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Wage Utilization, Household Decision-making and Role Variations: Implications on Gender Relations among Workers of Teza Tea Company, Burundi

Evode Tuyikeze
Dept. of Sociology, Psychology and Anthropology
Moi University, Kenya

Donald Wandere
Dept. of Sociology, Psychology and Anthropology
Moi University, Kenya

ABSTRACT

This paper is abstracted from a larger study that was carried out among workers of Teza Tea Company in the Muramvya Province of Burundi. The main objective of the study was to assess the socio-economic push-factors that drove tea workers to seek employment at Teza, how they utilized their wages, and the way wages accrued impacted on intra-household gender relations. In this regard, the study assumed that income earned by workers was not utilized appropriately thereby impinging negatively on intra-household gender relations – the outcome of the study proving this assumption otherwise. Methods used for data collection included; structured and unstructured interviews in the Survey Method, Focus Group Discussions, Key Informant interviews, Informal Discussions, and Observations. A sample of 150 workers was drawn from the study population by means of disproportional stratified and simple random sampling. Data were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. The study was guided by among others, the *Bargaining Theory* of Krishnaraj [1], the *Division of Labour Theory* of Arora et. al [2], and Agassi's [3] *Marxist* orientation. The study found out that prudent use of wages by the workers had positive effects on intra-household gender relations. Specifically, this enhanced inter-spousal bonding and paved way for more or less symmetrical decision-making powers for both men and women within a marriage situation. Finally, the study also found out that as a result of depressed income for the workers, gender roles within families were not rigid and instead, they took an infinite variety form with no specific responsibilities set aside for either gender.

Keywords: Workers, Wage-utilization, Households, Gender relations, Teza, Burundi.

INTRODUCTION

Just like many African societies, Burundi typifies a patriarchal system where men harness greater social and economic power and control over women. While men are associated with the more

influential public arena, women are relegated to the domestic area whose domain is characterised by an inferior and powerless stature. Arora et al. [2] says that a typical woman in rural Africa assumes the role of a food producer and processor, home-maker and caretaker. As for the men, they are mostly associated with income generating ventures. On this, Njiro [4] noted that the tendency of men to diversify their labour power into various cash generating activities removes them from their households.

These details, as presented by the scholars above, are located in the patriarchal system where relations between men and women recognize the former as the powerful members in many Burundian families. Indeed, in virtually all Burundian families, exclusive decision-making powers are vested in men household heads. Olah et al. [5] suggests that, in such circumstances, the dominant decision-making powers are strongly influenced by the relative earning power of each partner. Hence, access to material and financial resources by any of the partners would have a strong influence in the decision-making power matrix within a family situation.

Based on the larger study, this paper discusses how gender relations, within families of Teza Tea Company workers, are influenced by certain economic variables that relate to their occupational statuses. In particular, the paper focuses on how wage earnings of the male workers are instrumental in enhancing spousal relations through promoting women economic activities; shared decision-making powers between the spouses and how this impinges on gender relations within families; and the changing gender roles stemming out of choked income paid to the workers.

STUDY AREA, POPULATION AND METHODOLOGY

Study Area

The study was conducted among workers of Teza Tea Company which is situated in Bukeye commune. Bukeye, located in the north of Muramvya, is one of the five communes which compose Muramvya province. It borders Matongo and Butaganzwa communes of Kayanza province in the North, with Nkokoma stream and Mbuye commune bordering it in the East. Towards the South, Bukeye is bordered by Cizanye stream and Muramvya commune. While in the West, it is bordered by Mubarazi stream, Musigati and Rugazi communes of Bubanza province, and Teza forest. Ecologically, Bukeye fits within Mugamba and Kirimiro regions. Kirimiro is characterized by moderate temperatures and fertile soils.

Mugamba region which takes a great part of Bukeye, is characterized by acidic soils which require soil amendment and application of fertilizers for better agricultural yields. This region is also characterized by low temperatures and regular rainfalls. There are two main precipitation patterns in this region: the heavy rains fall between the months of September to January; and the moderate rains are received between March and June. The dry season starts from July to early September.

Agriculture is the main means of livelihood for most of the population around Teza Tea Company in Bukeye commune. Apart from cultivation of tea as cash crop, indigeneous farming - where intercropping is done - is the main agricultural practice in Bukeye and it is traditionally reserved to women. The crops cultivated include cassava, sweet potatoes, beans, sorghum, banana, Irish potatoes, maize, vegetables (tomatoes, onions, eggplants, cucumber, etc) and fruits.

