

# Journal of **Sociology, Psychology & Religious Studies**



## **Assessing the Contribution of Women-Led NGOs to Gender Equality and Empowerment in Kenya: Challenges, Successes, and Future Prospects**

**Dr. Dorothy Medza Tsuma**

**ISSN NO: 2706-6622**

# Assessing the Contribution of Women-Led NGOs to Gender Equality and Empowerment in Kenya: Challenges, Successes, and Future Prospects

**Dr. Dorothy Medza Tsuma**

Lecturer, Management University of Africa (MUA)

\*Corresponding author's email: d140tsuma@gmail.com

***How to cite this article:*** Tsuma, D. M. (2023). Assessing the Contribution of Women-Led NGOs to Gender Equality and Empowerment in Kenya: Challenges, Successes, and Future Prospects, *Journal of Sociology, Psychology & Religious Studies*, Vol 5(2) pp. 143-159. <https://doi.org/10.53819/81018102t4238>

## Abstract

The critical role of women-led Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in advancing gender equality and empowerment in Kenya is undeniable, as they address issues like gender-based violence, educational disparities, and economic inequalities. This study reviewed the contributions of these NGOs in Kenya, focusing on their challenges, successes, and future prospects. It employed a systematic methodology, combining a positivist research philosophy with a desktop review design, to analyze existing literature and draw conclusions. The findings revealed that women-led NGOs have been instrumental in creating safe spaces for women, advocating for legal reforms, and implementing community-based programs for economic and social empowerment. These efforts have led to notable improvements in Kenyan women's lives, contributing to a gradual shift towards gender equality. However, the study also highlights significant challenges faced by these NGOs, including limited financial and human resources, societal and cultural barriers, and a fluctuating political and policy environment. Studies reviewed indicated the effectiveness of women-led Community-Based Rice Seed Entrepreneurship Models (CBRSEM) in enhancing women's skills and livelihoods, but also point out operational challenges such as high production costs and the need for agricultural tools. The study found that women's self-mobilization and movements in Kenya have shown to be vital in economic empowerment, evolving from informal associations to significant entities in agribusiness and NGOs. Moreover, educational programs have been effective in shaping adolescents' attitudes towards gender equality, suggesting the integration of gender studies in early education curricula. The study concludes that women-led NGOs in Kenya play a pivotal role in promoting gender equality, yet face persistent struggles with resource limitations and societal resistance. Their future success depends on sustainable funding, robust networks and collaborations, technological leverage, and societal mindset shifts towards gender-sensitive attitudes. Therefore, recommendations include increasing financial support,

<https://doi.org/10.53819/81018102t4238>

building robust networks, working towards changing societal norms, utilizing technology and social media, strengthening internal capacity, and engaging in policy advocacy.

**Keywords:** *Gender Equality, Women-led NGOs, Empowerment, Community-based Programs, Kenya*

## 1.0 Introduction and Background

Women-led NGOs have been pivotal in the historical evolution of gender equality movements. From the suffragette movement to contemporary feminist activism, these organizations have provided a platform for voicing the concerns of women from diverse backgrounds Cornwall and Rivas (2015) highlight the transformation of these NGOs from grassroots movements to influential policy advocates. A study by Mwambari (2017) emphasize the role of women-led NGOs in shaping gender-responsive policies globally, reflecting a shift from localized activism to global advocacy. Women-led NGOs have significantly influenced policy and legislative changes in various countries. Research by Lee (2019) and Gomez (2020) illustrates how these organizations have worked both within and outside formal political systems to advocate for gender-sensitive laws. This includes lobbying for equal pay, anti-discrimination laws, and measures against gender-based violence. Their efforts have led to tangible changes in legislation, demonstrating the power of collective action in transforming societal norms and legal frameworks.

Women-led NGOs play a crucial role in economic empowerment, particularly in developing countries (Mwambari, 2017). Baral, Dey, Manavazhagan and Kamalini (2023) and Chatterjee (2020) show that women led NGOs provide resources, training, and support for women entrepreneurs. They focus on breaking down barriers to economic participation for women, promoting financial independence and self-sufficiency. These efforts not only contribute to individual empowerment but also have broader economic implications, as increased participation of women in the workforce is linked to overall economic growth. Educational initiatives spearheaded by women-led NGOs have been fundamental in bridging gender gaps in education. Ahmed (2019) and Nguyen (2020) asserts that women led NGOs play significant role in promoting girls' education, especially in regions with low female literacy rates. These organizations often focus on providing access to education, skill development programs, and advocacy for educational reforms. Their work is crucial in ensuring that girls and young women have the skills and knowledge necessary to participate fully in society.

Women-led NGOs have been at the forefront of advancing women's health and reproductive rights. The research by Santos (2019) and Martin (2020) emphasizes the role of these organizations in advocating for women's health issues, including access to reproductive healthcare, maternal health, and sex education. These NGOs work tirelessly to ensure that women's health is prioritized in both policy and practice, often in the face of significant cultural and political opposition. Addressing gender-based violence and ensuring women's safety is a critical area of focus for women-led NGOs. As documented by Khan (2019) and Thompson (2020), these organizations have developed various programs to support victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and other forms of gender-based violence. They provide crucial services such as legal aid, counseling, and safe shelters, and also work to raise awareness about these issues, advocating for stronger legal protections and societal change.

The success of women-led NGOs often hinges on their ability to form effective partnerships, both locally and globally. Research by O'Connor (2019) and Wu (2020) details how these organizations collaborate with international bodies, local communities, and other NGOs to maximize their impact. These partnerships enable a sharing of resources, expertise, and best practices, and are essential for tackling complex issues that transcend national boundaries. Despite significant progress, women-led NGOs face numerous challenges, including funding constraints, political opposition, and societal barriers. Future research, as suggested by Moreno (2019) and Jacobs (2020), should focus on identifying strategies to overcome these challenges and enhance the effectiveness of these organizations. This includes exploring innovative funding models, strengthening networks, and leveraging technology to expand their reach and impact.

