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Socially excluded? Kenyan elderly and participation. A
Case Study of Kolwa Division

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This document represents part of the author's study programme while at the Institute of Social Studies. The views stated therein are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Institute.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

NGO- Non-Governmental Organization

CBO- Community-Based Organization

FGDs- Focus Group Discussions

CDF- Constituency Development Fund

MPs- Members of Parliament

Mzee- A Swahili respectable title for an elderly man

ILO- International Labour Organization

UN- United Nations

PS- Permanent Secretary

HIV/AIDS- Human Immuno-deficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

TBAs- Traditional Birth Attendants

HAK- HelpAge Kenya

RA- Research Assistant

Baraza- Regular gatherings organized by village elders to discuss issues affecting their communities

DS- Development Studies

UNDP- United Nations Development Programme

Abstract

Too often older people are stereotyped as passive or helpless—the realities of their lives unobserved (Gorman, 2002 p. xiii)

This paper is about participation versus social exclusion of the elderly in Kenya. I believe that the latter constrains their constitutional right to full participation. The prevailing social injustices, structural violence, inequality, attitudes and perceptions restrict the capabilities of this minority population. The definition by United Nations and African Union that the elderly are those above 60 year of age has been adopted for the purpose of this research paper whereas the theory of Dullemen (2006 p 101) that “....aging world is a working world” is the basis of this paper’s argument.

In order to explore Kenyan elderly participation in community affairs, as well as factors that hinder their full participation, a Case Study was done in Kolwa Division in Western Kenya. Responses from 22 interviewees (all natives of the study area) revealed that the elderly of both genders participate in leadership, conflict resolution, care for orphans and the sick, farming, businesses, cultural activities and politics. The study further revealed that a combination of structural, social and internal (personal) factors such as gender differences, culture, socio-economic status, education, power relations and personal characteristics trap these senior citizens in a spiral of disadvantage by constraining their capabilities. In my view, this is Social exclusion and Self-exclusion which negatively affects the quality of life of the elderly of Kolwa Division.

The Capability approach theory by Sen and Nussbaum has been used to argue that the elderly too have Capabilities. Enhancement of their individual freedoms and real opportunities is what the elderly need in order to achieve functioning such as good nourishment, good health, self-respect and social integration instead of being perceived as dependent. I concur with Dullemen (2006 p 101) that “There is an urgent need for a change of attitude towards the elderly, who should not be perceived as a burden to society but as key players in the productive and reproductive field.”

Relevance of this Research Paper to Development Studies

Sumner and Tribe (2008) defined Development Studies (DS) largely as an applied research, more often concerned with real-world problems. In spite of the concern by Mehta ‘et al’ (2006: 1) that DS is ‘more loaded and contested than other kinds of research,’ not much has been documented on the topic of this paper. The elderly appear to experience social exclusion emanating from structural violence, social injustices, poverty and inequality that is usually inflicted under circumstances beyond their own control. This, I believe ultimately limits their full participation and leads to increased human insecurity and vulnerability which has been regarded as a form of structural violence by the UNDP (R, David, 2006). In this paper, I shall use the term *full participation* of older people to mean ‘being freely and actively involved in all aspects of the community’s affairs as a fundamental human right’, as stipulated in Article 39 of the Kenyan Draft Constitution.

Corbridge (2005: 1; Sumner, 2006) critiques DS by arguing that most DS researchers are often from different Socio-cultural backgrounds from ‘subjects’ of the research thereby raising the questions of legitimacy, ethics and feasibility of recommendations made by the researcher. The case is different for this Paper since I’m a native of the Study Area who understands and has empirically observed the contributions made and the challenges faced by the elderly of this community over time.

I hope that the findings of this study will add onto the limited existing knowledge on participation of Kenyan elderly in the affairs of communities and how social exclusion is hampering their full participation. Like (Mehta ‘et al’, 2006: 5), I also hope that in the near future, development research will not just study processes of change, but will also be an integral part of them to promote applicability through policies and (in this case) elderly-friendly Development strategies. In agreement with Woolcock (2007: 57) as cited in Sumner and Tribe (2008, p 764), we, in the Social Development profession need to create a community of ‘practical thinkers’ and ‘reflective doers’ so as to achieve long-term and sustainable development.

Keywords: Elderly, Social exclusion, Participation, Aging & Capabilities

CHAPTER 1

Socially excluded? Kenyan elderly and participation. A Case Study of Kolwa Division

1.1 Introduction

Too often older people are stereotyped as passive or helpless—the realities of their lives unobserved (Gorman, 2002 p. xiii)

In this paper, I have attempted to argue against the stereotypes that the elderly are ‘passive’ and ‘unproductive’ which makes them to be discriminated against. I have therefore used both primary and secondary data to argue that the elderly are resourceful (*resourceful* has been used in this paper to mean capable of doing something through one’s own creativity or with additional support). The elderly need encouragement and their capacities strengthened to be able to continue actively participating in social, economic, cultural and sometimes political affairs of their communities and the country’s development in general. This approach could foster development as opposed to the so-called ‘old-age dependency’ which is in itself a ‘derogatory’ term that further excludes this category of the population. In addition, emphasis by demographers that our global population is aging at a very fast rate calls for even greater necessity to pay attention to the needs of this category of the population.

1.2 Indication of the problem

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights, Article 1 states that ‘all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights’, irrespective of age. The elderly (defined by United Nations and African Union as those above 60 year of age), are unfortunately not recognized explicitly under the international human rights laws that legally oblige governments to realize the rights of all people.

The concept of social exclusion which captures the situation of the elderly in Kenya forms the basis of this paper. This concept originated in France. Due to its ambiguity, the concept has since been defined differently

by many scholars. Social exclusion was first introduced in the lime light during the Development debate at the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen from 5th-12th of March 1995, courtesy of several multilateral agencies, notably the World Bank, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Department for International Development (DFID). The concept has since been defined in various ways that are highly variable in meanings but the notion of : vulnerability, denial of equal access to opportunities or discrimination and hierarchical power relations cut across as a ‘common denominator’. According to Burchardt ‘et al’ (2002, pp 30, 32;Hobcraft,2007), an individual is socially excluded if he or she is geographically a resident in a society but for reasons beyond his or her control, cannot fully participate in the ‘key activities’ of the citizens in that society, despite his/her willingness to participate.

In my opinion, the Kenyan state, among other developing countries continues to either actively or passively exclude certain categories of her population, especially the minority and marginalized groups such as the elderly. This limits their participation in making decisions on issues that affect their lives thereby denying them access and utilization of resources. At both the national and community level, these minority population of elderly men and elderly women face multi-dimensional challenges such as deprivation in knowledge, inaccessible/expensive healthcare, HIV/AIDS, rape, economic insecurity, lack of respect by the younger generation, exploitation by politicians, victims of theft of their properties (cattle, land or movable assets), putting up with long queues in banks when going for pension and in public health facilities, social exclusion and lately the ‘burden’ of caring for grandchildren orphaned by HIV/AIDs, mostly ‘shouldered’ by grandmothers who lack reliable source of livelihood, and in many cases do not have the physical capability to undertake such responsibility (Johanson,1996:165–169). Female elderly are particularly ‘victims’ of rape, illiteracy, exclusion from the ownership and control of fixed and movable assets of the family, inheritance of their late husband’s property among others. Kenyan news reports, in both audio and print media are awash with such news: “Residents of

Karia village in Githunguri (Central Kenya) lynched a man for allegedly raping a 70-year-old woman” (Daily Nation, 2010). The fact that culture allows men to exercise social and economic power over the women puts the elderly women even in much ‘lower strata’ within societies thereby worsening their vulnerability, same as poor older men. A report of a research entitled ‘Elder abuse in the health care services in Kenya’ by World Health Organization (WHO) in collaboration with HelpAge Kenya (HAK) is a clear evidence of some of the challenges facing the elderly. An elderly respondent reported that a public health provider remarked “You are not sick, your problem is old age” when he sought medical attention (Ochola, 2000: 55). This was also ‘confirmed’ by a nurse working at Kenyatta National Hospital who admitted that she enjoys working with younger people as opposed to the elderly (*ibid*). These are common occurrences in Kenyan public hospitals, hence the need for urgent intervention to guarantee the elderly a life of respect and dignity.

Currently, a number of NGOs respond to the needs of communities through community project interventions targeting women, children, disabled and people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS among other so-called minority groups. No attention is however given to addressing issues affecting the older population specifically. The above challenges have adverse impact on those in rural areas where basic services such as health care, healthy nutrition, public transport and secure housing are hard to access. In response to the plight of the elderly, the Kenyan state mandated HAK, founded in 1982 to address issues affecting the elderly both in urban and rural Kenya. Its core objectives being to help the elderly claim their rights, challenge discrimination and overcome poverty. However, inadequate funding continues to limit their implementation capacity (Gondi, 2005).

According to HelpAge International, many elderly are resourceful and significantly contribute to the wellbeing of their families and communities although the substantial productive contribution of older people is largely unrecognized by policy makers. The existing limited literature outline the following as contributions made by senior citizens to their commu-

nities: Care of grandchildren (including AIDS orphans), pension-sharing, continued economic activity, and the provision of accommodation (which they may have built or paid for) to other household members as well as economic contributions (Kaiser, 1994; Sagner, 1999; Saengtienchai, 2001). Also included as socio-cultural contributions are: guiding the young, administration of family and communal property, officiating marriages and cleansing ceremonies when death occurs, household and community decision-making, resolution of family and community conflicts, grandmothers taking care of adults ailing from HIV/AIDS, transmission of cultural values and wisdom, among others that have been revealed from the field research, unique to Kenya and specifically to the study area.

