

# The Implication Of Men's Rural-Urban Migration On Household Decision Making In Soy Sub-County, Kenya

Lumayo Mildred Fedha, Peter Oino Gutwa, Caroline K. Gatobu

**Abstract:** While most regions in the world have been experiencing an increase in rural-urban migration, some have experienced excessive rates. As men's rural-urban migration occurs, one of the sectors that is mostly affected is the family institution, where women take up the role of decision making in the household in their absence. This study is an outcome of the study conducted on the impact of rural-urban migration on household decision making in Soy sub-county. The study found that men's absence in the household affects different aspects within the family context. Men's rural-urban migration has led to an increase in the number of women-headed households in the rural areas. Women who are left in charge of households are expected to continue to perform their traditional roles, at the same time taking on men's responsibilities within the household. However, culture dictates that they consult men even when they are away. From a socio-cultural context, men's prolonged absence has many implications on the family and community life and greatly affects institutions such as health, education and agriculture. Therefore, the presence of men is crucial to household security, decision-making and mobility. The study recommends that as much as men are away from home, women should be empowered to make household decisions for smooth running of household undertakings.

**Keywords:** Rural-Urban Migration, Household Decision Making, Soy Sub-County, Kenya

## Introduction

Rural-urban migration is a very common phenomenon in most developing countries and a major cause of the rapid rates of urbanization. Since 1950, urbanization has had a tremendous effect on developing countries all over the world, at varying rates of change, some more rapid than others (McCatty, 2004). In sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) migration is such a widespread phenomenon, that any study made on an urban area will invariably deal largely with a population which was not born there. Most of these people have migrated from other parts of the country, particularly rural areas. Current rates of urban population growth reach up to 6% in many African countries including Accra, Lagos and Nairobi (Dao, 2002). Migratory movements have multiplied greatly in recent years, as a result of improved transport and communications and an expansion in urban informal sector employment in most SSA countries (Chant & Radcliff, 1992).

In SSA, most social roles and status are ascribed according to gender and age, and opportunities and constraints such as access to resources and the opportunity to migrate, are socially embedded. Migration decisions are therefore, made within a context of socially recognized and mutually reinforcing expectations that reflect several dimensions of gender relations between individuals, within households and in societal institutions (Francis, 2000). As a result, the impact of migration on rural households tends to be systemic; with far-reaching implications for the economic livelihood and daily lives of rural women. Murray (1981) contends that one important consequence of rural-urban migration on the household is that women are filling the roles of absent males, both within the household and in the community. Murray's arguments points to the fact that conventional explanations of men's migration experience in many cases do not apply to women. According to the Gender And Development (GAD) approach, there is need to focus attention on the marginal position women have in society in order to achieve equal status and power. This approach looks at the dynamics of gender relations and the various roles of women with those of men. Women are housewives in a context where men and other women expect them to be housewives. Gender relations are seen as central to social processes and social organization and therefore, to development. This approach illuminates the power relation between men and women, and the situation of subordination that most women face in most societies. The GAD approach reveals the many manifestations of male bias in the development process (Rowlands, 1997). According to Arnfred (2004), UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing 1995 marked the transition to the new perspective, that of gender and development, and became incorporated into the global development discourse. In countries with significant regional disparities it is particularly evident that migration represents a way of tapping into the welfare advantages and greater opportunities enjoyed in more developed areas (Haar, 2009). In the African context, urban growths are among the highest worldwide recording 7% per annum with most towns having a big growth rate of about 10% all these is associated with male rural-urban