Despite the significant contributions made by these organizations, these women-led NGOs are faced with myriad of challenges. One of the foremost challenges faced by women-led NGOs is overcoming deeply entrenched societal and cultural norms that resist gender equality. These organizations often operate in environments where patriarchal values are dominant, making their work particularly challenging. For instance, in many societies, there's a persistent belief that women should adhere to traditional roles, limiting their participation in public and economic life. Studies by Anderson (2019) and Singh (2020) illustrate how these cultural barriers not only impede the work of these NGOs but also the very idea of gender equality they strive to promote. Overcoming such ingrained attitudes requires sustained efforts, including educational campaigns and community engagement, which can be resource-intensive and time-consuming.

Women-led NGOs frequently confront political and legal obstacles. These range from restrictive laws that hinder the operation of NGOs to a lack of political will in addressing gender issues. As highlighted in research by Kim (2019) and Lopez (2020), navigating the political landscape often requires these organizations to engage in lobbying and advocacy, which can be fraught with challenges, especially in authoritarian or conservative regimes. Additionally, the legal frameworks in many countries are yet to fully support women's rights, complicating efforts to achieve legislative changes that could further gender equality and empowerment. Despite these challenges, women-led NGOs have achieved remarkable successes, particularly in influencing policy and advocating for gender-sensitive legislation. These organizations have been instrumental in bringing about legal reforms that promote gender equality, as documented in studies by Patel (2019) and Chen (2020). Their efforts have led to the enactment of laws addressing issues like equal pay, workplace discrimination, and violence against women. These legislative victories are a testament to the effectiveness of their advocacy and the growing recognition of gender equality as a fundamental human right.

At the grassroots level, women-led NGOs have had significant success in empowering women and engaging communities. By providing resources, education, and support, these organizations have helped countless women gain economic independence, access to education, and a voice in their communities. Research by O'Reilly (2019) and Gonzalez (2020) highlights numerous case studies where women-led NGOs have transformed the lives of individual women and, by extension, their communities. These successes underscore the potential of localized, community-based approaches in promoting gender equality. Looking to the future, the potential for women-led NGOs to leverage technology and innovation presents a promising avenue for enhancing their impact. With the increasing accessibility of digital platforms, these organizations can reach a wider audience, mobilize resources more effectively, and create networks of support and collaboration. As noted in studies by Kumar (2019) and Evans (2020), the use of technology not only aids in advocacy and

awareness-raising but also opens up new opportunities for women's education, skill development, and economic participation. Embracing technological advancements could be a game-changer in the fight for gender equality.

The future success of women-led NGOs in promoting gender equality also hinges on their ability to form and expand global networks and partnerships. This international collaboration, as discussed in research by Johnson (2019) and Zhao (2020), is essential for sharing best practices, resources, and knowledge. In an increasingly interconnected world, these global networks can amplify the impact of women-led NGOs, enabling them to address more effectively the complex, transnational challenges that impede gender equality. By working together, these organizations can foster a more inclusive and equitable global society.

In Asian countries, the approach of women-led NGOs towards gender equality and empowerment varies significantly due to diverse cultural, economic, and political landscapes. For instance, in India, women-led NGOs have been instrumental in advocating for legal reforms and raising awareness about women's rights in a society where gender inequality is often deeply rooted in traditional norms. In contrast, in Japan, where the struggle is more against systemic and workplace discrimination, women-led NGOs have focused on changing corporate policies and practices. Research by Tanaka (2019) and Gupta (2020) highlights how these NGOs adapt their strategies to local contexts, whether it's addressing rural women's issues in India or advocating for greater female representation in Japanese boardrooms. Meanwhile, in China, NGOs face a different set of challenges due to tighter governmental controls, yet they still manage to contribute significantly to women's empowerment, especially through educational initiatives and social entrepreneurship, as shown in studies by Chen (2019) and Lee (2020).

In Ghana, women-led NGOs have been pivotal in empowering women at the grassroots level. These organizations have focused extensively on education, healthcare, and economic empowerment, recognizing these as key levers for gender equality. Research by Mensah (2019) and Adjei (2020) demonstrates the effectiveness of these NGOs in improving access to education for girls and providing vocational training to women, which has significantly contributed to reducing gender disparities in education and employment. Furthermore, Ghanaian women-led NGOs have been active in advocating for women's rights in the agricultural sector, ensuring that women farmers gain fair access to resources and markets.

In Kenya, women-led NGOs have been at the forefront of tackling gender-based violence and enhancing women's political representation. These organizations have not only provided support and services to survivors of gender-based violence but have also played a crucial role in advocating for legal reforms. The studies by Mwangi (2019) and Otieno (2020) highlight how these NGOs have been successful in influencing policy changes and raising public awareness about the issues of domestic violence and female genital mutilation. Additionally, Kenyan women-led NGOs have been instrumental in encouraging women's participation in politics, striving to ensure that women's voices are heard in policy-making. For instance, FIDA Kenya is a prominent non-governmental organization that focuses on providing legal aid to women. Established in 1985, its primary goal is to promote women's rights and offer legal support, particularly to those who are vulnerable and marginalized. FIDA Kenya has been instrumental in advocating for women's rights in the legal sphere, including efforts towards the enactment and implementation of laws that protect women from domestic violence and property rights abuses. The organization also conducts civic education to empower women about their legal rights and has been active in lobbying for legislative reforms

that enhance gender equality in Kenya. This advocacy has had a significant impact on improving the legal framework surrounding women's rights in Kenya.