The natives of Kolwa Division where the research was carried out are of *Luo* ethnic group, who in the past, as a cultural norm highly respected the elderly within the society (Ominde 1952; Mboya 1965; Nyambedha ‘et al’, 2003 p49). This has since changed as is the case in many communities. It is therefore a wonder if De Beauvoir (1972) had exclusion of the elderly in mind when he remarked that:

It is...the entire system of values that define the meaning and value of age. The reverse applies: by the way in which a society behaves towards its old people, it uncovers the naked and often carefully hidden, truth about its principles and aims

Stereotypes that some older people are dependent with high levels of vulnerability are not entirely untrue although it is good to acknowledge that other older people may be making more social and economic contributions than some of the so-called people in their ‘productive age’ for various reasons, making these elderly more depended-upon instead. For instance, during hard economic times when unemployment rate is high among the ‘working population’, mostly the youth.

I concur with Troisi (2001) that it would be beneficial to come up with policies that seek to promote the capacity of older people to make contributions, alongside increasing opportunities for them to do so. This would contribute to healthy, active and meaningful ageing experiences. The poli-

cies however cannot be designed without prior documentation of factual information about the contributions made by the elderly.

It is for this reason that I have explored ways in which Kenyan senior citizens participate in social, cultural, political and economic development of the country and their societies in particular. The research has further identified factors that deter this category of the population from full participation. Capability approach framework has been used to argue that not all elderly are absolutely dependent as has been largely stereotyped. Instead some of the senior citizens use their capabilities to contribute to their societies and families in various ways. I feel that there is need to support them to be able to exercise their agency to ensure full participation in the affairs of the society as opposed to excluding them as ‘unproductive’ dependants.

1.3 Relevance and justification

Considering the above stated challenges faced by the elderly and their capabilities, it is important to note that the Kenyan state lacks a reliable database or documentation on general contributions made by the elderly, their needs, challenges and expectations. My motivation to carry out this research is the understanding that despite empirical observations about participation of the elderly, their resourcefulness has not been independently assessed and documented (Nana, 1992). In order to achieve this, I engaged the voices of the older people themselves and other stakeholders in exploring knowledge on the resourcefulness and participation of the older people at community and national level.

Kenya is one of the signatories to the International Plan of Action on ageing (adopted in 1982 in Vienna, Austria during the first World Assembly on ageing) which stipulates the rights of the older persons to independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity. On the contrary, a national Policy on ageing is yet to be entrenched into the Kenyan Constitution, although the current draft constitution stipulates in Chapter six (on Bill of Rights; Article 39) the rights of the older members of society to full participation in the affairs of the society, pursuing their personal development,

freedom from all forms of discrimination, exploitation and abuse, living with respect and dignity, entitlement to reasonable care and assistance of family and state. The draft further guarantees quality health care, active life, food security, gender and social security and welfare, housing, community and family support-system, adult education (training), income security, conflicts and disaster prevention.

This study acknowledges that the Kenyan government does recognize the significant contribution of the elderly. In the press release of 2007, Ambassador Nancy Kirui, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Gender and Social Services reiterated that:-

The contributions that older persons continue to make towards development, sustenance of their nation and the care role they give in the face of the HIV/AIDS pandemic can no longer be ignored,(Pan-African Voices for Freedom and Justice 2004, Issue 159).

Adult education department, established in 1979 has seen a number of older persons gain basic literacy skills which empowers them socially and economically. Even though retirees from wage-earning employment in Kenya can expect lifetime monthly pension, these benefits are often too low, prompting the elderly to continue to work in the informal sector or private enterprises to be able to cope with the ever-rising cost of living. Some even offer financial support to their children and grand-children. Are these elderly true passive dependants?

In spite of attempts to care for the elderly, the government still lacks practical commitment towards improving the welfare of the older citizens. For instance, adult education program no longer get the attention it deserves thereby denying many elderly people their right to adult education, which inevitably constrains their capabilities. The paradox is the fact that a big percentage of the members of parliament in Kenya are above 60 years of age, yet issues affecting the elderly rarely feature in the national agenda, not forgetting that the elderly account for majority of voters in rural areas. Across the border in Tanzania, during the launch of the older citizen's social movement group, a member proudly commented:

Before, we were denied seats and had to sit on the floor. Now people will applaud when we walk in and say, the senior citizens have arrived,
(<http://www.helpage.org/Aboutus/Whoweare>)

In Kenya today, there is a greater need to explore various ways through which many elderly men and women can proudly proclaim words similar to the above stated quote. This will add onto the existing knowledge that will hopefully contribute towards the debates on social exclusion of the elderly, especially in developing countries. Empowerment of the people according to Edwards and Hulme (1997:64) is a process of assisting disadvantaged individuals and groups to retain greater control over local and national decision making and resources. I feel this is what senior citizens in Kenya need.

1.4 Research objectives

1. To explore ways in which the elderly in Kenya participate in improving their well-being and those of other community members .
2. To identify the perceptions of the male elderly and female elderly in Kolwa Division regarding their social, cultural, economic and political participation compared to the views of institutions and organizations working for this category of the population.
3. To identify the existing challenges that hinder the senior citizen's *full participation* in the affairs of the society (full participation is stipulated in the 'harmonised' Kenyan draft constitution as a right of the elderly).

1.4.1 Main Research Question:

The main question that guided this research is:

“What roles do the male elderly and female elderly in Kenya play in improving their well-being as well as those of other community members?”

1.4.2 Sub-Question:

- In the views of the elderly, the youth, NGO and CBO leaders, what socio-economic, cultural and political factors hinder the elder citizen's full participation in the affairs of Kolwa Division as a society?

1.5 The Study area

This study was carried out in Kolwa Division, Nyanza province of Western Kenya. The division lies along the shores of Lake Victoria and covers a total area of 569 km². According to Census 2009, Kolwa division has a total population of 21,833. The majority are of *Luo* ethnic background.

The main economic activity in the area is subsistence farming with additional income based on fishing and micro-enterprises. Some elderly rely on remittances from their adult children working in various urban centres within and outside Kenya for their upkeep. The reasons for choosing to focus on this area is because of my personal field work experience within the Division which revealed that many elderly (especially those who have retired from formal employment) are very resourceful in mobilizing communities for projects supported by NGOs, resolving conflicts within the community, caring for the ever-increasing number of orphans, providing for their families using their pensions, guiding and counselling the youth among other productive activities.

Despite these contributions by the elderly, many NGOs working in the area do not target the elderly with their programs, but instead focus on women, youth and children. I interpret this as passive exclusion of older people. The government has also excluded the area in terms of development. This is evidenced by the existing poor infrastructure (health facilities, roads, no banks etcetera) forcing the elderly to walk long distances to the nearest city, Kisumu, in search of such vital services. Consequently, this has impacted negatively on their physical, mental and social health and well-being thereby constraining their capabilities hence low participation.

1.6 Demography of Ageing in Africa

The elderly in Sub-Saharan Africa are a smaller portion of the population compared to other parts of the world. It is estimated that by 2050, there will be almost three children under the age of 15 for every person aged 60 years and older in Africa (United Nations Population Division 2003b). Further estimates by HelpAge International (2002b) as cited in Dullemen, C (2006) indicate that by 2050, the number of older people in Sub-Saharan Africa will increase to 102 million, of whom, 22 million will be over 80 years old.

Developing countries have a smaller sex differences in life expectancy compared to the developed countries, and in Africa, they are projected to diminish even further. Currently, there are 100 older women for every 86 older men. This is believed to be associated with harsher lives for women, including the increasing high levels of maternal mortality and heavier workloads continuing into old age (United Nations Population Division, 2002; Oppong, 2006).

In contrast to Europe, Africa has by far the highest proportion of economically active people among those aged 65 or older yet this does not appear to reduce relative poverty among the elderly (Oppong, 2006)

The biggest concern therefore is that Africa is ageing at a time when its resources have been depleted through corruption, ethnic wars, bad governance and HIV/AIDS, thereby affecting equitable distribution within the nations' population (United Nations Population Division, 2002). This inevitably contributes to poverty among the marginalised groups such as the elderly.

1.6.1 Ageing in Kenya

The proportion of the population aged 60 and above in Kenya is estimated to fall from 6.3% in 1990 to 3.9% in 2025 mainly due to the high population growth rate that leads to high number of children and younger population (Lloyd-Sherlock, 1997:5). This could partly explain why focus is diverted from the elderly who are viewed as a minority population. However, in reality, the absolute numbers tend to increase due to increased life expectancy associated partly with major reductions in the prevalence of infectious and

parasitic diseases, declines in infant and maternal mortality, improved nutrition, greater investments in sanitation and clean water supplies, expanded access to health services and wider application of public health measures such as immunization (Bongaarts, 2005).