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migration in search of employment. In West Africa, Ghana in particular, this has historically been manifested in the migration flow of farmers from the poor regions in the north to the more vibrant urban south (Anarfi et al.2003; Awumbila et al. 2008). Given the significant disparities between Ghana's rural and urban sectors, it is not surprising that urban life by and large represents the dream of formal employment, less social restrictions and diversified opportunities, while the rural areas provide limited employment outside agriculture, insecure income and inadequate infrastructure (Bookaye-Yiadom, 2008). In Kenya, migration of people from the rural to urban areas is not a recent phenomenon; it has been an issue and a problem over decades. People move to urban areas for various reasons, which are well patterned and lined up from one direction-poverty. The causes of migration of people from the rural areas to urban areas results to various effects that affect both rural and urban areas. However, during rural-urban migration decision making process is greatly affected in the rural areas, particularly by women. Rural women have been known to play a critical role in the rural economies of both developed and developing countries. They participate in crop production and livestock care, provide food, water and fuel for their families, and engage in off-farm activities to diversify their families' livelihoods. In addition, they carry out vital reproductive functions of caring for children, older persons and the sick (Women, 2000). Although, in patriarchal societies, gender-based stereotypes and discrimination deny rural women equitable access to and control over land and other productive resources, opportunities for income-generating activities, access to education and health care, and opportunities for participation in public arenas, which worsens when men have moved to urban centers leaving their women in the rural areas. While it is recognized that women play fundamental roles in the socio-economic development of their communities, they are often excluded from local decision-making processes because their views are not solicited and their interests are not taken into consideration by their counterparts (Opare, 2005). Society as a whole would benefit greatly if women had adequate access to decision-making opportunities. Women have been and continue to be subordinated to men in several ways that adversely affect their well-being. The Beijing Platform for Action emphasized that "women's equal participation in decision making is not only a demand for justice or democracy, but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Without the

perspective of women at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved. From the socio-cultural point of view, the inability of women to assume decision making in their households is attributed to the socio-cultural orientation. For instance, the socio-cultural belief that men are the superiors both in the household and in the wider community and that women are only there to support them. From an organizational point of view, Fournier and Kelemen (2001) noted that behavior characteristics considered relevant for managing organizations such as rationality, objectivity, control and competitiveness are perceived to be masculine images or typify male characteristics while women are generally seen as possessing caring, nurturing, and sharing that are more suitable for domestic activities, the reproduction of the home and family. Klasen, (2002) further asserts that women have made minimal strides in their quest to bridge the inequality gap. However, this state of affairs is not blamed solely on women but on the prevailing political system. Despite attention to rural women in international frameworks such as the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Millennium Development Goals, which recognized their contributions, rural women continue to face serious challenges in effectively carrying out their multiple roles within their families and communities. Their rights and priorities are often insufficiently addressed by national development strategies and gender equality policies, effectively addressing education issues, agricultural issues among others, which require their full involvement. The main question in this paper is that what is the reason for low female representation in decision making particularly, in the household?

## Methodology

This study was conducted in Soy Sub-county in Uasin Gishu County and utilized a descriptive survey research design. The study population was household women whose husbands had moved to town to search for a livelihood for their families. The researcher sampled 133 from four locations that is Kipsomba (4,736 households-24), Soy (5,111 households-26), Kiplombe (5,787-29) and Moi's Bridge (10,772-54). These locations were purposively selected due to the fact that they were mostly affected by male rural-urban migration.

**Table 1: Sample size**

Location	No. of households	Criteria	Sample size
Kipsomba	2368	1% x 2368	24
Soy	2556	1% x 2556	26
Kiplombe	2893	1% x 2893	29
Moi's Bridge	5386	1% x 5386	54
<b>Total</b>	<b>13, 203</b>	<b>13, 203</b>	<b>133</b>

**Source:** (Uasin Gishu County information Office, 2014)

Questionnaires and interviews were used as the main data collection instruments where. Close and open-ended questions, which were administered to the families and Swahili was used so as to enhance communication.

