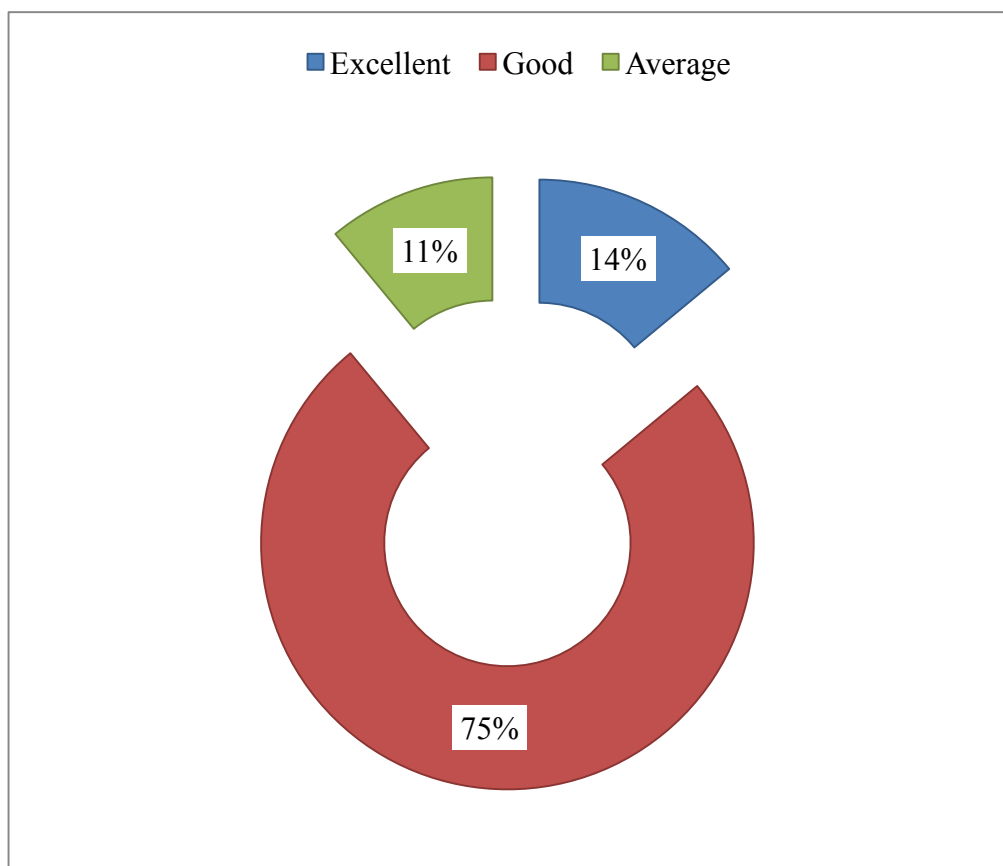


**Figure 1: Gender affects distribution of tobacco income**  
**Source: Field Data (2015)**

Figure 1 above further illustrates how intensely gender affected the distribution of tobacco income in Kuria Sub-Counties at the household level. 63 percent (133) of the respondents agreed that men spend money as they wished, whereas some 25 percent (53) asserted that the income was spent on joint household consultation and another 12 percent (26) indicated that



women spent money as they wished. Further, tobacco income spending attitude clearly shows that men enjoyed more freedom in this regard. In most scenarios, at the disadvantage of their female partners who give the larger share of labour input during the entire farming season.



**Figure 2: Female headed households' rate of welfare in relation to income**  
**Source: Field Data (2015)**

Figure 2 above illustrates the differentials between male and female headed households in welfare, especially in relation to the tobacco income. Majority of the respondents, 75 percent (160) indicated that female headed households had good welfare considerations. Some 11 percent (23) indicated that it was excellent and 14 percent (29) confirmed that household welfare was average. The above illustration indicates that female headed households had better welfare standards. The general picture that emerges in this presentation is that they care for the household welfare more than any other financial priority.

**Box 2: Summary of regional excerpts on labour input versus welfare consideration**

“Female headed households enjoyed more rationality in regard to labour input and had good welfare parameters”

“Male headed households experienced strict labour controls and less welfare”

“Female headed households were loosely organized in cultural dimensions”

**Source: Field Data (2015)**

Box 2 above is a collection of qualitative summary of regional excerpts of an FGD exercise (translated into English from Kuria) that sought to compare labour input versus welfare discretion between male and female headed households. In all, 3 responses were obtained which were elicited from both male and female participants in the discussions. In as much as female headed households were loosely organized from a cultural perspective (due to absence of a male head), they were more rational in workload handling and correspondingly better off in welfare dimensions. On the contrary, male headed households were strictly organized and

culturally approved but had less welfare considerations. Therefore, this study has been able to demonstrate that there are significant indifferences between labour input and welfare at the household in Kuria Sub-Counties.



**Plate 2: Members of a household sorting tobacco leaves in Kuria Sub-Counties**  
Source: Field Data (2015) - Photo by Principal Researcher

The above plate 2 illustrates a tobacco sorting activity in which a household of farmers work under a grass thatched shade, next to their grass thatched house in a Kuria Sub-County village. Both adults and children can be seen in the photograph. Scenes like this are quite prevalent in the region.

In a nutshell the economic status of the household especially the access to resources and subsequent welfare imperatives were affected by the gender differentials in Kuria Sub-Counties. Male heads of the households were particularly more active towards the sale seasons of tobacco as opposed to farm work processes itself. They enjoyed great freedom in accessing land resources, spent the income as they wished, most of the time putting their women at a disadvantage, deprivation and alienating them from the income they participated in creating. On the other hand, the study asserts that tobacco farming could be a source of household welfare disparities. Welfare considerations emerged to be strongly differentiated between female and male headed households. The foundations of this rested in the patriarchal ideology in which men dominated and stereotyped women, thereby giving them a raw deal in the access to household resources, income and household welfare.

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