The latest census records show that Kenya has an elderly population of 1.5 million with the highest concentration residing in Nyanza and rift valley provinces (Kenya Population census, 2009). The study area of Kolwa Division lies within Nyanza province. Bongaarts (2005) predicts that these figures may rise due to what demographers refer to as ‘Population momentum’ resulting from a young population age structure currently experienced in Kenya. Population aging is a concern due to the fact that most elderly in the country rely almost entirely on support from their families yet the decline in fertility, migration away from home and deaths of the youth caused by HIV/AIDS greatly affect the support earlier provided. Inefficient public social security and healthcare systems, poor health, few savings and illiteracy put the elderly in a more vulnerable position (*ibid*).

1.6.2 Ageing in Kolwa Division

Statistics on the elderly population within lower administrative boundaries such as Divisions, locations or villages are not clear in the Kenyan population census reports. This brings about challenges in National planning and for the designing of fair policies that caters for all citizens across the country, especially due to the fact that most senior citizens reside in rural areas.

Kenya 2009 census indicate that the population census statistics are expected to be used by the government for policymaking, measurable goal setting and effective monitoring systems as well as in tracking the progress made to meeting the millennium development goals. In my view, none of these objectives directly target specific needs of the elderly population. Neglect, lack of political goodwill or inefficiency could possibly explain why detailed statistics about older persons is not documented by the government. This paper will therefore use the most recent available national statistics of

1.5 million elderly populations as a representative to discuss both primary data and literature review aimed at answering the main research question: “What roles do the male elderly and female elderly in Kenya play in improving their well-being as well as those of other community members?”

1.7 Outline of the paper

Chapter one has highlighted the research topic, indication of the problem, its relevance and justification, research objectives and questions. This is followed by brief background information about the study area, ageing in Africa, Kenya as a whole and in Kolwa Division. Chapter two then proceeds to discuss two key points namely: Concepts forming the basis of this research such as (Ageing, Social exclusion, participation, productive and unproductive labor) and Theoretical framework (Capability Approach theory). Chapter three highlights the methodology used and scope of the study. Chapter four discusses roles played by the elderly within the study area in improving their well-being and that of other community members. Conclusions are drawn in Chapter five followed by list of references from which academic literature was reviewed.

CHAPTER 2

2.1 Conceptual Framework

In this chapter, I have discussed how ageing is perceived scientifically and culturally in the African and Kenyan context respectively. Different perceptions of participation as a concept have been highlighted, with respect to involvement of the elderly in community affairs. Subsequently, the concept of social exclusion has been explored, with focus on how both social and self-exclusion hampers full participation of the elderly in Kenya.

The conceptual framework has therefore been applied to support the argument that the elderly in Kenya have capabilities (ability to achieve) and endowments that they often use to benefit themselves and the entire community, albeit with a number of constraints emanating from negative perceptions about older persons and doubts about their abilities to participate or engage in either productive or unproductive labour.

2.1.1 Ageing and perceptions

Bernard Strehler, a very well-known American gerontologist, scientifically defines ageing as a universal, intrinsic, progressive and deleterious process. He adds that the process is associated with an increased susceptibility to trauma, infections, impaired immune system and many other forms of stress (Jose, 2007). However, approaches to the study of age in Africa have focused more on traditional age-set systems, relying on these systems as definers of relationships between individuals and within society. The lives of today's elderly in Africa have been grounded on traditional family values, norms, and roles prevalent half a century ago. According to Oponong (2006 p 655), “the elderly are viewed within the context of their families—kin networks, domestic groups, and marriages—and their associated productive and reproductive roles. These are seen as being shaped by cultural values and norms, molded and constrained by sociopolitical systems and economic and demographic change.”

Old age in years per se has not been especially revered but rather the maturity and wisdom born of a lifetime's experience in raising new generations (*ibid*).

In Africa, meanings of age vary depending on the diverse social, cultural and political perceptions which change and evolve over time (Mario Aguilar), cited in Ogola (2006). In Kenya, social and political relationships are structured by age. For instance, Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940, 1987) noted that old age in Africa was ‘the most general condition of leadership’ which defined authority and was culturally legitimate. Ogola (2006 p 569) cites Gunter Wagner's argument that in the past, the elderly were “feared as potentially troublesome spirits in their next lives, and therefore highly revered” (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1987: 235). This was not without gender bias where authority was automatically linked to being ‘male and old’, whereas females were categorized with children irrespective of age. As Aguilar puts it, traditionally it appears that older people were given some kind of social recognition, and old age seems to be regarded as an attribute rather than a hindrance. Aguilar further observes that “rights and obligations, prohibitions and duties are . . . connected to perceptions by individuals, who can be older in biological age but junior in the ladder of social relations and cultural perceptions, or vice versa” (Aguilar 1998: 20; Ogola 2006).

The complementary notions of old age as naturally conferring power, wisdom and knowledge on one hand, and of youth accepting its powerlessness, folly and ignorance that leads to the need for perpetual guidance from the old on the other hand continue to be challenged by globalization and modernity (Ogola, 2006). The youth often challenge the norm of obedience to the elderly through their language (*jargon*), dressing, music among others, just as the elderly alienate them in a language dominated by parables and proverbs. Ogola further observed that the youth “do not tend to follow the ethnically and localized, constructed parameters of gender productions or age, rather they have opinions related to the cultural globalization of age”.

Young people to whom the city is home are giving age new meaning – through a new language and in new relationships with their parents and traditional authority, with the state and the mythologies of the state (Ogola, 2006 p 582)

In reference to ageing, power and authority in Kenya is mostly gendered although changes occasioned by development is constantly reproducing and contesting the society’s perceptions on ageing. As quoted in Ogola (2006), I agree with Aguilar (1998) that “new inventions within cultural settings such as the changing economic, political and cultural variables plus the effects of globalization have radically changed perceptions of age and gender”.

Age and economic asymmetries in non-marital partnerships between ‘sugar daddies’ and young girls are believed to be factors that contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa since power to negotiate for ‘safe sex’ is compromised. The stereotypical ‘sugar daddy’ is any adult male (including the elderly) who exchanges large amounts of money or gifts for sexual favors from a much younger woman (Luke, 2005). I add that there are ‘sugar mummy’s too. This could partly explain why traditional perceptions of the elderly are changing, negatively in this context.

Although modernization is more often blamed as a cause of vulnerability among older people, Dullemen (2006) argues that “impoverishment in old age may be a cross-cultural experience of the aging process rather than simply resulting from modernization”. She goes further to cite Deaton (2003) who feels that inequalities experienced in earlier life, such as a lack of education, access to health care, and access to the labor market, are far more important factors that predict poverty and exclusion from the decision-making processes later in life.

Contrary to popular belief that the elderly in developing countries enjoy ‘safety nets’ from traditional kinship ties, Dullemen (2006 p 101) states that “For women, as for men, the aging world is a working world”. She adds that often, there is no retirement for older women until death, dementia, or disability. This is further aggravated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic

which leaves the burden of caring for the sick adults and orphaned children to the elderly, especially older women.

2.1.2 Participation

Social participation, defined as socially oriented sharing of individual resources, is often regarded as an important criterion of quality of life in old age (Aleksej, 2002). It can also refer to involvement in daily activities such as personal care, social roles, interpersonal relationships and leisure. In order to effectively participate, individuals require resources (tangible and non-tangible). In addition, personal interests, attitude, social-economic status, health status, progressive age, culture, gender, power-relations and the length of stay within the community affect the intensity of social participation in old age. Wing-Lin (2003) observed that there is need to adopt and promote user participation when working with or providing services to the elderly within communities so as to encourage ownership. In addition, Institutional processes, internal politics and access to infrastructures also need to be investigated and acted upon to achieve genuine, equitable and free participation (Dorsner, 2004). I support Olico-Okui 's (2006 p.iii) argument that participation is a power laden, slow process of change and that it is context specific.

Olico (*ibid*) further adds that “participation is an abused concept because of the cosmetic, simplistic and superficial impression it is given by its advocates. But it is well used if it empowers communities to analyse, take decisions, and gain confidence and self-esteem”.

Practically, it seems that the concepts of participation and social exclusion allow the articulation of the push and pull factors of participation or exclusion, that are determined by “the changing social position of individuals over life courses, . . . the variable costs and benefits of differently placed people,[the] contending and complementary concerns with production and reproduction . . . [that] shape people’s willingness and ability to participate” (Cleaver; Cooke and Kothari, 2001).

This paper therefore bases its arguments on the fact that despite the exclusion of the elderly by the Kenyan government and the society, the senior citizens of both genders continue to ‘include’ themselves by exercising their agency, wisdom and experience to participate in social, economic, cultural and political spheres aimed at improving their own welfare and that of their community members. ‘Agency’ refers to the capacity of humans to ultimately decide what action to take or not to take Berner (1998). I do concur with Rotolo’s (1999) assertion that voluntary participation promotes a culture of commitment, more involvement and sustainable trust that makes people content with their lives and that of their society thereby acting as social capital. These qualities, I believe, could make the elderly enjoy the ageing process. Demers (2009) points out that although restrictions in participation in normal aging have been recognized, little research has been done to investigate the coping strategies used to alleviate those restrictions. Details of factors that restrict full participation of the elderly of Kenya will be discussed in Chapter four.

2.1.3 Paid and Unpaid labour

The concepts productive and unproductive labour can sometimes be referred to as paid and unpaid labour respectively. In most cases these types of labour are categorised by gender among societies.

