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Family Succession and Responsibilities Towards Female Gender in M'muock Villages, South West Region, Cameroon

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Abstract:

The article 'Family succession and responsibilities towards female gender in M'muock villages' is an attempt to examine the role of successors towards the female gender and gender inequality. Using a mixed approach, 300 questionnaires were administered to randomly selected households while in-depth interviews were conducted with some family heads, traditional rulers and notables. Questionnaires were analyzed qualitatively while interviews were exploited using content analysis. Results depicts that family succession in the M'muock villages is discriminatory as the girl child is not allowed to succeed the father. This idea, which is backed by traditional beliefs and customs was supported by about 70% of the population. Women are given out for marriage and are not allowed to have a share of their father's wealth. However, surveys revealed that women could only take over if there is no male child in the family or when he is incapacitated. This is seen as aspect of gender inequality and discrimination against the female folk. Nevertheless, the degree of responsibility of the child (30%), affectation towards a particular wife (44,4%°), level of education (10%), success in life (10%) and ignorance on the part of the deceased family head were identified as being accountable for changes in successorship. Gender that gender inequality prohibited by the law, this work recommends that parents should empower the girl child and give them equal opportunities as far as inheritance is concerned.

Key Words:

Family succession, gender inequality, M'muock villages, Cameroon

INTRODUCTION

Succession is an important aspect of African traditional set up. The issue of succession ship both at the level of households and community level dates back before colonial Era. It has remained as African culture that as a head of a household dies, replacements are been made (Göran, T 2006) which can be circumstances their children or siblings of the decease. A successor is a person that comes after someone else and takes his place or the act of taking over an official position or titleship. If the successor is nominated among his children and he is under age; an elderly person may be appointed to guide the adolescent till aged. Both within polygamous homes and monogamous homes, he may be partially accepted or completely accepted by all base on several reasons (E venter 2006). It's worth to note that disagreement on succession ship occurs more in polygamous homes were others think they have been deprive of their right or discriminated upon. The successor in the context of the African households has as role to resolve disputes between family members, maintain and improve on family properties inherited, provide education to children and transmit cultural values to others but female education is generally under look in succession issues Carolyn, M. (1993). None the less, it is considered that families having females as heads are socially and economically vulnerable (Dorrit posel 2001) as they are required to improve on family wealth and increase family size in a reasonable manner and communicate to the ancestors on behalf of others, collect the bride price of the adult females who are ready for marriage, maintain links created by the initial family head and above all keep the family united in all circumstances. However, it is observed that in many African societies this has not been the case. Family succession by some scholars is said to be the source of many family conflicts and failures in Africa. Many family businesses and properties has been destroyed because of succession problems (Kajsa haag 2006, Andrea, C. and others 2017).

In M'muock, they are people who because of family succession problems left their initial place of settlement to either nearby villages or foreign villages. Till date though the character of exiting the village in M'muock has been reduced to zero but internal family conflicts remain among the members. With the advent of globalization and women emancipation, issues of gender inequality and discrimination have been observed within the African traditional settings. Conflicts are arising and the village tradition Councils within the M'muock tribe has never stopped from judging family succession matters and some families have been split for life because of the family succession. Thus, conducting a research to educate many people within the M'muock community will go a long way to solve societal problems that affect our society in daily basis. Such conflicts of succession have been responsible for population movements in

many parts of Africa, as reported by Ojuku, (1996). Women in the M'muock villages are discriminated upon and this has made them vulnerable, economically and socially. However, the female population has been multiplying efforts to cope with the challenges. This idea was corroborated by Akwanga,(2016), stipulating that women in M'muock base their livelihoods on the production and commercialization of Irish potatoes. This economic activity is still dominated by men as succession has not permitted most women to have access to farm lands. This aspect of female discrimination in the economic and productive sectors is equally a call for concern (Evertter and Boshoff, 2006)