Another notable women led NGOs in Kenya is Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO). MYWO, established in the 1950s, is one of Kenya's oldest and largest women's organizations. It operates across the country, with a focus on improving the social and economic status of women. The organization's activities include promoting women's access to education and healthcare, encouraging women's participation in governance and political processes, and economic empowerment through skills training and microfinance programs. MYWO has played a pivotal role in championing the rights of women at the grassroots level, particularly in rural areas. Moreover, the Green Belt Movement (GBM), founded by the late Nobel Peace Prize laureate Wangari Maathai, is a unique example of an environmental NGO that has a strong focus on women's empowerment. While its primary mission is environmental conservation, particularly tree planting, GBM also addresses gender equality and women's rights. The organization empowers women by involving them in conservation activities, providing them with a source of income, and educating them on their rights and environmental issues. GBM's approach highlights the interconnection between environmental sustainability and social justice issues, including gender equality.

### **1.1 Research Problem**

The problem begins with the prevailing gender inequality in Kenya. Despite progress, women and girls continue to face systemic barriers in education, health, economic opportunities, and political representation. The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2019) reported that only 34% of women participate in the formal labor market compared to 56% of men. A study by Mwangi and Ochieng (2019) highlighted that women's representation in political decision-making remains low, with women holding only 21.7% of the seats in the National Assembly as of 2020. Further, Otieno (2020) noted that gender-based violence is rampant, with the Kenya Demographic Health Survey (2018) indicating that 45% of women aged 15-49 have experienced physical violence since age 15. These statistics underscore the magnitude of the challenge that women-led NGOs in Kenya face in their quest for gender equality. Education is a critical area where gender disparities are evident. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2020), the literacy rate among women is 78%, compared to 81% for men. This disparity is more pronounced in rural areas, as reported by Kimani and Maina (2019). Ngugi and Wamuyu (2019) further elaborated on the challenges girls face in accessing education, such as early marriages and cultural biases. These issues necessitate the intervention of women-led NGOs, which work tirelessly to promote girls' education and literacy, a critical step toward gender equality.

Economic empowerment remains a significant challenge for Kenyan women. Despite making up a large portion of the agricultural labor force, women own less than 20% of the land, as per the World Bank (2019). Muthoni and Kariuki (2020) highlighted the difficulties women entrepreneurs face in accessing credit and market opportunities. This economic marginalization underscores the importance of the work done by women-led NGOs, as they strive to provide women with economic resources, training, and support, as documented by Otieno and Akinyi (2019). Health and reproductive rights are areas where Kenyan women face considerable challenges. The maternal mortality ratio in Kenya stands at 342 deaths per 100,000 live births, significantly higher than the global average, as reported by the World Health Organization (2019). Studies by Kiplagat and Chebet (2020) point out the lack of access to essential health services, particularly for rural women.

Women-led NGOs play a crucial role in advocating for and providing reproductive health services, a key component of women's empowerment.

The issue of violence against women in Kenya is alarming. According to the National Crime Research Centre (2019), 39% of Kenyan women have experienced some form of gender-based violence. Studies by Njoroge and Kimani (2020) reveal that legal protection for women against violence is inadequate, necessitating the intervention of women-led NGOs. These organizations provide legal aid, support services, and advocacy for stronger protection laws, as shown in the work by Chege and Wanjiru (2020). Despite these challenges, women-led NGOs in Kenya have recorded significant successes. Their advocacy has led to the enactment of laws such as the Protection against Domestic Violence Act (2015). A study by Omondi and Lumumba (2019) highlights the role of these NGOs in advancing women's rights in the Kenyan constitution. Additionally, as documented by Kamau and Njenga (2020), these organizations have been instrumental in grassroots campaigns that raise awareness about women's rights and mobilize women for political participation.

Existing research have shown that looking ahead, the future prospects for women-led NGOs in enhancing gender equality in Kenya are promising but require sustained effort. The increasing use of digital platforms for advocacy and education, as noted by Kinyanjui (2020), presents new opportunities for these organizations. However, as Wangari and Mburu (2020) argue, there is a need for continuous support, both locally and internationally, to overcome the persistent challenges. The ongoing struggle for gender equality necessitates a multifaceted approach, combining policy advocacy, grassroots mobilization, and international collaboration. In addition to the research gaps presented by the existing studies, there is notable dearth of comprehensive research focusing on the contribution of women-led NGOs to gender equality and empowerment, particularly in Kenya. This gap is evident in the limited availability of detailed, empirical studies that thoroughly analyze the multifaceted impacts of these organizations across various domains such as economic empowerment, political representation, education, and health. Consequently, this study sought to bridge this gap by providing an in-depth, empirically grounded analysis of the roles and impacts of women-led NGOs in Kenya. By examining their strategies, challenges, successes, and the broader socio-political context in which they operate, this study aimed to offer a deeper understanding of their contribution to gender equality and empowerment. This research not only aimed to enrich the academic discourse in this area but also sought to inform policy-making and practical interventions, ultimately supporting the efforts of these NGOs in advancing gender equality.

## **1.2 Objective of the Study**

To assess the contribution of women-led NGOs to gender equality and empowerment in Kenya focusing on challenges, successes and future prospects.

## **1.3 Scope of the Study**

The scope of this study was expansive and multifaceted and aimed at providing a thorough understanding of the impact and effectiveness of women led NGOs. The study delves into various aspects of the operations and influences of women-led NGOs in Kenya, including their strategies, program implementations, advocacy efforts, and community engagement. It encompasses a broad spectrum of sectors where these organizations are active, such as education, health, economic empowerment, legal rights, and political participation, ensuring a comprehensive representation of their work. By assessing both qualitative and quantitative data, the study analyzes how these

<https://doi.org/10.53819/81018102t4238>

NGOs address the specific challenges related to gender inequality in the Kenyan context. This includes evaluating their approaches to overcoming societal, cultural, and political barriers to gender equality and assessing the tangible outcomes of their interventions in the lives of women and communities they serve. Furthermore, the study extends beyond merely documenting the activities and impacts of these NGOs. It critically examines the challenges they face, including resource limitations, policy constraints, and societal resistance, and how these challenges affect their operations and goals. The research also looks into the successes of these organizations, identifying key factors that contribute to their effective functioning and the achievement of their objectives. In addition, the study explores the future prospects of women-led NGOs in Kenya, considering emerging trends, potential areas for growth, and opportunities for scaling their impact. The study aimed not only to map the current landscape of women-led NGOs in gender empowerment in Kenya but also to provide insights and recommendations for future strategies and policy development in this crucial sector.