Population:

Burundi is occupied by three ethnic groups namely Hutu, Tutsi and Twa. These groups do not have specific areas; they live together in different places in the country. But the three ethnic groups were traditionally believed to have three competencies that complement each other economically. The "division of labour" prescribes the majority Hutus as agriculturalists; the Tutsis are the pastoralists, while the minority Twa are pottery makers. The economic relation between the three ethnic groups was symbiotic and interdependent, with the groups involved in exchange of products generated from their respective fields. Currently, apart from pottery which is still practised by most Twa group members, agriculture and animal husbandry are, respectively, no longer the exclusive domain of the Hutus and Tutsis.

In the aforementioned divisions in economic competencies among the three ethnic communities, differentiations of roles along gender lines were also prescribed. In agriculture for example, men were traditionally assigned strenuous activities like cutting trees, clearing bushes, breaking ground etc while women were responsible for lighter tasks such as hoeing, weeding, sowing etc. In animal husbandry, men were responsible for taking the animal out for grazing while women were assigned "small" duties such as cleaning stables of animals.

The same was the case with the Twa group where the men were responsible for strenuous activities such as extracting clay from holes, while women were responsible for carrying the clay to pottery places. In all, these economic activities were inadequate in fully satiating the economic and subsistence needs of the families and households. Hence, for those around Teza, the factory became a necessary option in eking out a living.

Methodology

The survey method was used to collect primary data in the field. Due to the dominant numbers of male workers at Teza, a disproportional stratified sampling method was initially used to get a sample frame that would constitute both genders. Eventually, a final sample was arrived at using the simple random technique that generated a sample size of 150 respondents, with the individual workers being the unit of analysis. The sample group was then subjected to interviews to collect primary data by means of recording schedules. In addition, Key Informant interviews and Focused Group Discussions were also carried out. The Observation Method was applied to decode the mode of life of the workers within their natural settings. Both qualitative and quantitative data were elicited from the enlisted methods of data collection.

The study was driven by three theoretical perspectives. First, is the *Bargaining Theory* of Krishnaraj [1]. The theory posits that spouses are the main economic agents in a family situation. In this regard, the exchange between economic agents is a process of bargaining agency, that is, the capacity to solve an economic problem. The objects of bargaining include the household division of labour, the time and distribution of consumption in goods and services, and the allocation of income and labour between members. The second theory is the *Division of Labour Theory* of Arora et al.[2].

The theory assumes that in most societies, certain tasks are reserved to either males or females. In applying the theory, Arora states that, a typical woman in rural Africa assumes the role of a food producer and processor, home-maker and caretaker, while the man is seen as the provider. Finally, the *Marxist* tradition postulates that the origin of gender distinctions has nothing to do with the sex

differences per se, but is emergent from economic classes whose roots can be traced to capitalism. Agassi [3] citing Engels states that the cause of women inferior status is a class society and the form of family organization it produces. This implies that women's social position was not subordinated to men before. It is when capitalism showed up that men became owners of private properties and new relations between men and women started thereafter.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section summarises the findings of the study, and discusses the same along three outlines relevant to the parameters of this paper. To begin with, the section discusses how women economic activities have benefitted through earnings from their male counterparts thereby enhancing positive inter-spousal gender relations. The second discussion centres on inter-spousal decision-making responsibilities and powers relative to income accrued from work at Teza, and how this impinges on gender relations. Finally, we ventilate on the low income earnings by workers at Teza and the implication it has on gender roles within this society.

Wages, women's economic activities, and gender relations

The gender ratio on workers at Teza indicated that a sizeable number comprised of men. In the sample group of 150 respondents that was arrived at through disproportional stratified and a subsequent simple sampling strategy, a largely skewed result of 148 men to 2 women was captured. The labourers in question were mainly tea pickers; an activity considered as a dominantly masculine role. This aside, the heavy presence of men at Teza can be argued from a historical perspective. According to Capecchi [6], when Teza Tea Company was initiated, the male household heads in Bukeye and those from Muramvya communes (where the factory is currently situated) were encouraged to seek employment at the factory in order to eke out a living for their families.