## Findings and Discussion

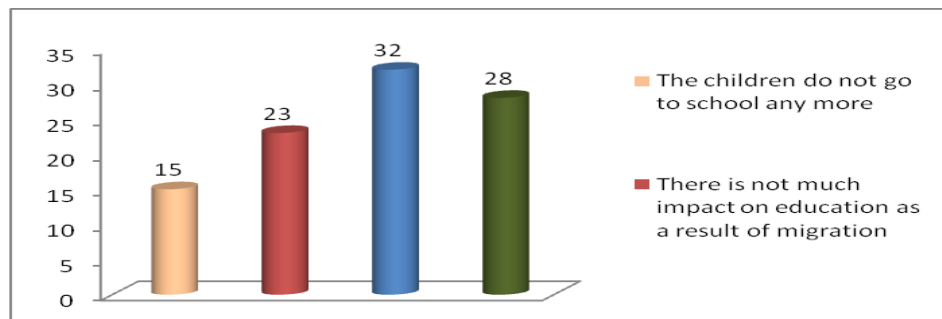
### Women and Household Decision Making

While most regions have been experiencing an increase in rural-urban migration, some have experienced excessive rates. As rural-urban migration occurs, one of the sectors that is mostly affected is the family institution, where women take up the role of decision making in the household in the absence of men. According to this study, men's absence in the household affects different aspects within the family set-up. For instance, the way children are brought up, their educational development, and how their statuses are valued and their psychosocial presence is not felt. Additionally, men's rural-urban migration has led to an increase in the number of women-headed households in the rural areas. The findings of this study are similar to a study that was conducted in Brazil in some rural areas and found out that entire villages are made up of women-headed households due to men's departure. Women whose husbands have left as an environmental adaptation strategy are known as "widows of the drought" (WB, 2009). Therefore, this composition of rural households can challenge traditional roles and contribute to women's empowerment through increased autonomy and decision-making power. Hence, women's responsibilities also expand when men migrate. Women who are left in charge

of households are expected to continue to perform their traditional roles and at the same time take on men's responsibilities. However, culture dictates that they consult men even when they are away. The daunting extra burden on rural women left behind can have far-reaching consequences, including on girls. Girls are stopped from going to school and take up the roles of their mother when their fathers have migrated to town, hence, denying them education. This study is in concurrence, with a study done in China, which found out that the shortage of male farm workers due to migration has resulted in girls being pulled out of school in order to take care of younger siblings and to help with farm work (IOM, 2009). Further analysis of the literature review indicates that in African societies, decisions about rural development projects are usually hampered by absenteeism of men in the household and they are the determinants on women's involvement in community projects. This paper observes that women's needs frequently differ from those of men, but are often overlooked when such kind of projects are being formulated and implemented. Therefore, improved access to decision making would provide women a chance to articulate their peculiar needs in the household and the community.

### Implications on Education

Education is very essential for children in their formative stages. Being one of the objectives of the study, the researcher sought out the implications of male rural-urban migration on decision making and its impacts on education in Soy Sub-County. The findings are presented in Figure 1 below:



**Figure 1:** How migration has impacted on education

Analysis in Figure 1 above shows that the movement of men to town has led to low education levels of children in most households. Majority (32%) of the respondents stated that the movement of men to town has led to low education levels in their families. Twenty eight percent (28%) of the respondents indicated that the children have become deviants and do not listen to their mothers. This means that decisions made by their mothers in regard to school attendance are ignored by the children. Twenty three percent (23%) of the respondents indicated that migration has not impacted much on education while the least, 15% indicated that since their husbands moved to town, their children ceased to go to school. From these findings, it is evident that rural-urban migration impacts greatly on household decision making in relation to school attendance in Soy sub-County which, impacts negatively on education. The respondents also cited the actual absence of men as

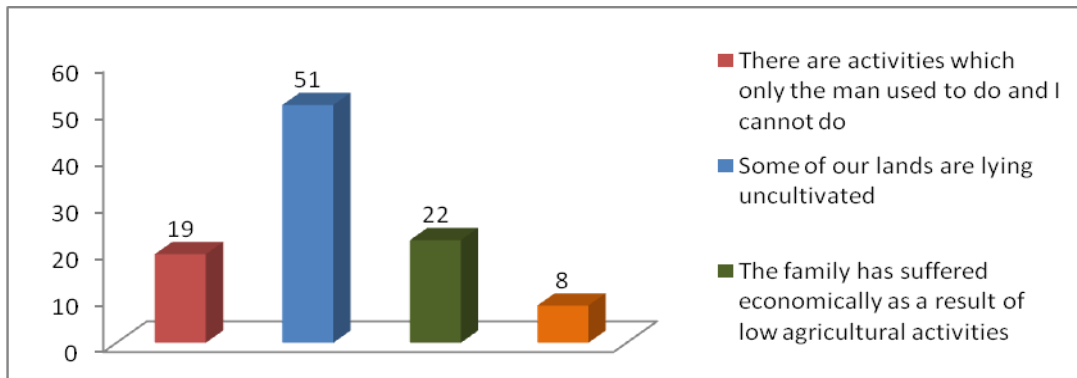
being the major reason for poor academic performance as children tend to be deviant to their mothers. As a result, school attendance goes down. It was noted that children fail to go to school because they also have to help fend for the family. This leads to poor performance among the children as well as early school drop-out. From the foregoing discussion, due to the absence of male parents, children tend to be defiant and as a result, don't go to school. This ends-up affecting the overall education standard not only Soy sub-county but also in other parts of the country.