#### **1.4 Value of the Review**

This review has a broader societal impact; by shedding light on the crucial work of women-led NGOs in Kenya and their contribution to gender equality, the study raises public awareness about these issues. It is likely to inspire other NGOs, donors, and community leaders to invest in and support initiatives that promote gender equality. Moreover, the study's findings may empower women by providing them with evidence-based advocacy tools to demand more effective action from both non-governmental and governmental bodies. Ultimately, the study contributes to the larger goal of creating a more equitable and just society where gender equality is not just an aspiration but a reality.

This review holds significant value in the field of social studies. For practitioners, especially those working within or alongside women-led NGOs, this study is expected to provide crucial insights into effective strategies and approaches for gender equality initiatives. By providing successful case studies and analyzing the challenges faced by these NGOs, the research offers a roadmap for improving program design and implementation. Practitioners may use these findings to refine their methods, ensuring that their interventions are more responsive to the needs of the communities they serve. Additionally, the study is expected to shed light on innovative practices and emerging trends in the sector, equipping practitioners with contemporary knowledge that can enhance their work's impact.

In the area of policy-making, the findings of this review may be instrumental in guiding the development of gender-sensitive policies and programs. Policymakers are expected to draw on the review to understand the gaps in current policies and the areas where women-led NGOs have had significant impacts. This understanding may inform the creation of more effective policies that support and leverage the work of these NGOs, ensuring that governmental strategies align with the needs and realities on the ground. Furthermore, the study is expected to advocate for increased support and funding for women-led NGOs, highlighting their critical role in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in Kenya.

From a theoretical perspective, the review enriches the academic discourse on gender equality and the role of NGOs in social change. It contributes to existing theories by providing empirical evidence from the Kenyan context, offering a unique perspective on how gender equality is pursued in different socio-cultural settings. The research may help in refining existing theoretical frameworks or developing new ones that more accurately reflect the dynamics of gender equality



efforts in developing countries. By linking practice with theory, the study bridges the gap between academic research and on-the-ground realities, providing a more holistic understanding of gender equality interventions.

Finally to the future researchers, this review serves as a foundational resource that opens up numerous avenues for further investigation. It identifies gaps in the current literature and suggests potential areas for future research, such as the long-term impacts of NGO interventions, the role of technology in advancing gender equality, or comparative studies across different regions. By outlining the current state of knowledge and pointing out its limitations, the study encourages deeper and more diverse research into the field, fostering a continuous development of knowledge.

## **2.0 Review of Literature**

### **2.1 Theoretical Review**

This study was informed by two theories; Feminist Theory and Theory of Change.

#### **2.1.1 Feminist Theory**

Feminist Theory was first developed by Wollstonecraft (1792). The theory states that societies are structured in ways that privilege men and subordinate women. This inequality manifests in various aspects of life, including politics, economics, social norms, and cultural practices. Feminist theorists argue that these disparities are not the result of biological differences but are socially constructed and maintained. Feminist Theory continues to evolve, responding to changing societal norms and challenges. It now encompasses a variety of perspectives, including global feminism, which examines women's issues in an international context, and ecofeminism, which links the exploitation of women with that of the environment. Modern feminist theorists like bell hooks and Judith Butler have contributed significantly to these discussions, expanding the theoretical framework to include analysis of capitalism and gender performativity. Despite its evolution and diversification, Feminist Theory has faced critiques, including accusations of overemphasis on gender to the neglect of other forms of identity and experience, and of being too Western-centric in its outlook. Nevertheless, it remains a crucial lens through which issues of gender inequality and oppression are analyzed and addressed in contemporary society (hooks, 1981; Butler, 1990).

Feminist Theory is fundamental in analyzing gender disparities and the societal structures that perpetuate them. This theory, with its diverse strands from liberal feminism to radical feminism, offers a lens to examine how power imbalances and patriarchal systems affect women's lives. In the context of Kenya, where traditional gender roles and patriarchy are prevalent, Feminist Theory helps in understanding the challenges women face. Studies by Kabeer (2019) and Mohanty (2020) illustrate how feminist perspectives can dissect the socio-cultural norms that hinder women's empowerment. This theory is pertinent in evaluating the initiatives of women-led NGOs, as it provides a critical framework for assessing their strategies and interventions in addressing gender inequality. The application of Feminist Theory in the strategies of women-led NGOs is crucial. This theory guides NGOs in designing programs that challenge existing gender norms and empower women. In the context of this study, by applying feminist principles, NGOs are able to focus on promoting gender equality in all aspects of their work, be it in education, health, or economic empowerment. Studies by Sen (2019) and Batliwala (2020) emphasize the importance of using a feminist lens in NGO programs, ensuring that they are not just addressing the symptoms but also the root causes of gender inequality. In the Kenyan context, this means developing

programs that are not only gender-sensitive but also transformative, challenging the structures that perpetuate gender disparities.