Paid labour refers to any activity that attracts monetary reward or payment. Unpaid labour on the other hand refers to activities that are considered unproductive because they are perceived not to have any market value and so no reward is given or received. This category is seen as unattractive to men in their youthful years and is therefore mostly engaged in by children, women and the elderly of both genders. Labour of this kind is mostly about care (child care, care for the sick and aged), community leadership and organization, conflict resolution, knowledge transfer etcetera, most of which are done by the elderly, yet this category of people continue to be perceived as unproductive and dependent. Due to ill health associated with chronological ageing, it is sometimes inevitable that the elderly become dependent

on family members for care and support. However, I could argue that need for support when ill or financial assistance could apply to anybody irrespective of age, hence, labelling older citizens as mere dependants is in itself a denial of their rights to dignified life and respect.

On the contrary, HIV/AIDS pandemic in African countries has since seen the elderly being a huge resource by spending their pension to care for grandchildren orphaned by the disease as well as taking care of the sick family members' medical and other needs. For instance, the female elderly who do not get pension are forced by circumstances to engage in paid labour so as to be able to effectively care for the sick and orphans (unpaid labour). This puts pressure on these senior citizens yet their unpaid contributions are perceived as of lesser value in a world dominated by 'market economy'. The paradox is that in the long run, these current orphans are likely to add value into the labour market as productive, energetic adults. The same applies when the sick recover and get back to the labour market as producers. At a UN high-level meeting on HIV/AIDS held in New York in June 2008, calls were made for governments to recognise the roles of older persons in responding to the disease, hence recommendation for regular and predictable cash transfers to mitigate emotional, physical and financial impacts of AIDS on the children and their caregivers, often older women (World Disaster Report 2008).

The concepts, paid and unpaid labour, seem to create structures of subordination and unequal participation in socio-economic activities. It is my view that there is a mismatch between the contributions of the older citizens to societies and their rewards or recognition, leaving them as an excluded population.

2.2 Capability Approach Theory

The concept of capabilities was originally put forward by Sen. (1987). In this paper, I base my argument on Sen and Nussbaum's Capability Approach theory, with the belief that the enhancement of individual freedom and real opportunities among the elderly population is likely to determine

the lives they may lead (Sen, 1987, p.36), preferably, healthy happy lives. I am convinced that a number of the elderly in Kenya have various capabilities that are accumulated from their life-long experiences, wisdom acquired from education or even inborn talents.

Sen defines capability as the individual freedom to achieve functioning such as good nourishment, good health, self-respect, and social integration (Sen., 1996; Sen., 1999). A functioning, he says, is an achievement, whereas a capability is the ability to achieve. Sen further argues that the key consideration should be individual freedom, rather than possession of resources per se and that capability should not only be valued as means to achieve functioning, but also intrinsically (Sen., 1999).

Nussbaum, from another perspective, views capabilities as fundamental, universal human rights, which she feels should provide the moral basis for national constitutional guarantees. This resonates with the rights-based agendas of NGOs such as HelpAge International, and the development of a new United Nations International Plan of Action on Ageing. Nussbaum describes different kinds of capabilities as follows:

- (i) Basic capabilities as those that a person is born with, and is immutable. These often involve latent potential, which may or may not be developed in later stages of a person's life.
- (ii) Internal capabilities are those that a person develops through life. For example, a 70-year old will have a different set of capabilities to a 20-year old.
- (iii) Combined capabilities as the interplay of internal capabilities and the constraints of the external environment.

Nussbaum further identifies combined capabilities as a hindrance to participation of older people in the south (Sen and Nussbaum, 1993; Lloyd-Sherlock, 2002); a situation I can relate to the Kenyan context. Physical ageing may weaken an older person's internal capability to engage in hard manual work. If this is combined with lack of support, for instance, when the elders of Kolwa try to engage in commercial farming yet their pay is constantly delayed or when their pensions delay, their real opportunities are

limited hence exclusion of these senior citizens. Of equal concern is the possibility of older persons' current capabilities being dependent upon past achievements. This could partly explain why the retired professionals of Kolwa Division appear to be more competent enough to engage in various activities compared to their less educated counterparts who had fewer opportunities from their past. “All I can say is that I'm very productive to this community at all levels..... many elderly suffer and only a few like me are lucky. Maybe the government could do more to improve this.” Concludes *Mzee Ondiek* (74), a retired professional. In order to address situations like this, it is necessary to enhance capabilities of older persons so as to promote individual agency that is likely to promote genuine, people-centered participation (Dorsner, 2004).

The fact that capabilities of most citizens are often constrained by cultural factors and political institutions that are often beyond their control is worrying. It appears that elders of both genders within the study area are socially excluded as a result of being trapped in a spiral of disadvantage by a combination of factors (DSS, 1999, p 23). As Drèze and Sen. put it, education (adult literacy in the case of the elderly) is required to enhance their capabilities so as to promote their independence, hence, a dignified life (Drèze and Sen. 1995). I therefore largely agree with 'Active ageing' school of thought which criticises 'dependency policies' that emphasize the transfer of certain kinds of resource to older people (pensions, nursing homes, etc). The school of thought further recommends that the focus should instead be on policies which optimize older peoples' capacity to contribute to their own quality of life and that of others (OECD, 1998; Gorman, 2000).

Modernity has promoted reward for social professions that share knowledge such as guidance, counselling, consultations, conflict resolutions among others. These professions require wisdom, education and experience; qualities that some senior citizens are endowed with yet they continue to offer these services at national or community level without much recognition or rewards unlike their so-called 'productive' fellow citizens who are paid professionals. As revealed by this study that the elderly of Kolwa Divi-

sion have capabilities that they use to achieve certain functioning, the respondents also claimed that exclusion by the government and the society, either actively or passively continue to constrain their capabilities. Such claims were earlier noted by Brock (1993) who found out that functioning among the elderly in developing countries is more dependent upon external constraints than agency and personal choice.

2.2.1 Ageing and Capabilities

It is widely recognized that the old, just like women, have their capabilities relatively constrained. This may result from external factors, such as attitudes within societies, socially constructed dependency, pervasive negative paradigms of old age, and discrimination within the workplace (Walker, 1990; Lloyd-Sherlock, 2002). It is also true that ageing reduces combined capabilities as a result of a decline in certain internal capabilities and the speed, timing and intensity of loss vary between individuals (*ibid*).

Chronological age influences internal capabilities (such as physical strength) whose loss is more or less inevitable as a person grows very old (Brock, 1993). These internal capabilities in older persons depend on their lifetime accumulation of social, human and financial capital and also partly dependent on functioning in earlier life (*ibid*).

The following points could attempt to explain chain of causality: Structural factors could influence the current functioning of old people's lives. The distinction between internal capabilities (an integral part of oneself) and combined ones (the interplay between self and the outside world), clarifies a critical set of issues that lie, often ignored, at the heart of current ageing and development debates. This distinction enables us to get beyond simple characterizations of ageing as a purely social construct, or of older people as intrinsically incapable. I argue that just as has been among other groups of the population, capability approach should be applied to the elderly, especially in policy formulation and development interventions, if the senior citizens are to be mainstreamed into the development debate as active participants in social, economic, cultural and political development.

2.3 Social exclusion

I argue that despite the participation of the elderly in both productive and unproductive activities, social exclusion continues to hamper their capabilities thereby denying their rights to full participation. The definitions vary by national context and sociological paradigm, with some scholars referring to it as an inability to exercise the social rights of citizenship, including the right to a decent standard of living.

Scharf ‘et al’ (2000 p.6) cites Madanipour ‘et al’ (1998) who define Social exclusion as a ‘multi-dimensional process, in which various forms of exclusion are combined: access to employment and material resources and integration into common cultural processes. It also involves the lack of or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in decision making processes, economic, social, cultural and political relationships and activities available to the majority of people in a society. This affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole. Department of Social Security (DSS) (1999, p.23) argues that Social exclusion occurs where different factors combine to trap individuals and areas in a spiral of disadvantage.

Other work has also addressed the question of social exclusion in terms of the quality of life of older people (Barnes ‘et al’, 2006; Estivill, 2003). This is conceptually helpful, since quality of life is the overall concern of much of the work on social exclusion. Empirically, exclusion on one or more dimensions has a diverse negative impact on quality of life. This gradually distances and places persons, groups, communities and territories in a position of inferiority in relation to centres of power, resources and prevailing values (Estivill, 2003, p 19).

Sukhdeo Thorat and Katherine S Newman (2007 p.4121) have cited Buvinic (2005) who defines Social exclusion as the “inability of an individual to participate in the basic political, economic and social functioning of the society, resulting from the denial of equal access to opportunities imposed by certain groups of society upon others.”

The structural character of social exclusion, relating it to wider economic processes and inequalities, has been a feature of much academic writing (Brown and Crompton, 1994; Byrne, 1999, 2005; Levitas, 1998, 2005).

Burchardt ‘et al’ (2002a: p. 30, 32; Hobcraft, 2007) redefined social exclusion as a situation in which an individual who is geographically a resident in a society, for some reasons beyond his or her control, cannot fully participate in the key activities of the citizens in that society, despite his/her willingness to participate. Burchardt ‘et al’ identified the ‘key activities’ as:

Consumption: the capacity to produce goods and services.

Production: participation in economically or socially valuable activities.

Political engagement: involvement in local or national decision-making.