During the field undertakings of this study at Teza, women were observed selling vegetables and other commodities in the local markets and along the main roads. Interviews with a number of informants on this observation revealed that most of these traders were wives and partners of labourers working at Teza. Further, the interviewees stated that seed capital for the economic undertakings by most of these women came from wages of the male workers. On this, a key informant said:

Kirundi version:

> *"Iyo ndonse umushahara ngaha i Teza, ndabika dukeyi mu ntumbero yo kuronderera agatahe umupfasoni wanje kugira acuruze".*

English version:

> *"When I get my tea wages here at Teza, I save certain amount in order to raise capital for my wife to do business".*

In the study, 89.3% of the respondents stated that men were the main breadwinners within households. Although these results may be critiqued on the basis of a skewed ratio of men to women in the sample, they are however legitimized by the patriarchal nature of the Burundian society. In Burundi, just as is the case with virtually all African societies, men are heads of households and to whom are bequeathed the critical role of providers and ensuring adequate means of family livelihoods.

The fact that men were instrumental in kick-starting their spouses' / partners' economic ventures, as stated by the informant quoted above, does not imply that they had good earnings. A majority of the workers (48%) earned less than 30,000 Burundian Francs (USD 16) per month. Table 1 below summarizes monthly earnings of the respondents.

Table 1: Repartition of respondents according to wages

Monthly tea wages	Frequency	%
60,000 F and above	4	2.7
45,000 F – 60,000 F	17	11.3
30,000 F – 45,000 F	57	38.0
30,000 F and below	72	48.0
Total	150	100.0

Source: Author's computed data (2019)

The participation of women in small market economies is common in other developing countries too. In Nigeria, Iman et al. [7] state that women engage in these activities in addition to undertaking other household and child-care chores. This too is reflected in the Teza case. Hence, women seem burdened by both domestic activities as well as commercial duties outside their homes. In this regard, and as suggested by Krishnaraj's [1] Bargaining Theory, women are economic agents by virtue of their involvement in small market economies just like their male spouses working at the Teza factory.

Inter-spousal decision-making within families

The study attempted to find out the decision-making processes relative to income accrued from the work at Teza. In the typical Burundian tradition, men command unmatched powers in terms of critical decisions that pertain to family economic and social lives. This position is supported by interviews carried out in the survey method and whose results are reflected on Table 2; hence it reinforces the patriarchal nature of the Burundian socio-cultural milieu.

Table 2: Decision-making in household

Household decisions made	Frequency	%
By the man (Husband)	99	66.0
By the woman (Wife)	12	8.0
By both husband and the wife	36	24.0
By the entire household	2	1.3
Any	1	0.7
Total	150	100.0

Source: Author's computed data (2019)

Similar studies within other contexts lend credence to a decision-making power hierarchy that favours men. In her study on Embu tea producers in Kenya, Njiro [4] argued that there is a tendency for men to diversify their labour power into various cash generating activities. Therefore, the fact that they are the ones who make major decisions pertaining to households in the rural areas may be explained by the earning power that the cash generating activities confer upon them. Olah et al. [5] conducted a study on families and societies in Europe. They found out that the earning power of

each partner in a household predetermines consideration within particular families. This may be interpreted to mean that the major household decisions are made by the men because of their earning power.

However, Focused Group Discussions involving women spouses of male Teza workers revealed that though men held the de jure decision-making powers relative to major issues, inter-spousal consultations on their income-use is becoming the norm. The consensus statement, below, which came out of one such FGD summarizes women's thoughts on this issue:

Kirundi version:

> *"Urumva, imishahara yo ngaha mu cayi ibonekera umusi umwe. Iyo duhembwe rero, ku mugoroba turaganira n'abo twubakanye kugira twemeze ivyo amafaranga twaronse azokora mu kwezi kwose. Ivyo bitabaye wohava usanga twibagiye no kwigisha abana, kugura agahuzu canke gusigaza udufaranga two kwa muganga".*

English version:

> *"What we meant is that the tea wages are paid on the same day. When we get the wages, we meet in the evening with our husbands so that we validate the main uses of the wages for the whole month. Without this consultation, we can end up forgetting even education for children, clothes, and medical care".*

Respondents seemed to agree that such frequent consultations by the spouses played a major role in creating a harmonious relationship between the spouses. In the survey method, there was a near unanimous affirmation on this as can be attested by the responses on Table 3 below.

Table 3: Harmonious relationships in households

Harmonious relationships within households	Frequency	%
Yes	146	97.3
No	3	2.0
Somehow	1	0.7
Total	150	100.0

Source: Author's computed data (2019)

These harmonious relationships in households create a solid foundation for good intra-household cooperation, so that the members of households can participate in solving their economic hardships. The participation in solving economic problems is what Krishnaraj [1] in his Bargaining Theory calls "bargaining agency". So, although men bring with them more resources at the bargaining table which could, in turn, favour them in terms of greater decision-making powers (at least according to Krishnaraj theoretical underpinning), their female counterparts seem to have a canny way of negotiating their interests for consideration.