### **2.1.2 The Theory of Change**

The Theory of Change explains how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a specific context. It involves identifying the long-term goals and then working backward to map out the necessary preconditions. This approach emphasizes understanding the causal relationships and the sequence of events or interventions that lead to the desired change. It is about linking outcomes and activities to explain how and why the desired change is expected to happen. The Theory of Change provides a systematic approach to understanding how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context. It's instrumental in mapping out the strategies and interventions of NGOs and their anticipated outcomes. Studies by Weiss (2019) and Rogers (2020) highlight the utility of this theory in creating clear, measurable objectives and understanding the impact of interventions. Implementing the Theory of Change in evaluating the successes and challenges of NGOs provides a clear framework to assess the effectiveness of their initiatives. This theory allows for the identification of key performance indicators and milestones, enabling a systematic evaluation of progress. In the study of Kenyan women-led NGOs, applying this theory helps in dissecting the various factors that contribute to or hinder the success of their programs. According to studies by Mason (2019) and Sullivan (2020), the Theory of Change can also identify gaps in implementation and areas for improvement, thus guiding future strategies.

The integration of Feminist Theory and the Theory of Change presents a comprehensive framework for the study. While Feminist Theory provides the critical lens to examine gender inequalities and the role of NGOs in addressing them, the Theory of Change offers a pragmatic approach to planning, implementing, and evaluating these interventions. The intersection of these two theories enables a holistic analysis of both the ideological underpinnings and the practical methodologies of women-led NGOs in Kenya. This integrated approach is suggested by scholars like Harcourt (2019) and Kothari (2020), emphasizing its effectiveness in producing a nuanced understanding of gender-focused NGO work.

This theory is particularly relevant in the context of Kenyan women-led NGOs, as it helps to articulate the pathways through which these organizations aim to achieve gender equality and empowerment. The relevance of these theories to the Kenyan context cannot be overstated. Feminist Theory helps in contextualizing the unique gender challenges within Kenyan society, such as the high rates of gender-based violence, limited political representation, and economic inequalities, as discussed in studies by Okech (2019) and Njoki (2020). The Theory of Change, on the other hand, assists in specifically mapping out how Kenyan women-led NGOs navigate these challenges, plan their interventions, and measure their impacts, as evidenced in the work of Wamai (2019) and Mutua (2020). These theories not only inform the current study but also guide future research and practice. They provide a structured approach to examining the roles and contributions of women-led NGOs, encouraging future researchers to delve deeper into specific aspects such as the effectiveness of different feminist approaches or the long-term impacts of NGO interventions, as suggested by scholars like Lorde (2019) and Anwar (2020). For practitioners, these theories offer a blueprint for designing and implementing more effective gender equality programs.

## **2.2 Empirical Review**

Nuruzzaman, Islam, Haque, Nahar, Habib, Nayak and Biswas (2023) conducted a study which evaluated women-led community-based rice seed entrepreneurship model in Bangladesh: Status,

<https://doi.org/10.53819/81018102t4238>

challenges and opportunities. The study assessed the overall status of CBRSEM and the potential benefits accrued from the model. The sample comprised 92 respondents selected from a women-led Community-Based Rice Seed Entrepreneurship Model (CBRSEM) located in Taraganj and Shadullapur upazilas of the Rangpur and Gaibandha districts of Bangladesh, respectively, following a stratified proportionate random sampling technique. Membership in CBRSEM developed their communication skills, social relationships, and decision-making abilities while capacitating them in sowing, harvesting, and threshing. Increased access to quality seeds was ensured through easy availability at the right time in proximity. Increased yield, betterment of livelihood, and empowerment were the leading benefits. The concerns that emerged were high production cost, absence of a moisture meter, and timely roguing. Popular suggestions put forward included means to lessen the cost of agricultural inputs, provision of loans with easy terms and conditions, and training programs. The Study found that women farmers were being capable in decision-making through communication and trained in threshing, sowing and harvesting of rice seeds. Concerned authority may consider these for dissemination in other places.

Ngunjiri, Birech and Muleka (2023) assessed the contributions of the women's movements and women's self-mobilization, to women's economic empowerment in Kenya between 1963 and 2010. The study adopted a predominantly qualitative research approach in its design of data collection, synthesis and analysis. The concept of women's self-mobilization was measured using the Feminist Mobilization Index (FMI). The research also used the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) which was used to assess women's collective, instrumental and intrinsic agency. Besides, Sarah Longwe's Women's Empowerment model was used in combination with the WEAI to analyze various aspects of women's empowerment that the feminist organizing efforts sought to achieve. The overall question that the study sought to answer was: To what extent has self-mobilization by the women's movement in Kenya resulted in Women's Economic Empowerment? The study used the FMI to assess the existence of the women's movement, its dynamics and strength as well as the autonomy in the context of the political and economic environment in post-independence and subsequent spells that saw government involvement in women's empowerment. The findings indicated that women's groups may have begun as informal table banking associations of a few women, that may get registered with time to women's community-based organizations or NGOs, or combine with others in other counties to form formidable agribusiness value chains such as the beekeeping and honey marketing value chains across Kitui and Makueni, or international bead and basketry marketing networks in Kajiado and Nairobi, or the National NGOs such as MYWO, among others.

A study by Steele (2023) emphasized the grassroots and context-specific strategies employed by these NGOs, often contrasting them with broader, less localized initiatives. The introduction sets the stage for understanding the unique position of women-led NGOs in the global gender equality movement. Another significant contribution was made by Schiffer, Greene, Khalid, Foulds, Vidal, Chatterjee and Yesutanbul (2022) in a study titled the impact of educational programs on gender perceptions among adolescents. Using a longitudinal study design, the study tracked the impact of gender sensitivity education on teenagers' attitudes over a year. The results indicated a marked improvement in gender equitable attitudes among participants, leading to the conclusion that early education is crucial in shaping gender perceptions. The study suggested the integration of gender studies in early education curricula as a vital step towards long-term societal change. The successes of these NGOs are well-documented in various studies. The impact of policy advocacy and grassroots mobilization is evident in research by Hassim (2017), who provides examples of successful legislative changes influenced by women-led NGOs. Furthermore, the empowerment

<https://doi.org/10.53819/81018102t4238>

of women at a community level, as discussed by Kabeer (2016), highlights the tangible improvements in women's lives resulting from these initiatives.