Social interaction: integration with family, friends, and community (*ibid*).

This definition by Burchardt ‘et al’, along with that of DSS (1999), have been adopted in discussing the findings of the study.

Some writers have not only noted the contribution of polarization and inequality to the growth of social exclusion, but have drawn attention to what Barry calls an ‘upper threshold’ of social exclusion, permitting self-exclusion by the rich (Hutton, 1996; Barry, 2002; Oppenheim, 1998). I’m of the opinion that stereotypes portraying older persons as unproductive due to the fact that many of their contributions do not have direct monetary outcomes often contribute to both social and self-exclusion among this population.

Oppenheim (1998) suggests that it is necessary to focus on social exclusion rather than poverty for a number of reasons, adding that Social exclusion is multi-causal, relational, and it includes less tangible aspects than poverty such as the loss of status, power, self-esteem and expectation. Another important aspect of exclusion is political exclusion and the inability to influence decision making, which can be affected by lack of resources, including time, telephones, transport and articulacy (*ibid*).

CHAPTER 3

3.0 Research methodologies

This research was a Case Study

3.1 Primary data

Field research was conducted from 2nd July to 17th August 2010. The respondents comprised of the elderly, the youth and key informants and were selected using the following criteria:

Elderly-Both males and females who still engage actively in socio-economic, cultural or political activities, those who have since retired from formal employment, those that rely solely on remittances and support from offspring and family.

Youth-Male and female youth born, raised and still living within Kolwa Division at the time of research.

Key informants-The potential key informants were identified as those who either directly or indirectly work with/ and for the elderly for the ‘good’ of their well-being.

Data Collection tools included: A functional recorder, note books and pens used to capture information during the interview process. Prior informed consent was sought from all respondents before using the recorder to capture information given.

This study intended to interview 3 Key informants each from the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) sector, Community-Based Organization (CBO) and government ministry. Unfortunately, an interview scheduled with the third Key informant, a government representative from the Ministry of Gender and Social services did not take place due to change of work station and so I obtained secondary data about the Ministry from their reports in the internet as an alternative. One coordinator from HelpAge International (NGO) and one from JUWALI Women Self-Help Group (CBO) working in the study area were purposely selected for qualitative interviews, with the assumption that the former works for and with the elderly across the country while the later interact with the older members of society more

often hence in a position to give in-depth information about their socio-economic and cultural participation within Kolwa Division.

Other respondents included: 4 elderly men and 6 older women who were each interviewed separately in their homes using semi-structured and open-ended questions. A total of 10 youth consisting of 5 males and 5 females aged between (18-35 years) were also interviewed independently to solicit their views concerning participation of the elderly within the community. Collectively, this study managed to gather primary data from 22 respondents. English, Swahili and native *Luo* language was used during the interviewing process. I fluently speak all the mentioned 3 languages which made field work more interactive.

3.1.1 Practical challenges I experienced during field research

The field study was constrained by the following challenges: very hot temperatures within Kolwa division (close to 35 degrees centigrade), expectations of monetary rewards especially from female elderly and female youth respondents, shyness and inferiority among female youth that limited the information shared. This I could associate to low economic status and low level of education respectively. Expectations of monetary rewards could also be occasioned by ‘dependency attitude’ created by some NGOs who give ‘sitting allowance’ whenever the community attend meetings. Loneliness experienced by many elderly due to death or relocation of some of their adult children to towns in search of employment propelled the older respondents to spend more time narrating their private lives leading to longer interview sessions.

In order to counteract the above stated challenges, I resorted to conducting the research during late afternoons when the sun was about to set and temperatures much lower. I reminded the respondents that I’m a student and not an NGO employee hence the information shared would be used for learning purposes only. As a native who understands the plight of the elderly within the Division, I empathised and spared some time to listen to

those who decided to share their sorrows and private lives with me during the interview sessions. Dressing like the local youth and speaking the local language made the youth to feel comfortable enough to open up and share more information. All these led to the success of the field study.

3.2 Secondary Data

Information was sourced from Chapter 6 of the Harmonised draft Constitution of Kenya on Bill of Rights (Published on 17th November, 2009), Kenyan Daily Nation newspaper, Reports from HelpAge International and HAK chapter, reports from the Kenyan Ministry of Gender and Social services and Scholarly publications on both traditional and current roles played by the elderly in African societies (including Kenya).

3.3 Scope of the study

This paper focuses on both male and female elderly who have since retired from formal employment and/or those currently actively participating in any socio-economic, cultural or political activities within Kolwa Division. Information from key informants and the youth helped to get varied perceptions about older persons as far as their participation and/or social exclusion is concerned. Being a case study, the sampling size of 22 respondents was biased towards natives residing within the study area at the time of the interview.

Data from both primary and secondary sources have been used to analyze and to critically argue the issue of participation of the elderly in community affairs vis a vis social exclusion which is argued to be hampering their full participation, a Universal and Constitutional right.

CHAPTER 4

4.1 Participation of the elderly in the affairs of Kolwa Division

This chapter discusses field research findings that attempt to answer the main research question of the paper: “What roles do the male elderly and female elderly in Kenya play in improving their well-being as well as those of other community members?” This will be followed by highlighting the factors that hinder the senior citizens’ full participation.

I shall begin by discussing the responses from Key informants and information from a ‘relevant’ government Ministry website. The responses from both male and female elderly (aged above 60) will follow. The views of male and female youth (aged between 18-35) will conclude the discussion. All the respondents have either worked with or often interact with the elderly population within Kolwa Division.

The 22 respondents interviewed comprised of 2 Key informants, one from the NGO sector (HelpAge International-Kenya) and the other from a CBO (JUWALI Women Self-Help Group). An interview scheduled with the third Key informant, a government representative from The Ministry of Gender and Social Services did not take place due to reshuffling of officers at the Ministry and unfortunately the ‘new’ holder of the office was not familiar with the Ministry activities hence I obtained secondary data about the Ministry from their reports in the internet as an alternative. The 2 respondents shared their personal experiences and empirical observations during their work within communities.

Mr. Otieno (54) has worked with the elderly for close to four years as HelpAge International coordinator based in Ahero Township. He says that the elderly, like other citizens do make various contributions towards their own well-being and for the welfare of their communities and the country at large, although a bit minimal compared to other energetic and youthful citizens.

More often, the senior citizens act as advisors and counsellors due to their wealth of experience, having lived longer than many of us, asserts

Otieno amid a smile. *They also double up as caretakers to orphans left within the homes. Majority have lost parents to HIV/AIDS.*

Otieno reiterated that children losing parents to HIV/AIDS is common within the study area. “In order to be self-reliant, a number of older people resort to farming as a source of food, especially for those who do not have adult children who can support them economically. They rear livestock and herd them as the youth are out engaging in other economic activities, some having fun and others refusing to help. The elderly tend to be loyal and time-keepers, hence, organizing meetings with them is easier. These are some of their strengths” Otieno continues to say that gender, to certain extent, determines the participation of the elderly in community affairs. In this community, men clear the land for cultivation whereas women come in to do the planting, weeding, harvesting and house chores. Age too plays a role in individuals’ participation in community affairs. For instance, the very old (oldest) within the community are entrusted with custody of community secrets and they teach the younger generation about cultural norms and abomination. They are also consulted before ‘traditional rights’ are performed. For these they are respected. Mr. Otieno outlined the following as additional contributions made by the elderly within Kolwa Division:

- a) Advising the youth on cultural practices and the importance of upholding them, in line with a Swahili saying which goes “*He who abandons his culture is a slave*”.
- b) Facilitating or overseeing rituals being performed by medicine-men at: newborn babies ceremonies, funerals, weddings or cleansing ceremonies within the community.
- c) Mobilizing the community when a project is introduced to the community by an NGO, Government or well-wishers. This in most cases leads to either the success or failure of the project depending on how the elderly relate with the ‘outsider’ tending to introduce the project, hence, they act as important resource ,contact persons or opinion leaders within communities.

- d) Blessing the political leaders from the community or those intending to vie for political positions, especially, those with a good track record who can represent well the community. This makes the leader or the aspirant more competent as it also endears the aspirant to other community members.
- e) Due to their wisdom from life’s experiences, the elderly give the youth informal education concerning experiences of life, challenges and how to handle them well.
- f) Majority of TBAs (traditional birth attendants) are female elderly and they tend to pass on this skill to some of their female children. Most of these children later prefer to take up nursing as a profession should they perform well in school. In addition, some Non Governmental Agencies such as AMREF (African Medical Research Foundation) offer community training programs that reach community Health workers (including elderly TBAs) which helps in building their capacities and empowering them to work better.

Mercy (30), the CBO leader, said that the elderly play advisory role in overseeing the management of community funds e.g. Constituency Development Fund (CDF): funds allocated by the government through Members of Parliament.

The opinion leaders (mostly retired members of society), are often called upon to assist in prioritizing community needs and how the money can be spent to address the people’s felt needs, adds Mercy.

Mercy shared that some elderly occasionally donate parcels of land for communal projects and also help school head teachers in making decisions concerning running of community public schools. The so-called opinion leaders and retired professionals are often appointed as Board of Governors’ of schools. They normally act as a link between the community and the school leaders. However, the challenge is that some of the elders abuse this opportunity to meet their selfish ends by causing rifts/conflicts between the

community and the head teachers, or worse still, some incite the community against the leaders of the schools, especially, if they are non-natives and do not bow to the whims of the opinion leaders.