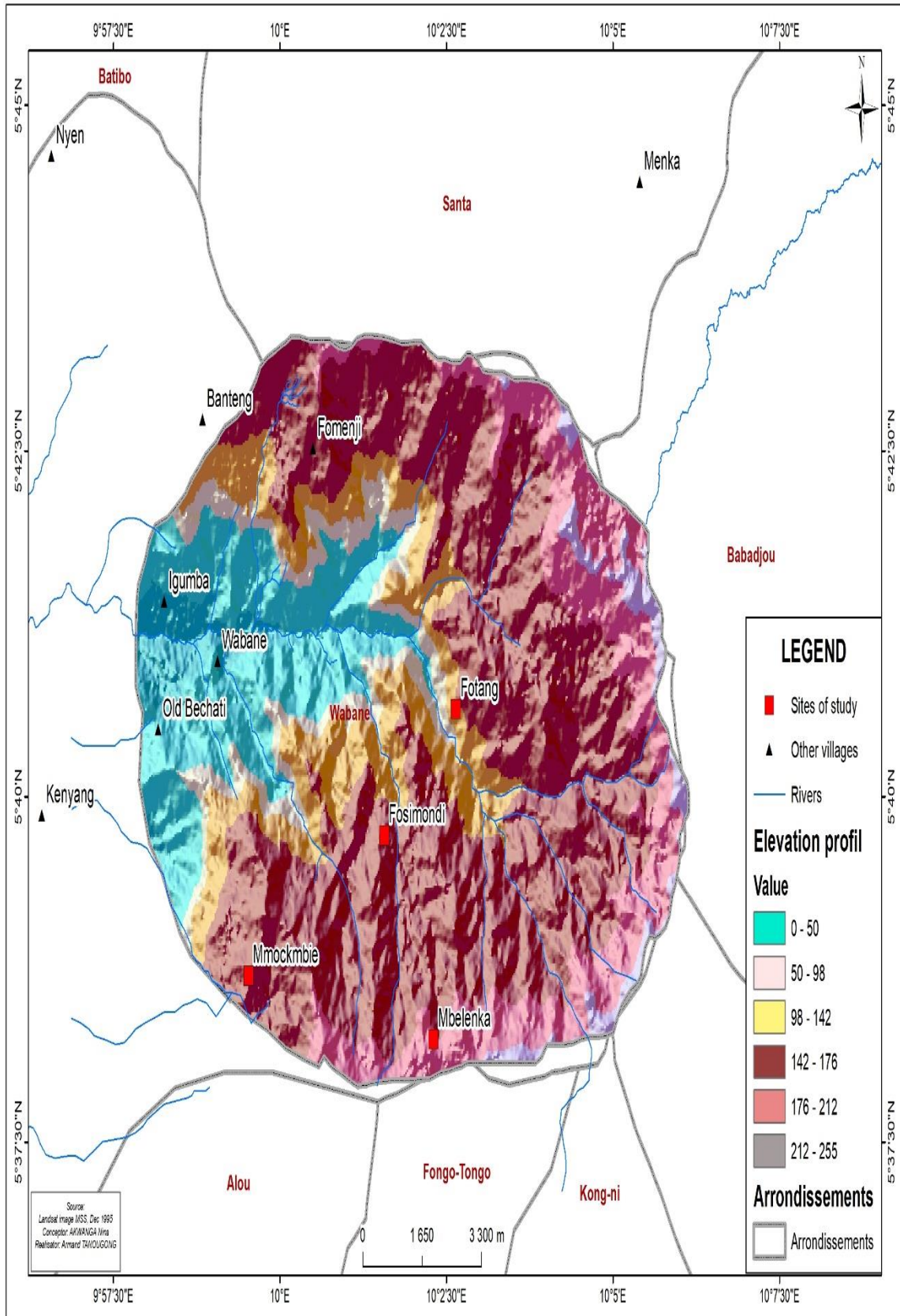
African women have played a great role in the growth and development of the society. She plays the role of educating, teaching children society deals(ethics). This identifies the indispensable role of African women in the society and evokes the issue of gender inequality which still exist in our contemporary world. There are extraordinary challenges for daughters aspiring to the top leadership position in their own family's enterprise. There is a sex-based preference that favors sons over daughters as managerial heirs' daughters have been relatively disadvantaged in acquiring key experience, training, and social support to assume the top role as they mature (Constantinidis and Teresa Nelson 2017).

It is thus based on this background that this article seeks to investigate the succession procedure and challenges face by female children within their families and society at large. It further probes into gender inequality and discriminations perpetuated on women in an attempt to educate the masses and shed more light on women emancipation and gender equality.