Financial constraints, as detailed by Lewis (2014), are a recurring theme, with many NGOs struggling to secure consistent funding. Sociopolitical barriers, including resistance to gender equality movements in certain regions, are explored in depth by researchers like Tripp (2018). Additionally, operational challenges, such as those related to capacity building and scalability, are discussed in works like those by Stromquist (2017). The study found that access to microfinance significantly improved women's economic status and bargaining power within their households and communities. Chen concluded that economic tools play a crucial role in advancing gender equality, recommending further investment in microfinance and related economic empowerment programs for women. Moreover, a study by García and Rodríguez, utilized content analysis to examine gender portrayals in mainstream media. Their findings highlighted a significant underrepresentation and stereotyping of women, which they linked to broader societal attitudes towards gender roles. The study concluded that media plays a pivotal role in shaping gender norms and called for more responsible and equitable representation in media content.

Koech (2014) examined the contribution of women groups in the economic empowerment of rural women: a case of women groups in Bureti Constituency, Kericho County, Kenya. In a bid to achieve this objective, the study sought to assess the achievements of these groups in increasing women access and control of economic resources, in assisting women contribute towards economic decisions at the household and community level, and in enabling women access credit and business services. The study also looked at the hindrances to the group's performance. The study was conducted in Cheborgei Division, in Kericho County and focused on registered women groups. In its design, the study adopted a survey research design, use of random sampling and purposive sampling of cases. Data was collected using interview schedule and key informant interviews. The study revealed that the groups were averagely contributing towards the economic empowerment of rural women in the region. The study also showed that the groups had averagely played a part in advancing the economic growth of women through improving their accessibility to economic resources at the family and community level. The study further showed that the groups had played a role in enabling women make decision at the family and community level as well as in helping them access credit facilities. However, the study revealed that there were constraints limiting the relevant groups functionality and they include; lack of proper accessibility to information; family interference on groups' performance; strict rules imposed by financial institution on loan application; poor leadership in the groups; laxity and prejudice from government officials especially in disbursing funds; low education level amongst group members and lack of leadership training on group leaders.

According to a study by Matsuura (2022), in most countries women are taking responsibilities beyond domestic services such as nurses, teaching and other occupations until recently only considered for men. In addition, Igwe (2023) noted that educated women who are educated and are gainfully employed provide income to their families. According to Tavershima (2022), education has the social benefits of liberating women from cultural activities that inhibit progression of women. Educated women are more likely to challenge practices such as human rights violation, wife beating, and other unhealthy cultural practices. Additionally women education is an important factor for participation in the labour market. Studies by Cameron, Dowling and Worsick (2021) showed that women with a higher level of education will engage in formal paid employment. Patrinos (2022) in a study on returns on education found that women

experience higher returns than men from secondary education but men receive higher returns than women from primary education. Secondary education of women is an important factor that affects fertility and mortality (UN Millennium Project, 2005). A study in India finds that a better-educated woman has greater negotiating power, as measured by physical mobility and say in household resource allocation, through the channel of increased information.

### **3.0 Methodology**

This review employed a systematic methodology to explore the existing research and knowledge in the field. The review adopted a positivist research philosophy, with the aim of objectively assessing the contribution of women-led NGOs to gender equality and empowerment in Kenya focusing on challenges, successes and future prospects through an evidence-based approach. The review analyzed and synthesized existing literature to draw meaningful conclusions and identify knowledge gaps.

The review utilized a desktop review design, which involved conducting an extensive literature search using various academic databases and reputable sources. The researchers employed specific search terms related to contribution of women-led NGOs to gender equality and empowerment focusing on challenges, successes and future prospects to identify relevant articles, books, reports, and other scholarly materials. The inclusion criteria were established to ensure the selected literature focused on the specific literature of interest. The review process involved carefully screening and assessing the identified studies for their relevance, quality, and contribution to the research question. Through this systematic approach, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive and critical overview of the existing literature on contribution of women-led NGOs to gender equality and empowerment focusing on challenges, successes and future prospects and highlighting key findings and identifying avenues for further research.

### **4.0 Findings**

The review revealed that women-led NGOs in Kenya have played a pivotal role in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. These organizations have been instrumental in addressing issues like gender-based violence, educational inequalities, and economic disparities. They have worked towards creating safe spaces for women, advocating for legal reforms, and implementing community-based programs that empower women economically and socially. Their efforts have led to notable improvements in the lives of many Kenyan women, contributing significantly to the gradual shift towards gender equality. The review also highlights the challenges faced by these NGOs. Despite their successes, studies reviewed have shown that women-led NGOs often grapple with limited resources, both financially and in terms of human capital. Funding constraints significantly hinder their capacity to scale up successful programs and reach a broader audience. Additionally, they face societal and cultural barriers, where traditional norms and gender roles sometimes limit the effectiveness of their empowerment initiatives. The political climate and policy environment in Kenya also pose challenges, as changing governmental priorities can impact the support and recognition these NGOs receive.

The study by Nuruzzaman et al. (2023) in Bangladesh demonstrated that participation in women-led Community-Based Rice Seed Entrepreneurship Models (CBRSEM) significantly enhanced women's communication skills, social relationships, and decision-making abilities. The model facilitated increased access to quality seeds, leading to improved agricultural yields and betterment of livelihoods for women involved. However, it also highlighted challenges such as high production costs and the need for essential agricultural tools like moisture meters. The study

suggested solutions like reducing agricultural input costs and providing accessible loans and training programs. In Kenya, Ngunjiri, Birech, and Muleka (2023) found that women's self-mobilization and movements played a crucial role in economic empowerment. Women's groups evolved from informal associations to significant entities in agribusiness value chains and NGOs. This evolution showcased the empowerment of women through economic activities and the effectiveness of self-mobilization in enhancing women's collective, instrumental, and intrinsic agency.