In addition to the voices of natives of Kolwa Division, I intended to get the position of the Kenyan government on participation of the elderly from a government representative. However, circumstances mentioned in chapter three of this paper propelled me to get the information from the official website of a government Ministry instead. The Ministry of Gender and Social Services is of relevance to the study since it is concerned with enhancing socio-economic welfare and addressing social exclusion of older persons, among other categories of Kenyan citizens. It is indicated in the official government website that the Ministry was established in the year 2003 with a vision for all Kenyans to attain full participation in the development process so as to enhance their social-economic welfare. To achieve this, the Ministry has projects and programs that target the most vulnerable groups with particular emphasis on women, youth, children, mentally and physically challenged persons, the displaced and the elderly. In order to alleviate poverty and address exclusion, the ministry focuses on engendering development and strengthening capacities of self-help groups to undertake productive income generating activities by expanding access to economic opportunities, especially among women. These interventions have the capacity to create employment and better livelihoods at the community level. Unfortunately, the gender bias excludes elderly men from equitable participation. The ministry also advocates for the promotion of progressive cultural values that emphasize mutual respect and support for each other, community participation and national social cohesion while phasing out retrogressive ones like widow inheritance; a common practice that increases vulnerability and stigma among young and old women residing in the study area. This could lower an individual’s capability to freely and fully participate in community affairs. It is however encouraging to note that the Ministry has been striving to address adult literacy and life-long education by in-

roducing functional and accessible adult literacy programs across the country.

The elderly, comprising of 4 males and 6 females, all of whom are natives of Kolwa Division responded well to the research questions. Contrary to earlier plans to organize a Focus Group Discussion, all elderly respondents were interviewed in their homes. This was necessitated by the fact that it was a rainy season that resulted in muddy pathways hence getting them to meet at the scheduled venue would have been a challenge. The information about the changes was relayed to them in good time. Fewer males compared to females were interviewed as it was established that some men were out of the homes to meet and socialize with friends at the local brew-drinking joints while others were out in the farms or managing their businesses.

The 10 interviewed elderly responded to questions that sought to know the social, economic, cultural and political roles the elderly play in improving their well-being as well as those of other community members, whether or not gender influences an individual’s participation and any other factors that hinder their full participation in the affairs of the society.

Three of the respondents had very positive attitude towards life and admitted that most of their adult children are employed and so regularly send remittances at home to support their ageing parents in the village. This, they claim make their lives more comfortable compared to their other neighbours although they still have to work hard to manage the homes and do daily house chores. Most families practice farming and cattle rearing as the main source of livelihood, although natural calamities such as floods or very dry seasons experienced in the study area tend to negatively affect the harvest and, worst still, lead to the deaths of their livestock. They blame the government for not coming up with measures to mitigate the impacts of these calamities despite the fact that they are predictable yearly occurrences. Christina, a 72 year old grandmother says that for a long time she has been brewing and selling the local brew known as ‘*chang’aa*’ for a living but since this has wrecked many homes, with many youth dropping out of school and stealing from their parents to buy the drinks and family men

spending all their earnings and time at the drinking joints, the local authorities have constantly harassed her until she opted to quit the business a few months ago and resorted to livestock rearing.

Emily, a 68 year old elderly woman is a retired teacher and does not complain about financial challenges since she gets a monthly pension that can sustain her. All her surviving adult children are employed in towns and so she faces a lot of loneliness and stress emanating from rebellion and lack of co-operation from her 2 teenage grandsons living with her. Her husband aged 80 years is always away spending time taking the local brew. “I think counselling the youth and resolving domestic conflict around this village has become my second profession since I retired, but unpaid”. Says Emily proudly as she is a role model to many because of her former career as a teacher. “I also participate in politics by voting as I just did in the referendum for the proposed New Kenyan Constitution”. Emily added.

Onunga (72) has several grandchildren in the homestead. She appeared exhausted when I walked into the home yet she was optimistic that she lives fairly well compared to her neighbours. She lives in a grass-thatched hut and was cleaning it as she maintained a positive attitude saying ‘*Adak maber*’ meaning ‘I live well’. She plants cotton, sugarcane, maize and millet. She also sells chicken to Indian business men in the nearest Kisumu town. Being the sole bread winner, she happily feeds and pays schools fees for her grandchildren. Onunga says she continues to invest wisely the financial benefits obtained from her late children’s employers.

All my five sons and their wives have died of HIV/AIDS-related complications and so the community here calls me the mother of immoral sons. The many grandchildren you see around are all I’ve got.....God will bless my efforts in caring for them. Onunga says, full of hope.

She is also a member of a women’s group that meets monthly to pool funds that is given to members in turns as capital to boost their micro-enterprises. Unlike Emily, she has no time for politics claiming “Politics adds no value to my life but only enriches a few elites. This discourages me from voting”.

Female elderly had relatively similar responses on factors hindering their full participation, which included loneliness, stress and a lot of responsibility resulting from the death of their adult children while the surviving ones migrate to towns in search of employment, many leaving behind grandchildren. This prompts the grandparents to work hard in order to take care of and support the orphans. Given that they are busy within the homestead most of the day, these grandparents inevitably solve conflicts that arise among family members within the homes. Of the 6 interviewed, only 2 lived with their husbands while the rest are widowed. All these conditions posed varied challenges. Those living with husbands complained of loneliness and lack of support from their husbands who were away from home almost all day long thus leaving a lot of responsibilities with the women. When they return home in the evenings, most men are too drunk to offer any meaningful company and this inevitably translates to less financial support or shared ideas that can enable the women to manage the homes effectively. On the other hand, the widowed face challenges of entirely managing family affairs on their own and loneliness. 3 of them talked of depending mostly on their children for daily emotional and social support whereas relatives and the community offer support only when death occurs within the family.

The male senior citizens participate in different activities within the community although they face more-or-less similar challenges as their female counterparts within Kolwa Division. The males tend to spend most of their times away from home, either managing their businesses, farms, visiting friends, drinking local brews, attending political meetings or rallies or participating in making decisions and resolving conflicts either in local schools or village committees.

Mzee Ouko, an 80 year old retired teacher, is a large-scale sugarcane farmer supplying sugarcane to Kibos sugar factory in the outskirts of Kisumu town. Ouko complains about delays in payment after delivering sugarcane to the factory and that the government doesn't do much to rectify the situation, thereby, prompting hard-working retirees who rely solely on farm-

ing to depend on others for support thus the stereotype “Old people are dependants”.

We old people want to depend on ourselves but the politicians do not support our efforts, let alone the government! Laments Ouko.

Poor management and inefficiency in government and private institutions affect the economy of Kenya. This negatively influences the financial position of hard-working elderly as well. “I have no passion for politics because all politicians do is use us to get votes then they move to live in mansions in Nairobi while we wallow in poverty”, concludes Mzee Ouko.

Mzee Julius Ondiek (74) on the other hand, has been holding political positions within the Division all his adult life and is full of praise for the government. He has since retired from formal employment but still active as a village elder (not on salary). He organizes weekly local ‘*Barazas*’ (village meetings) where village elders meet to discuss issues affecting them, come up with possible or practical solutions and share ideas on how to improve their lives as well as preserve the community’s culture. This includes social, cultural, economic and political issues. He too is a large-scale sugarcane farmer but is reluctant to elaborate on challenges mentioned by a fellow sugarcane farmer (Mzee Ouko).

All I can say is that I’m very productive to this community at all levels and that I educate my 5 grandchildren comfortably. Honestly, many elderly suffer and only a few like me are lucky. Maybe the government could do more to improve this, Mzee Ondiek concludes.

10 youth too shared their views on what they feel about participation and social exclusion of the elderly within Kolwa Division. They comprised of 5 males and 5 females. Among the 5 females interviewed 4 were teenage mothers of which only one is married while the rest live with their grandparents. They were all aged between 15-19 years. All the females admitted that they always help their grandparents a lot with the house chores and even in the farms if called upon, adding that gender does not determine what one can or cannot do within this community. They further admitted that their grandparents continue to play a key role in their up-bringing plus those

of their siblings as the numbers of orphans continue to rise within the Division. This includes financial support, providing shelter, offering pieces of advice, counselling and even educating some. The female youth claimed that the grandparents are more accommodative and understanding compared to their biological parents, aunties and uncles. However, the rate at which teenage pregnancies and early marriages appear to be common in this Division raises eyebrows as to whether or not these girls are ‘safer’ staying with the grandparents who could be giving too much freedom. Winnie (18) says that in her view, “the female elderly here participate more in activities that improve the lives of their families and the community at large whereas their male counterparts spend more time politicking and drinking local brew.”

This poses a burden to the female elderly. “The grandmothers manage small enterprises and join groups where they can get loans to expand their businesses. These groups also double up as a source of Social Capital in case one has a problem such as sickness or death within the family.” says Winnie. Apart from the youngest teenager (Mercy aged 15) who was too shy to respond to some questions, all the other four declared that they are anti-politics and are glad that their grandmothers keep off politics too, which they believe are a preserve of the ‘rich retirees’ who have surplus money from their savings as well as pension that can be spent on politics. “Only the rich male elders participate in politics here, with exception of a few old women who have either retired from formal employment or are married to rich husbands” Says Susan (19).