METHOD AND TOOLS

Area of study

The M'muock village is found on the southern slope of the Mount Bamboutos caldera(2740M) and north east of Lebialem division of the south west region; estimated to be located between latitudes 5°37'30" and 5°40' north and longitudes 9°57' and 10° east of the Greenwich mean time. It has the Cameroon type of climate which is quite hot and humid characterized by the existence of two seasons: seven months of rainy season from March to November and five months dry season. The landscape is accidental in nature less than 1000M to above 2400M in altitudes with main sustenance means being agriculture. Mostly characterized by youths with marital ages starting from 17 with female gender dominating.



Source: Authors realization (2019) Location map of M' muock villages

Data collection and analysis

This paper adopted a qualitative methodology as it was seen as being capable to examine people’s perceptions and cultural understanding of succession principles. Qualitative questionnaires with open questions were designed and purposively administered to 300 households in the three villages of M’muock Fosimondi, M’muock Leteh and Mockmbie. In-depth interviews were equally conducted with 10 resource persons with sound knowledge on the succession process. The 10 different persons were purposively sampled and included traditional rulers who are custodians of the cultural heritage, notables and the old family heads. Questionnaires were coded and treated in Microsoft excel. The treatment was done using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Interviews were equally treated using the content analysis. Results were presented using percentages, charts and tables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio demographic characteristics of the sampled population in M’muock villages

The population of area under study are farmers by nature though diversify in activities. The livelihood strategies adopted are farming and off farm activities. In which case farming is mostly in the hands of the female gender with off -farm mostly in the hands of men. The socio-economic characteristics of the population are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the population

Variables	Frequency	%
Male	186	62
Female	114	38
Respondents age structure		
17 to 27	77	25.6
28 to 37	152	50.6
38 to 47	57	19
48 to 58+	14	4.6
Educational levels		
Never went to school	12	4
FSLC	78	26
G.C.E “O”	67	22.4
G.C.E “A”	84	28
First Degree	50	16.6
Masters	9	3

Marital status		
Married	150	50
Engage	35	11.7
Single	99	33
Divorce	16	5.3

Source: Field work, (2019)

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic composition of the population. The sample for the study was male dominant (62%) against only 38 % for the female. With a relatively youthful population, with more than 50% below 40years, the main livelihood activity of the area is farming. It is carried out by both men and women but men have been identified as playing an important role than women. The landownership procedure is open to all, but stringent measures have limited the number of women who owns land. The levels of education are generally low, with a majority having O- levels certificate of education (22,4%). Many youths drop out of school and embark on the profitable farming activity that involves the cultivation of Irish potatoes and vegetables. Though it is a general scenario, the situation of the girl child is alarming and deserves particular attention. Th lower educational levels for female have made them vulnerable to gender abuses and discrimination.

The mirror of Family succession in M’muock villages

It has remained as African culture that as a head of a household dies, replacements are been made, which in circumstances can be their children or siblings of the decease. If the successor is nominated among his children and he is under age; an elderly person may be appointed to guide the adolescent till aged Baraza, N. (2009). Family succession in M’muock villages has several facets from household to another and from monogamous to polygamous homes. In monogamous homes, succession ship is considered to be automatic as it is directed toward the first male child but with the world becoming a global village, the tendency is changing as some families base their opinions on educational levels and children degree of responsibility. The situation in polygamous home is different.

30% of our sample stood out that family succession in M’muock villages should give sole ownership of family properties to the beneficiary since he is the successor. To them, being a successor means inheriting all the liabilities of the decease person and so they should equally inherit all his assets. However, the 70% who held the contrary view said succession is just a title of representation but does not give the appointed the ultimate right to abusively used the

family wealth particularly that is; the successor should use income earned from the usage of inherited wealth for the general wellbeing of the entire family and not only his. They should equally seek for the opinion of some concern before giving out land: For no reason, some cease lands from wives given them by their late husbands or send them away. Most successors doing so are doing so under the influence of their mothers, siblings and even friends who do not mean well for the family and the fact that some are unconscious as to the task while others are just self-centered. The implications here is that, it is understood that M’muock community has come to understand that family succession is just a title of representation and the title holder is the guarantor of the family properties.