### Implications on Agriculture

One of the sectors that are greatly affected by men's migration to town is agriculture. Because of the limited job opportunities in rural areas, men decide to move from rural areas to the urban to such for new opportunities. As the migration happens, the labor force in the rural areas is

being reduced and this will go a long way to affect the output that can be produced in the long run. According to Macharia (2002) there are more and more people leaving the rural areas which happen to be a fertile ground for development of any developing country, hence, limited number of labor forces in the rural areas. Most rural households rely on agriculture for their livelihood and

development. This is the reason why most households with high rate of rural-urban migration have low levels of production for the reason that they are not able to grow enough food for households. The study found out that male rural-urban migration has impacted on household decisions agricultural practices as shown in Figure1.0 below:



**Figure 2:** Impacted of mens' rural-urban migration decision making on agriculture Practices

Analysis in Figure 2 shows 19% of the respondents indicated that there are activities which only the man used to do and which they cannot do in the man's absence. This, in the long run implies that the farm activities engaged in by the family get to reduce as a result of some being omitted by the females in the household. The majority (51%) of the respondents stated that some of their land is lying fallow as a result of rural urban migration implying that the land under cultivation has reduced implying a reduction in the family

income as well as a reduction in food security of the household. Eight percent (8%) of the respondents indicated that the family's agricultural activity has gone down tremendously. From the above evidence, it is clear that the family has suffered economically due to a reduction in agricultural activities. The respondents were further asked to state the extent to which rural-urban migration has impacted on agriculture in the family. The results are shown in Table 2 below:

**Table 2:** Extent to which migration has impacted on agriculture

Extent	A lot	Moderately	Not so much	Not at all	Total
Frequency	31	40	27	2	<b>100</b>
Percentage	31	40	27	2	<b>100</b>

Analysis in Table 1 found out that migration has impacted on agriculture moderately as shows the responses towards the extent to which migration has impacted on agriculture. This is indicated by 31% of the respondent who indicated that rural urban migration impacts on agriculture a lot. 40% of the respondents stated that agriculture is moderately affected by rural urban migration. On the lower side though, 27% of the respondents stated that rural urban migration affects agriculture slightly and the least, 2% were for the thought that rural urban migration doesn't affect agriculture at all. From the findings on the table, it was ascertained that migration has impacted on agriculture tremendously. Following these findings, it is therefore evident that agriculture is affected to a very large extent by rural urban migration and decisions pertaining to agriculture are affected in the same proportion as well.

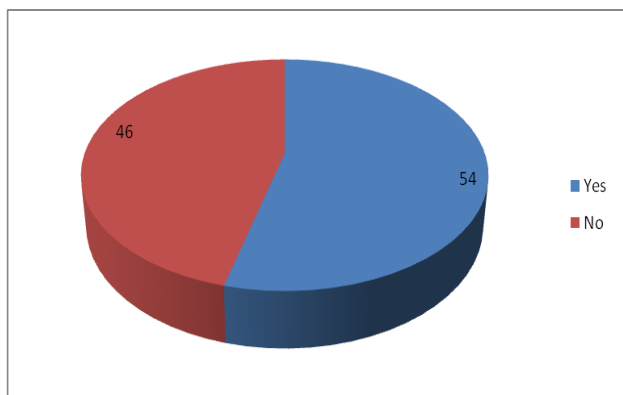
**Implications on Household Health**

The respondents were asked to state how health has been affected as a result of rural urban migration. Majority of the