The 5 male youth interviewed were aged between 17-29 years. 3 of them are married with at least one child whereas the other 2 completed primary level education and are yet to join secondary schools. The three married male youth who are all operating ‘bicycle taxi’ locally known as ‘*boda boda*’ for a living have a positive attitude towards the elderly, whereas the 2 younger ones view them as those who just sit and give orders, wanting everything done for them.

They all, however, admit that whereas the retired professionals do participate a lot in both politics and development projects initiated either by

themselves, NGOs or government within the community, their less educated counterparts play active roles in managing community social affairs, officiating cultural activities and resolving disputes. This could mean that there is a relationship between an elder’s education or financial status and their ‘productive’ participation within the community. Contrary to what the female youth said, the male youth all felt that gender determines what one can or cannot do within this community. For instance Nicholas Omondi (26) gave the example of men digging pit latrines, looking after cattle, building houses, riding *boda boda*, whereas, women do the cooking, wash dishes, clothes, raise children etcetera. He categorized these as productive and unproductive work respectively. The same applies to the elderly, “how many elderly men did you find when you went around home? They are out doing productive work to support their families.....” Nicholas added.

4.2 Factors that hinder the older citizens’ full participation

Respondents revealed the following as major factors that hinder the full participation of older persons within Kolwa Division:

- a) Stress stemming from loss of grown up children, especially from HIV/AIDS which is claiming lots of lives within the Division and still a stigma. This results into hopelessness among the affected who inevitably have to struggle raising up orphaned grandchildren. Some of the orphans are indiscipline and this stresses the elderly caretakers even more.
- b) Physical weakness as a result of poor diet caused by poverty or neglect by family, community or the state, hence, the inability to farm or engages in other economic, social or political activities.
- c) Lack of economic power prevents, especially, the female elderly from participating in micro-finance or economic activities where members pool funds and loan each other in turns to do business or for home-improvement purposes. Male elderly who do not have lots of money often shy away from engaging in active politics too.

- d) Delays, experienced by the retirees, in getting their pension contribute greatly to their financial strains, a factor that has been claimed to contribute to early deaths among the old in Kenya. This also makes them withdraw from active participation in social, economic, cultural and political activities.
- e) The elderly have lots of attachment to cultural beliefs and to their ancestral property, such as land, hence many do not co-operative if the government request them to relocate so that community projects such as road construction, community health facilities, community schools, etcetera, can be constructed on a piece of their ancestral land. This, therefore, tends to delay development processes within communities to certain extent.
- f) Due to physical ageing, most elderly are slow in action and so they rarely manage to attend meetings, conferences, seminars organized far away from their villages. Lack of bus fare also prevents them from attending functions, thereby, hindering their full participation, despite their willingness.
- g) The female elderly in particular are mostly overwhelmed with domestic chores, as well as, looking for money to take care of orphans to the extent that they do not have time to participate in other community affairs.

In order to discuss and explore responses on the roles played by the elderly of both genders in improving their well-being as well as those of other community members within Kolwa Division, I have categorised the key issues raised as follows: Gender and culture, length of residency and age, socio-economic and political structures, HIV/AIDS, climatic conditions and agency.

Gender and Culture

Both Key respondents reiterated that the older citizens of both genders do participate in the affairs of Kolwa Division even though their chronological

age limits their full active participation. This goes against the argument by Walker (1990) as cited in Lloyd-Sherlock (2002) that socially constructed dependency constrains capabilities of the elderly. Participation in this community is influenced by gender in that women are more involved in care giving, ‘productive’ social networks (micro-enterprise groups) etcetera which benefit the whole family whereas men are more inclined to political, social networks (benefiting themselves), for example, drinking local brews. Some elderly men also engage in ‘productive’ economic activities (mostly retired professionals). It was also clear that the educated female elderly feel confident enough to venture into public politics that is mostly dominated by the males, whereas, their less educated counterparts participate more in micro-finance groups confined within the village. All the elderly respondents confirmed that they enjoy both productive and unproductive labour with the fulfilment that this kept them busy, reduced loneliness, increased social networks hence healthy ageing experiences, even though some elderly females complained of being disrespected by orphans they take care of hence increased stress levels.

Olico (2006) is of the opinion that the term participation has been abused since it does not empower communities to be confident enough to make their own decisions or decisions affecting their lives. Two female elderly associated their stress levels and loneliness to staying within the homestead doing house chores most of the day, a cultural expectation. “This exposes me to seeing my late children’s graves regularly, making me feel sad and lonely most of the time,” says Christina (72). This, I believe, plunges them into withdrawal and worries, hence self-exclusion. The result is that their full participation in public community affairs is restrained. The males, on the other hand, interact more with people outside the homestead and this increases their opportunities of engaging in community social activities which lowers their chances of self-exclusion. The male youth who are married felt that the elderly are productive within communities, whereas, the unmarried male youth viewed them as a lazy population, always expecting everything to be done for them. Female youth, on the other hand, are more

tolerant of the elderly, support them with physical duties and appreciate the care they provide, especially to orphans and/or teenage grandchildren living with grandparents and are mothers too. It is clear that within the study area, participation is greatly influenced by culturally constructed gender roles even though hard economic times, widowhood and HIV/AIDS is compelling older females to play the role of providing for families, traditionally a male role.

Length of residency and Age

Wing-Lin (2003) believe that the elderly who have lived most of their lives within the community tend to enjoy and participate more in community affairs as opposed to those who returned to settle in the village after retirement from formal employment; the latter feeling like outsiders. I concur with Lee but I would argue that one's attitude too determines their quality of life as far as integrating and participating within the community is concerned. It therefore takes an individual's basic and internal capabilities, agency and personal initiative to fit well and contribute to community affairs. For instance, retired teacher, *Mzee Ouko* (80) is currently a large scale sugarcane farmer and confidently told me that “We old people want to depend on ourselves.” He further lamented that lack of support from politicians in power is pushing them into dependency, a condition he feels most elderly detest.

Even though it is true that ageing reduces combined capabilities as a result of a decline in certain internal capabilities (Sen and Nussbaum, 1993), the fact that older persons of advanced ages such as *Mzee Ouko* (80) among others in Kolwa Division are engaging in productive activities is reason not to underestimate the capabilities of senior citizens. I therefore support the recommendations by OECD (1998), cited in Gorman (2002) that there should be a shift of focus from ‘dependency policies’ to optimization of older people's capacity so as to promote ‘active ageing’. For instance, Winnie, a youth respondent is full of praise for the female elderly by saying; “The grandmothers manage small enterprises and join groups where they can get loans to expand their businesses so as to take care of orphans and

feed the family”, Winnie reiterates that the female elderly often engage in activities that benefit the whole family. ‘Active ageing’ was also confirmed by an 80 year old *Mzee* Ouko who is a large-scale sugar cane farmer when he proudly proclaimed the following: “All I can say is that I’m very productive to this community at all levels and that I educate my 5 grandchildren comfortably”.

Due to their long lives and many years of professional experiences, traditionally the elderly are believed to be wise thus contributing more in offering advice, counselling, consultations, promoting and preserving the community’s culture and conflict resolution. According to Martha Nussbaum (1993), internal capabilities are ones a person develops through life. For instance, a 70-year old has a different set of capabilities compared to a 20-year old. The former’s advanced ages are believed to come with accumulated years of wisdom and experience that could increase their capabilities (although this is not necessarily the case in practical sense). “More often, the senior citizens act as advisors and counsellors due to their wealth of experience, having lived longer than many of us”, asserts Otieno who is a coordinator for HelpAge in Kenya. Dorsner (2004) feels that enhancement of internal capabilities and individual agency could promote genuine, people-centered participation which I believe would lead to active and happier lives among the ageing population.

Socio-economic and Political structures

Brock (1993) rightly argues that internal capabilities in older persons depend on their lifetime accumulation of social, human and financial capital and also partly on functioning in earlier life. This could be the reason why the retired professionals within the study area are accorded more respect since they are believed to have more internal capabilities compared to those that were never in formal employment. Endowed with education and economic power, these retirees feel confident and can exercise their agency by engaging in political and large scale economic activities, as well as, being leaders of social forums, whereas, the ‘less educated’ feel more confident

participating in cultural affairs and being mere ‘followers’ at social forums. Retired male elderly respondents felt that all senior citizens have potential which needs to be enhanced and encouraged for self-sustenance, instead of stereotyping them as dependants. For instance, 3 elderly respondents are large-scale farmers supplying a factory with sugar-cane but payments delay due to poor management and inefficiency within the company rendering them dependent against their will. This makes functioning among some elderly in Kolwa Division more dependent upon external constraints than agency and personal choice (Brock, 1993).

Sen. (1996; 1999) defines capability as the individual freedom to achieve functioning such as good nourishment, good health, self-respect, and social integration; and that, key consideration should be individual freedom, rather than possession of resources per. On the contrary, this study revealed that in Kolwa Division, greater individual freedom together with tangible and non-tangible resources are possessed by the elderly in higher socio-economic strata. This leaves the less fortunate and their subsequent generations in a spiral of disadvantage due to their inability to provide sound education and economic security to younger generations at present. The study area also experiences yearly floods whose impacts the government is not committed to mitigating despite the huge losses incurred by the locals in terms of destruction of crops, death of animals and loss of property. The brunt of this is majorly faced by the vulnerable groups such as children and the elderly.