Generally, field surveys show that succession in M’muock villages has been witnessing some digression especially in polygamous homes. The first male child no longer succeeds the father automatically. A number of factors could account for changes in successorship (Figure 1)

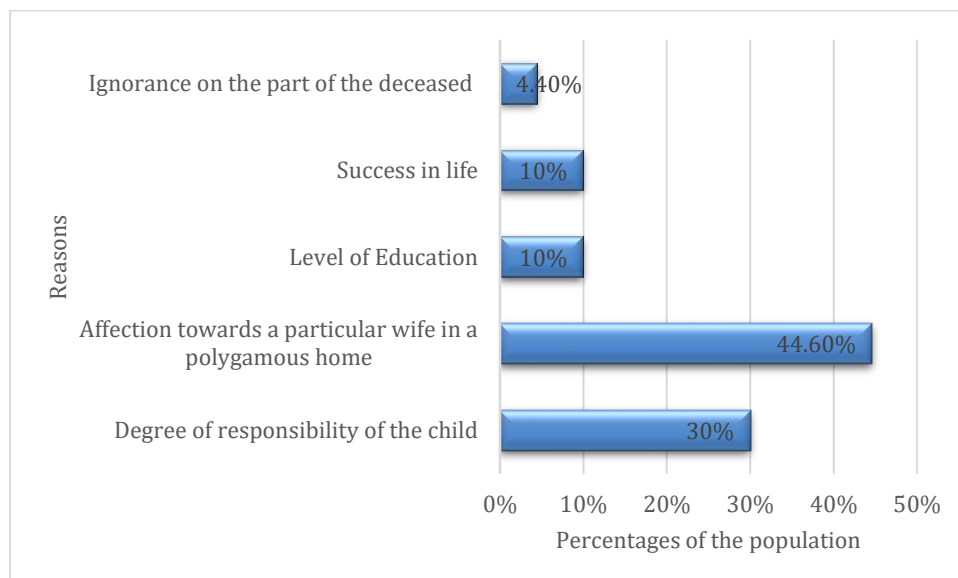


Figure 2: Reasons for change in successorship in M’muock villages

Source: Fieldwork, (2019)

From figure 2, factors such as; degree of responsibility of the child (30%), affectation towards a particular wife (44,4%°), level of education(10%), success in life(10%) and ignorance on the part of the deceased family head were identified as being accountable for changes in successorship. Among these factors, different affections for a wife and favoritism towards the son of such a wife has been playing a determinant role in successorship changes in M’muock village. This with no doubt, has been responsible for many conflicts in polygamous homes after the death of the family head. Conflicts are pronounced in a situation where the deceased was a

chief or traditional ruler. Inheriting the thrown of a deceased must be done according to the laws and customs of the people.

However, it was revealed that women are rolled out of the succession race under normal circumstances. This brings out the discriminatory role of tradition that is examined and critiqued in this article.

Successor's perception toward female gender in M'muock villages

This aspect of research seeks to investigate the public perception of the M'muock people regarding the responsibilities of the family successor towards the female gender whether it only ends at giving them out on marriage. Findings demonstrated that female children do not succeed their parents as stipulated by the tradition. Oral History holds that heads of households who had no male child could be succeeded by their brother's son or by their nephews. The female child was meant for marriage.

Heads of households perceive the female child as the property of the husband's family. This was singled out as the underlining reason why female succession is discriminated upon in most African traditional setups. Women get married and leave their parents' home for their husband's, where they start their own families. As such, they are not allowed to succeed their fathers.

During interviews with family heads, an overwhelming majority 80% said the responsibility of a family successor towards the female gender shouldn't be limited only to given them out for marriage. This is a reawakening of consciousness and a step towards the fight for gender equality in successorship. However, one respondent lamented that:

“For some of us who are from polygamous homes, it is regrettable to say some family successor are just consumers, most of them don't build nor try to improve on the existed structures, whereas the finance is available, I mean money gotten from activities undertaken on the inherited lands, girl's bride price just to name a few. Our late parents in ancient times after giving us out on marriage, will always try to find out if we are doing well in our marital homes but our 21st century, the successors do not show any care as to what you become after collecting his packages. End by saying most of them are heartless consumers”

The implications here is that M'muock tribe family successors should be schooled more on their responsibilities towards the female children of their decease father's; doesn't only ends at

giving them out for marriage but also involves following up to make sure that they are properly protected and treated by their husbands.

Investigations from the custodians of tradition revealed that women at first had no problem with the succession procedure. They accepted their position and respected the choices of their parents. However, remarkable changes have been observed lately in the succession landscape. Globalization and raising awareness on the right of women as well women emancipation has brought in some changes.