respondents stated that as a result of men moving to urban centers, health has been greatly affected due to lack of funds for healthcare needs. The respondents also indicated that rural urban migration has led to lack of finances in the families and as a result, getting access to proper diet has been difficult and as a result, food with very low nutritional value are consumed by the mother and children and this has greatly compromised on their health in the long run. A small proportion of the respondents indicated that rural urban migration has, as a result of the unavailability of the male figure in the families involved, the women have had to play the roles of both parents and as a result, health has been kept at a constant, not different to the way it is when the male family head is around.

**Source of Decisions Pertaining to Children's Health**

The researcher sought to find out from the respondents if decisions pertaining to children's health were made solely by the man. The findings are presented on Figure 3 below:



**Figure 3:** Source of decisions pertaining to children's health

Analysis in Figure 3 above shows that 54% of the respondents indicated that decisions pertaining to children's health were solely made by the man while 46% said No to the same question. Following these responses, a majority of the respondents had all the decision making vested on the men and an almost equal number of the respondents were also incorporated in the process of making decisions pertaining to children's health. These findings indicate that in many households, the men hold the mandate of making health related decisions for their families.

#### **Health in the Absence of the Man**

The researcher found it worthwhile to find out how the female house heads cope with health issues in the absence of their husbands. The findings are presented on Table 3:

**Table 3:** Health in the absence of the man

State	Frequency <b>N=105</b>	Percentage
Children's health has been affected	50	48
Getting to the health facilities has proved to be a bit difficult	41	38
Just like other women I have other things to do	14	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3 shows the responses pertaining to how the female household heads cope with health related issues in the absence of their husbands. When asked this question, and as indicated on the table, 48% of the respondents confided that their children's health has been affected as a result of their husbands being absent, 38% indicated that getting to the health facilities has proved to be difficult in the absence of their husbands. According to 13% of the respondents, they tend to be busy with other things and can therefore not attend to the health issues of their children. These findings indicate that the movement of men from rural to urban areas has greatly impacted on the health of their families. The findings have also portrayed some degree of laziness on the part of the women as some find it

difficult to take children to health facilities while others tend to concentrate on other jobs instead of attending to their own children. It can therefore be concluded that rural urban migration affects health negatively.

#### **Extent to Which Migration Has Impacted on Family Health**

The researcher sought to find out the extent to which rural urban migration had impacted on family health. This was done by the use of a likert scale which ranged from very large, slightly large, moderately, slightly low and very low. The responses given to this question were as presented on Table 4:

**Table 4:** Extent to which migration has impacted on family health

Extent	Frequency	Percentage
Very large	42	39
Slightly large	35	33
Moderate	15	14
Slightly low	12	11
Very low	3	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>100</b>



Analysis on Table 4 above shows that majority of the respondents have been affected to a very large extent, 33% stated that migration has impacted on family health to a slightly large extent and 14% admitted having been impacted upon moderately. On the other hand, 11% stated that the impact was slightly low while 3% stated that the impact was very low hence, the findings reveal that migration of men to urban areas have to a very large extent impacted on health of the families left behind in the rural areas. With such responses, it is evident that by moving to town, men leave their families with very difficult health issues which may impact on their overall livelihoods.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Findings of the study have indicated that men and women frequently have very different roles and responsibilities when it comes to household decision-making. Women generally place a higher interest on welfare of children but they are surmounted by other roles and responsibilities left by men who have moved to urban areas. Findings also indicate that the consequences of men's absence and women's exclusion from household decisions can be as dire for family's welfare and existence. From a socio-cultural context, men's prolonged absence has many implications on family's health, education and agricultural practices. The presence of men is crucial to household's decision-making on education, health and agriculture. However, as socio-economic imperatives force men to move away from their rural households for long periods of time such sectors are greatly affected. The study recommends that as much as men are away from home, women should be empowered to make household decisions for smooth running of household undertakings. Moreover, the society as a whole would benefit greatly if women had adequate access to decision-making opportunities.

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