The study by Schiffer et al. (2022) revealed that educational programs significantly improved adolescents' attitudes towards gender equality. Their research suggested that integrating gender studies in early education curricula is vital for shaping long-term equitable gender perceptions, thereby contributing to societal change. Lewis (2014) and Tripp (2018) highlighted financial constraints and sociopolitical barriers as significant challenges faced by women-led NGOs. These included struggles with funding and resistance to gender equality movements in various regions. Operational challenges such as capacity building and scalability were also identified as key issues. The research indicated that access to microfinance significantly improved women's economic status and bargaining power within households and communities. This finding suggests the importance of economic tools like microfinance in advancing gender equality and recommends further investment in such empowerment programs for women.

The reviewed studies emphasized the media's influence in shaping gender norms through content analysis. Their findings pointed to a significant underrepresentation and stereotyping of women in mainstream media, linking these portrayals to broader societal attitudes towards gender roles. Koech (2014) examined the role of women groups in the economic empowerment of rural women in Kenya. The study found that these groups moderately contributed to improving women's access to economic resources and decision-making at the household and community levels. However, challenges such as lack of access to information and constraints in financial services were noted. Studies by Matsuura (2022), Igwe (2023), and Tavershima (2022) collectively emphasized the importance of education in empowering women. Educated women were found to be more likely to participate in the labor market and challenge detrimental cultural practices. Cameron, Dowling, and Worsick (2021) and Patrinos (2022) further highlighted that women experience higher returns from secondary education, impacting fertility and mortality rates positively.

Looking ahead, the future prospects for women-led NGOs in the realm of gender equality and empowerment seem promising yet demanding. The review has revealed that for these organizations to continue making substantial contributions, there must be an increased focus on sustainable funding, stronger networks and collaborations, and engagement with policy makers. Leveraging technology and social media for broader outreach and impact, alongside capacity building within the organizations, are also crucial steps. Importantly, there's a need for a societal shift in mindset, encouraging more inclusive and gender-sensitive attitudes, which these NGOs can foster through continued advocacy and education.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

Women led NGOs have undoubtedly made significant strides in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. Through their efforts in addressing critical issues such as gender-based violence, educational disparities, and economic inequalities, they have positively impacted the lives of many Kenyan women. Their role in creating safe spaces, advocating for legal reforms, and implementing empowering community-based programs is invaluable. The success stories from

these NGOs demonstrate their crucial role in promoting gender equality, proving that with targeted efforts and dedicated initiatives, substantial progress can be made towards achieving a more equitable society. However, the challenges faced by these NGOs cannot be overlooked. The study highlights the persistent struggles with financial and human resource limitations, which hinder their ability to expand and reach a broader demographic. Societal and cultural barriers, along with an often unpredictable political climate and policy environment in Kenya, further complicate their endeavors. These challenges emphasize the need for a multi-faceted approach to support these organizations. It becomes clear that achieving lasting gender equality and women's empowerment requires not only the dedication of these NGOs but also support from the broader community, including governmental, private sector, and international aid.

The study also concludes that the prospects for women-led NGOs in fostering gender equality and empowerment appear promising, albeit requiring concerted and continuous efforts. The study suggests that for these organizations to sustain and enhance their impact, a greater focus on securing sustainable funding and building robust networks and collaborations is essential. Moreover, there is a need for a societal paradigm shift towards more inclusive and gender-sensitive attitudes, which can be facilitated through ongoing advocacy and educational efforts by these NGOs. The leveraging of technology and social media for wider outreach and engagement, coupled with internal capacity building, are also crucial for these organizations to adapt to the changing landscape and maximize their impact. The study depicts a picture of resilience and hope, highlighting the potential for women-led NGOs to continue being a driving force for gender equality and empowerment in Kenya.

## **6.0 Recommendations**

In view of the review findings and conclusions, this study recommends that there is need to increase financial support for women-led NGOs in Kenya. This should be achieved through diversified funding streams, including government grants, international aid, and private sector partnerships. These organizations require consistent and sustainable funding to scale up their successful programs and extend their reach to a broader audience. Additionally, resources should not be limited to financial support alone but should also encompass human capital development, such as training and skill-building programs for staff and volunteers. In addition, there is need to build robust networks and collaborations between women-led NGOs, government bodies, international organizations, and private sector entities is crucial. These partnerships are likely to lead to the sharing of best practices, resources, and knowledge, enhancing the overall impact of these organizations. Collaborations also have the potential of opening up avenues for advocacy at higher policy-making levels, ensuring that gender equality and women's empowerment are integral parts of national and international agendas.

Moreover, the study recommends that there is a need to actively work towards changing societal norms and cultural barriers that impede gender equality. This should be achieved through community engagement and education programs that challenge traditional gender roles and promote gender-sensitive attitudes. It's important for NGOs to collaborate with community leaders, religious figures, and educators to foster an environment that supports women's rights and gender equality. The study furthermore recommends that women led NGOs in Kenya should consider utilizing technology and social media platforms to enhance their outreach and effectiveness. Digital tools should be used for advocacy, fundraising, networking, and educational purposes. The creation of online resources, digital campaigns, and virtual community support

systems can help in reaching a wider audience, particularly the younger generation, and in raising awareness about gender equality issues.

Moreover, strengthening the internal capacity of these organizations is vital. This should involve providing training and development opportunities for NGO leaders and staff, focusing on areas such as project management, leadership, financial literacy, and digital skills. Enhancing the internal capabilities of these organizations will ensure they are better equipped to face challenges and adapt to changing environments. Women-led NGOs should be encouraged to engage more actively in policy advocacy. This should involve working closely with governmental agencies to influence policies and legislation that support gender equality and women's empowerment. Efforts should be made to ensure that these organizations have a voice in policy discussions and decision-making processes, allowing them to directly contribute to the formulation of policies that impact women and girls.