Some households without male children now allow the female child to take over their inheritance. In such an instance, the female child succeeds the family head but remain unmarried and continue with the leadership that entails the management of people and property. Other households with male children have as heads female because of circumstances surrounding the family such as the mental condition of the male. Non-the-less, the process will continue in so far there is no male child in the family. Once there is a male child, he takes over all the entitlements. This is an indicator of gender inequality

Gender issues and property ownership in succession

This aspect investigates and understand the perception of the M'buock people regarding view of family successors on their positions as the bread winners of their family. Succession entails control over the properties left behind by the deceased. One of such properties with important traditional ramifications is land and landed properties. The female children are in most cases discriminated upon as far the management of such property is concerned. Successors are supposed to manage the property properly and ensure the wellbeing of the entire family, including the children and wives the father left behind. However, property has been causing a lot of conflicts in families.

In this regard, majority of the respondents affirmed to the fact that most family successors see their title as means of creating personal wealth for themselves. This probably where a lot of conflicts originate in family succession. The initiation of the term had as intension to keep the family united and progressing but most heads in polygamous homes have set confusion among children while still alive, this arises from discriminating between wives which extends to the children; some feeling they have right and been love than the others. When the opportunity arises for those who have been privileged, they give deaf ears to the cry opinions of those who have live like kings and princess when father was still alive. More over there is

no communication between parents and children which often leads to disgruntlement after death. The implications here is that if family successor continues to view their successes as means of creating wealth, family dispute is bound to arise at all levels. Thus, it is encouraging to keep such attitude away.

In the M'muock village, we noticed cases whereby successors abused their rights and take over all the family property. A case has been narrated in which the male successor did not only discriminate against the female siblings but also against wives of the deceased. From a polygamous home, the successor concentrated on his own immediate family, took over farms from the late father's wives and gave to his siblings. This didn't only generate hatred but also witch haunting.