Despite all these, the elderly of both genders who are relatively better off felt that there are opportunities for everyone to improve their lives even though the government needs to support senior citizens more. Their less privileged counterparts sounded helpless. A situation I could relate to a cycle of poverty which lowers individuals’ capacities, agency, confidence and self-esteem. This situation of helplessness gradually places persons, groups and communities in a position of inferiority in relation to centres of power, resources and prevailing values; a condition described by Estivill (2003, p 19) as social exclusion.

In reference to the definition by Olico-Okui (2006) that participation is a context-specific slow process of change, it might take much longer before the elderly in Kenya can genuinely participate fully in politics, other than just casting their votes. The need for real participation in politics among the elderly of both genders is an issue of concern, going by the negative remarks about their views on political participation. “Politics add no value to my life but only enriches a few elites. This discourages me from voting”, says Onunga (72). Similar remarks were made by five other respondents.

HIV/AIDS

All the 6 female elderly interviewed in Kolwa Division were taking care of at least one grandchild orphaned by HIV/AIDS, a situation they claimed is ‘normal’ in the area. The care giving role is categorised as unproductive labour yet it has negative implications on the finances of the elderly care givers who are often economically insecure. Contrary to popular belief that the elderly in developing countries enjoy ‘safety nets’ from traditional kinship ties, this study revealed that aging world remains a working world for older persons within the study area, especially women (Dullemen, 2006). Studies by HelpAge International in Ghana (1999), South Africa (1999), and Brazil (2003) have shown the tremendous social and economic contributions that older people make to family and community and the satisfaction they derive from it, thereby challenging the myth that older people are mainly a societal burden (HelpAge International, 2003; Dullemen 2006).

These senior citizens use their pensions to facilitate economic and social change, and to address the rising household vulnerability (e.g., to HIV/AIDS in South Africa and to informal work in Brazil) which are perceived as extremely beneficial (*ibid*), cited in Dullemen (2006). The care provided by the elderly women of Kolwa Division to HIV/AIDS orphans is mostly voluntary, and is a huge social capital within the Division and the country as a whole. This, Rotolo (1999) believes is the kind of participation that promotes a culture of commitment and more involvement, even though caring for the orphans and the death of adult children due to HIV/AIDS,

among other responsibilities put stress and strain on physical, emotional and financial capabilities of many elderly. This is resulting into withdrawal (self-exclusion) among some of the affected families while others are socially excluded due to the society’s stigma associated with HIV/AIDS. Onunga, a 72 year old respondent, narrated her experience: “All my five sons and their wives have died of HIV/AIDS-related complications and so the community here calls me the mother of immoral sons. The many grandchildren you see around are all I’ve got.....God will bless my efforts in caring for them,” Onunga says, full of hope.

An area of particular concern is that as the female elderly participate in caring for orphans and adults ailing from HIV/AIDS, their male counterparts are being accused of contributing to the spread of the disease all over Sub-Saharan Africa. Research and empirical observations reveal that rich older men or pensioners exchange money or gifts for sexual favors from younger women (Nancy, 2005); a situation that plunges communities in Kenya into physical, emotional and economic insecurity as HIV/AIDS and its consequences become a vicious cycle. Needless to say, time and money becomes limited resources among care givers, subsequently affecting their participation in other aspects of community affairs.

Climatic conditions and Agency

According to Berner (1998), Agency refers to the capacity of humans to ultimately decide what action to take or not to take. Older citizens of Kolwa Division have over the years exercised their agency by participating in both crop and animal farming despite the very high temperatures of about 35 degrees centigrade experienced all year round within the Division, and the occasional floods. The high temperatures cause perennial crop failure and death of livestock; the major source of livelihood in the study area. Occasional floods destroy crops and property too. These factors reduce the endowment and functioning of the elderly who are mostly farmers, thus increasing their vulnerability to dependency.

In spite of the many challenges faced by this category of the population in Kolwa Division, respondents felt that the government does not do enough to mitigate the impacts of harsh climatic conditions on the lives of the residents of this community. “This area experiences floods every year during the month of April.....each time we get temporary handouts once our livelihood is destroyed....can’t the government get a permanent solution?” Jane (72) asks bitterly. It appears that the older members of this community have consistently faced a combination of factors that continue to trap them in a spiral of disadvantage described by DSS (1999, p 23) as Social exclusion. In my view, functioning within the study area is sometimes more dependent upon external constraints than agency and personal choice as argued by Brock (1993). These external constraints are what I refer to in this paper as factors that hinder the full participation of the elderly resulting into either active or passive social exclusion. On the other hand, research has shown that chronological ageing reduces combined capabilities as a result of a decline in certain internal capabilities (such as physical strength) which is inevitable as one grows old and its speed, timing and intensity of loss vary between individuals (*ibid*).

These internal capabilities of older persons depend on their lifetime accumulation of social, human and financial capital and also partly dependent on functioning in earlier life. This partly explains why retired professionals in Kolwa Division participate more in social, economic and political activities as compared to their less privileged counterparts who in most cases had a ‘weak’ socio-economic foundation even in childhood which I presume contributed to low self-esteem and less capacity to exercise agency. “All I can say is that I’m very productive to this community at all levels and that I educate my 5 grandchildren comfortably. Honestly, many elderly suffer and only a few like me are lucky. Maybe the government could do more to improve this”, concludes *Mzee Ondiek (74)* who is a retiree, a politician and an entrepreneur within the study area.

CHAPTER 5

5.1 Conclusion

Nussbaum argues in Sen and Nussbaum (1993) that progressive chronological ageing lowers internal capabilities of an individual, an opinion shared by key respondents about elderly participation within the study area. In spite of these opinions, the study revealed that the elderly of both genders (aged between 68 and 80) within Kolwa Division continue to participate by engaging in productive or unproductive labour either voluntarily or propelled by determination to survive. These activities benefit them, their families and even community in general, albeit with a number of constraints. Factors such as culture, stereotypes, attitudes, generational differences, socio-economic strata, lack of political goodwill, inefficiency at public institutions and lack of sensitivity by the public towards interests of the elderly are likely to contribute to the social exclusion of older persons at both the community level and public spheres. These factors are usually beyond the control of older citizens. Hutton (1996) as cited in Barry (2002) talks of ‘upper threshold’ where the rich exclude themselves, although in Kolwa Division, there seem to be ‘lower threshold’ occasioned by self-exclusion of the less privileged elderly population. The qualitative interviews exposed the existence of self-exclusion, especially among the female elderly. This, I can associate with low self-esteem due to low levels of education, cultural roles and expectations, minimal economic power, deaths of adult children, widowhood and general state of helplessness.

It was revealed that the participation of the senior citizens here is mostly motivated by the ‘drive to survive’ due to: hard economic times, weakening kinship support system, delays in getting pension (which is often inadequate anyway), unemployment among the youth, need to support increasing number of orphans, and adult patients ailing from HIV/AIDS; whereas, others work purely as part of cultural responsibility bestowed upon them by virtue of advanced age. It was however interesting to note that the participation of some older persons are motivated by selfish personal interests and not that of the whole community. Whether or not this contributes to

development can be a topic for further research. As Brock (1993) found out about developing countries, it appears that functioning of the elderly in Kolwa Division too is more dependent upon external constraints than agency and personal choice. My belief is that these external constraints that are manifested through community's social structures or political institutions hinder full participation of older persons in Kenya, and that, changing the status-quo can be a power laden, slow process. In agreement with Dullemen (2006 p 101), I deduce that aging world remains a working world for the elderly of both genders in Kenya, hence, suggestions of urgent need for a change of attitude towards senior citizens, who should not be perceived as a burden to the society but as key players in the productive and reproductive (unproductive) field.

In an attempt to add onto the ageing and capability literature, I made an observation from this Case Study which revealed the possibility that opportunities available to individuals at an early age (childhood/youth) are likely to influence their old age capabilities and functioning. Self-exclusion from participation in public affairs could also be determined by lack of, or limited accumulation of social, financial or human capital. For instance, the elderly of both genders in Kolwa Division who are relatively well educated and retired from formal employment appeared to participate more in political and economic activities compared to their less educated, never employed counterparts. Further probing revealed that the latter had fewer opportunities when growing up. This raises concerns about the possibility of 'exclusion cycle', something a kin to the much talked about 'poverty cycle'.

APPENDIX 1

Below are Semi-structured questions that guided the interviews:

Questions to the elderly of both genders

- ✓ How do you feel about social, cultural, economic and political activities in this community?
- ✓ Who participates in them and how?
- ✓ Do you ever get an opportunity to contribute towards Kenya’s development?
- ✓ Do you face any challenges that discourage you from participating in either social, economic, cultural or political activities within the community or in development projects at all? If yes, what are they?

Questions to NGO leader, CBO leader and Youth

- ✓ What can you say about participation of the elderly in social, cultural, economic and political activities in this community? Kindly mention what they do or do not do and why?
- ✓ Do gender differences, age or culture determine what one can or cannot do in this community? Explain
- ✓ What do you feel about participation of the elderly in national development in general?
- ✓ From experience, what are your views about working with the elderly?
- ✓ Is there anything you feel hinders the *full participation* of the elderly in the above stated activities?

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