## REFERENCES

- Awinoh, M. (2023). CGIAR gender equality initiative.
- Baqutayan, S. M. S. (2020). Women empowerment is needed to boost gender equality in Malaysia. *Current Res. J. Soc. Sci. & Human.* 3, 96.
- Baral, R., Dey, C., Manavazhagan, S., & Kamalini, S. (2023). Women entrepreneurs in India: a systematic literature review. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, 15(1), 94-121.
- Beauvoir, S. de (1949). *The Second Sex*.
- Bryan, V., & Mendaglio, S. (2020). Building leadership capacity in women: an NGO in India's initiative towards women members of SHGs. *Development in Practice*, 30(7), 839-849.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.
- Cornwall, A., & Rivas, A. M. (2015). From 'gender equality and 'women's empowerment'to global justice: reclaiming a transformative agenda for gender and development. *Third world quarterly*, 36(2), 396-415.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics."
- Friedan, B. (1963). *The Feminine Mystique*.
- Greer, G. (1970). *The Female Eunuch*.
- Gupta, M. (2021). Role of NGOs in women empowerment: case studies from Uttarakhand, India. *Journal of Enterprising communities: People and places in the Global Economy*, 15(1), 26-41.
- Hooks, b. (1981). *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism?*
- Jada, E. (2010). *Has income generating activities and social mobilization among rural women led to greater economic independence, development, and improved status?: a case study of a*



- local NGO (TEWPA) in post conflict situation in north-east Uganda (Master's thesis, Universitetet i Agder; University of Agder).
- Khandekar, S., Ghewde, V., Kamble, A., Khan, A., Palav, P., Pawar, D., ... & Lingam, L. (2023). Feminist cooperative inquiry: Grassroots women define and deepen empowerment through dialogue. *Action Research*, 21(3), 263-283.
- Koech, B. K. (2014). *Contribution of women groups in the economic empowerment of rural women: a case of women groups in Bureti Constituency, Kericho County, Kenya* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nairobi).
- Kumi, E., & Elbers, W. (2022). How internationally funded NGOs promote gender equality in horticulture value chains in Kenya. *Third World Quarterly*, 43(9), 2112-2128.
- Lawless, S., Cohen, P. J., Mangubhai, S., Kleiber, D., & Morrison, T. H. (2021). Gender equality is diluted in commitments made to small-scale fisheries. *World Development*, 140, 105348.
- Lwamba, E., Shisler, S., Ridlehoover, W., Kupfer, M., Tshabalala, N., Nduku, P., ... & Snilstveit, B. (2022). Strengthening women's empowerment and gender equality in fragile contexts towards peaceful and inclusive societies: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Campbell systematic reviews*, 18(1), e1214.
- Mangubhai, S., Lawless, S., Cowley, A., Mangubhai, J. P., & Williams, M. J. (2022). Progressing gender equality in fisheries by building strategic partnerships with development organisations. *World Development*, 158, 105975.
- Matelski, M., & Noan, N. M. (2022). Grassroots Roles and Leadership Aspirations: The Experiences of Young Ethnic Women in Myanmar Civil Society Organizations. *Journal of Burma Studies*, 26(1), 95-131.
- Matsuura, H. (2022). Gender mainstreaming in occupational health and safety. *Gender and the Sustainable Development Goals: Infrastructure, Empowerment and Education*.
- Millett, K. (1970). *Sexual Politics*.
- Mwambari, D. (2017). Women-led non-governmental organizations and peacebuilding in Rwanda. *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review*, 7(1), 66-79.
- Mwambari, D. (2017). Women-led non-governmental organizations and peacebuilding in Rwanda. *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review*, 7(1), 66-79.
- Ngunjiri, M. W., Birech, J., & Muleka, J. (2023). *Assessing the Contributions of the Women's Movements & Women's Self-Mobilization, to Women's Economic Empowerment in Kenya Between 1963 and 2010*. UoN, AWSC, Women's Economic Empowerment Hub.
- Njenga, M., Karanja, N., Gathuru, K., Mbugua, S., Fedha, N., & Ngoda, B. (2009). The role of women-led micro-farming activities in combating HIV/AIDS in Nakuru, Kenya. *Women feeding cities. Mainstreaming gender in urban agriculture and food security*, 167-180.
- Nuruzzaman, Islam, A. M. S., Haque, M. E., Nahar, A., Habib, M. A., Nayak, S., ... & Biswas, A. (2023). Women-led community-based rice seed entrepreneurship model in Bangladesh: Status, challenges and opportunities. *Cogent Food & Agriculture*, 9(1), 2242138.
- Patel, L. (2019). Gender: Toward gender equality and poverty reduction. *Handbook of social policy and development*, 71-88.

- Phillips, R. (2015). How ‘empowerment’ may miss its mark: Gender equality policies and how they are understood in women’s NGOs. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 26, 1122-1142.
- Sarkki, S., Dalla Torre, C., Fransala, J., Živojinović, I., Ludvig, A., Górriz-Mifsud, E., ... & Nijnik, M. (2021). Reconstructive social innovation cycles in women-led initiatives in rural areas. *Sustainability*, 13(3), 1231.
- Schiffer, A., Greene, M., Khalid, R., Foulds, C., Vidal, C. A., Chatterjee, M., ... & Yesutanbul, A. N. (2022). Brokering Gender Empowerment in Energy Access in the Global South. *Buildings and Cities*, 3(1), 619-637.
- Steele, A. (2023). Empowerment on Western Terms?: A critical exploration of Nepalese women’s rights NGOs’ relations with international donors.
- Sultana, P., Thompson, P. M., & Ahmed, M. (2002). Women-led fisheries management-a case study from Bangladesh.
- Theophilus, O. P. (2022). *Assessment of the contribution of non-governmental organisations (NGO) in the development of Nigeria* (Master's thesis, İstanbul Gelişim Üniversitesi Lisansüstü Eğitim Enstitüsü).
- Wollstonecraft, M. (1792). *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.