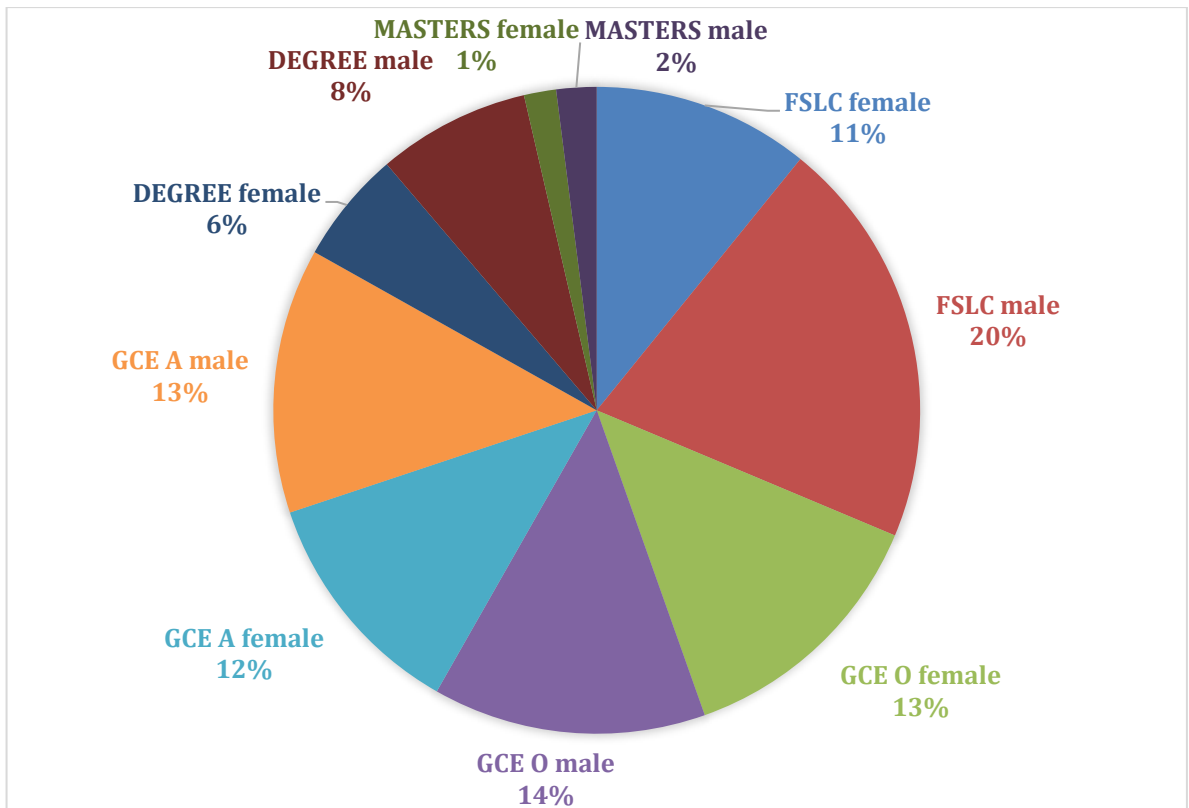
IMPLICATIONS OF SUCCESSION ON GENDER EDUCATION IN M'MUOCK VILLAGES

Increasing accessibility of the territory has brought about life sustenance diversification with potentials limited by literacy level; it is obvious from our field experience and observation that family heads and successors who have been able to overcome the myth attach to fostering female education are making a good deal out of it both at family scale and societal level. Households with literacy level are able to manage family resource and problems related to the follow up of children education, moreover there is need to eradicating the negative myth attributed to female education in Mmuock villages. This explains why the percentage of female as compare to the male gender who go further in their education is comparatively lower to the percentages of FSLC, GCE Ordinary level and Advanced level GCE; to this most of our respondents hold on to the myth that, I quote:

“I can't encourage my female child to go further in her studies because it will scare men away from her, ladies with higher educational levels will have the tendency of controlling their husbands and will always seek for explanation to their actions which they don't like nor want. This anonymous respondent adds that because of higher educational levels, they end up as single ladies”.

Anonymous 2: *“I don't want to be an object of mockery, so I only invest on female education till GCE Advanced level and if am pleased, I can manage again till first degree level, to me that's enough for the girl child”.*”

Anonymous 3: “I see no reason encouraging female education especially as her mother has no respect for me, let her mother see into that as she is financially stable than I am”. The results obtained from field investigation provide us with the figure below:



Gender educational standards in Mmuock village

Analyzing the above figure, it is evident that female education in Mmuock village came second after that of male children; 11% of female sampled are holders of the first school leaving certificate (FSLC) as oppose to 20% men, 13%-14% GCE “O” level for both gender, 12% of female are holders of the GCE “A” level and 13% male holders ;but the gap between the two gender education widens at the university level (first degree level) with 1% representing the female and 2% for male .This is a clear indication that the old myth regarding female education is gradually being eradicated though there is still need for the complete eradication of the myth hindering female to further education in this area.

Moreover, this obsolete myth is becoming a day to day habit among the female gender who have turn to believe on; my discussion with most of the university drop out provided the quotations below:

“my dear, I don't want to remain a single lady. why? If I have to further my education then I must have married first because if I do that before, men will shy or fleet away from me. I will not lose my mr right because of too much education”.

“Men do not appreciate getting married to women who have higher educational level than they do, they feel their superiority complex will be trample on, that you will always question every aspect of decision taken by them. I will wait, after marriage I will pleased and convince my husband to allow me pursuit with my education where I ended before. She further adds that when men get married to ladies with educational level lower than theirs, they feel protected and their superiority preserve”.

“I have the wish to further my education but there is no one to assist me, those who have assisted me in my studies so far said they have done enough and that if must further my education, I should get something doing”.

It is worth to note that such situations are generally observed in families with very low-income levels with ignorant on educational values. Some of the household heads have the seal to educate their children but discourage by the attitude of wives towards them, children end up being victims of circumstances, but I ask myself, should marital issues be enough reason for one not to educate a child?

My respond is no, we the Mmuock indigenes must change our mentality as to the brighter future of the female gender both from individual, households, community and above frontier scales. We should copy examples from other areas, higher educational level for the female gender opens up more and better opportunities for her, the community and her future home. In the 21st century, most successful marital homes have wives with higher educational level, for they are able to manage family life properly and overcome problems and the future of the unborn guaranteed, well treated and given the respect owed them by family in-laws, friends and community.