To conclude, we extract part of the Ntakumubenge song that is commonly sang by the male tea pickers, and which espouses their critical role in providing for family livelihoods. The lyrics of this song exhort wives of the workers, who are back at home, not to hate their husbands as the latter are

merely engaged in their roles as family providers. The song therefore extols the virtue of the couples staying in harmony. The Ntakumubenge ("Don't hate him) Song

Kirundi version:

''Yagiye gusoroma icayi

Eeeee, ntukamubenge

Akora muri OTB y'I Teza

Eeeee, ntukamubenge

Asoroma icayi yivuye inyuma

Eeeee, ntukamubenge

Uzomubere umugisha

Eeeee, ntukamubenge''

Translation to English:

"He has gone to pick tea

Don't hate him

He works in Teza Tea Company

Don't hate him

He is picking much tea

Don't hate him

Be a blessing to him, please

Don't hate him"

Changing gender roles and low income entitlements

Just as is the case with other traditionally oriented social systems, the typical mode of division of labour among the Burundians reflects a rigid compartmentalization where men and women are assigned different roles. Both crop farming and animal husbandry form the major modes of economic subsistence for the Burundians in Muramvya province; the region that is the main source of labour for Teza Tea Company. In the farms, the traditional roles associated with men include breaking ground, cutting trees and grass, and hoeing; roles that were thought to be strenuous. Apart from undertaking their traditional domestic chores, women too participated in farm activities. They were assigned "lighter" duties such as weeding, sowing and harvesting. On the other hand, roles in the animal economy are mainly tasked to men. In this regard, it is the responsibility of the man of the house to take the animals out in the field to graze; an exercise that may take an entire day.

Key Informant interviews and Focus Group Discussions in this study revealed that women, back at home, were heavily burdened in terms of domestic and farm activities. The absence of men from the rural homes in their quest to get means of livelihoods at Teza, inevitably meant that their wives back home would assume the traditionally assigned roles for their spouses. Hence, women found

themselves undertaking "masculine" roles such as ground breaking, felling trees, looking after livestock, and so on. These are added to their conventional domestic chores and income complementing activities such as in market and roadside trading. It is within this context that one would understand the relevance of the earlier quoted Ntakumubenge song that is meant to assuage women from "hating" their husbands.

Multitasking and the plural roles of women is commonplace among African societies. Moser [8] for instance states that in most societies, women have a triple role: women undertake productive, reproductive and community managing activities. Arora et al. [2] say that a typical woman in rural Africa assumes the roles of a food producer and processor, home-maker and caretaker.

Interestingly, in the male Focused Group Discussions, variations in the gender roles were mainly attributed to inadequate wages paid by Teza. The argument here was that, if the workers were well remunerated, they would be in a position to hire male labour back at home to help out on the so-called "masculine" tasks. In the survey method, 89% of the respondents felt that Teza was underpaying them to extent that they were unable to carry out their family and household responsibilities satisfactorily. As reflected on Table 1, when computed on a monthly basis, about half of the workers (48%) earn less than 16 dollars. Being basically casual workers, payments were done relative to amount of tea leaves picked as measured in kilograms. Each kilogram of tea leaves picked fetched 70 Fbu (USD 0.04) for the resident workers who are housed by the company in the camps. As for the non-resident workers, the payment is the same but a bonus of 10 Fbu (USD 0.005) is added over and above this.

It is against this background that respondents felt that blame on the additional roles for women should lie squarely with the company underpaying the workers, thereby undercutting the capacity to hire farmhands to take over their traditional roles back at home. And, possibly to appease their spouses, interviews, discussions and observation revealed that when the workers took time off-duty to go back home, they too would undertake "feminine" tasks on farmlands. This was an important gesture in creating harmony in the partner relationships within families.

CONCLUSIONS

The initial assumption in this study before fieldwork was that wage earnings by workers in Teza would impact negatively on inter-spousal relationships. It was hypothesized that the workers (men being the majority) would use their wages to engage in conspicuous consumption without due care to family needs, thereby straining relations with their spouses. The findings of the study, however, proved otherwise. There seem to be prudent use of income where workers at Teza channel part of their wages to empower their wives economically by opening small commercial ventures for them to subsist on. This gesture was seen to have positive effect on inter-spousal relationships. Secondly, contrary to the conventional patriarchal Burundian system, wives of the Teza workers were given significant leverage in decision-making at the family level; yet another catalyst for harmonious relations. Finally, the study found out some correlation between low income earned by the workers and infinite gender roles that were now new occurrences back in the rural lives.

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