STRATEGIES TO MITIGATE GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN M'MUOCK

A multiple response question was asked to know the strategies adopted by the people to fight gender inequality and discrimination as far as succession is concerned. Findings revealed many measures (Figure)

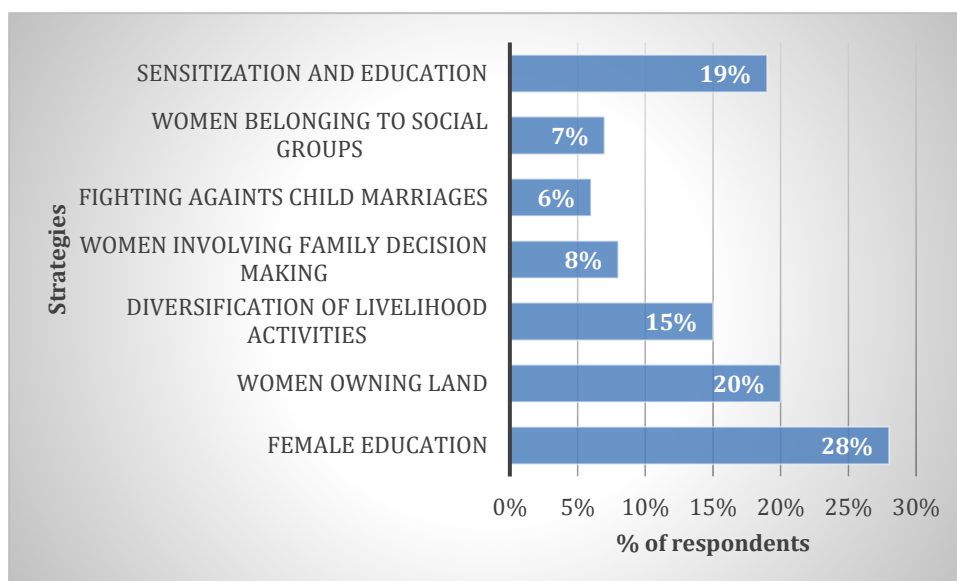


Figure 4: Strategies adopted by the population to fight gender inequality in M'muock villages

Figure 4 therefore indicate the various strategies which have been used by the community to fight gender issues among which are sensitization and education which represent not less than 19%, women appartention to social groups 7%, landownership by women 20%, diversification of livelihoods activities by female gender 15% which aside their reproductive role include buyam- sellam ,restauration, hair dressing and seamstress work, and 6% positioning against teenage marriages and female education motivated by 28% of the sampled population. These can equally be attributed to communication and accessibility which have made the world a global village whereby people are being awaken and consciousness gain in the arena of gender education and rights; which has made most households to provide equal educational rights to children rather than focusing on male as it was the case over the past centuries. Moreover, women now have claims over landed properties and can even buy land, women are allowed to engage in other income generating activities by husbands while in other households they are the driving force for the entire family.

Discussions

Most African tribes claim customary inheritance practices that favoured males over females from inheriting the properties as housing and other resource which they had access to while their fathers were alive(Cooper,2008_2010). The issue of gender discrimination has gain more ground from house hold to international levels resulting to the implementation of strategies on

gender issues which are integrationist and transformative in nature. The integrationist strategy recognizes the different role genders have and which they apply in the effective management of resources and the society (Kabeer 1999,40) and finds ways to contribute to the advancement of issues related to the female gender. The transformative strategies seek to change the development agenda by supporting women's interest (Anne Valimaa 2004). This issue of gender has equally lead to the adoption of approaches which are welfare ,equity ,anti-poverty and efficiency in nature; the welfare approach take care of those who cannot take care of themselves providing economic assistance to male in productive work while providing relief aid to women and other vulnerable group of people with women being consider as inactive participant in development issues with sole role to being mothers and child bearers ((Moser 1993,58-59).The equity and efficiency approaches consider women as active participants in both productive and reproductive domains.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study is a work of intellectual property and thus, we can conclude that family heads should show equal love to children and wives while still alive, they should also establish good communication between children, clarifications should be made in their will as to how the properties should be manage. Successors should forgive the past and see to what the future holds for them. Once you are a successor accept that you are a builder of a family and a peace maker and avoid considering family properties as a source of wealth making. Allow everyone in the family to benefit from the family properties. If such is done, family conflicts and failures will greatly reduce in M'muock tribe. It is recommended that family succession in M'muock shouldn't be seen as given sole ownership of family properties to the beneficiary. The family successor is merely the head of the family to unite people but family properties belong to every member of the family and the family successor should make sure that everyone benefits from it. It is also recommended that the responsibilities of the family successor shouldn't end only at giving their girl children for marriage. They should follow up to make sure their children are protected and well treated in their homes of marriage. Finally, it also recommended that to avoid family conflicts and failures which is rampant in M'muock due to family succession, the successors should stop perceiving their family title as a source of creating personal wealth. If they fail to, family conflicts are bound to arise.

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