

## Language and Culture as Tools of Gender Inequality among the Kuria

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### Abstract

*Despite the efforts done by the Tanzanian Government regarding gender equality and human rights in a bid to enhance poverty eradication strategies, the Kuria culture presents major obstacles to the endeavours by holding back the development efforts initiated by Kuria women. This obvious gender inequality manifests itself not only in socio-cultural practices but also in the language used to refer to women and men. This article examines language, gender and culture in relation to Kuria women in Kuria society. The article aimed to examine the power behind the language of Kuria male to female, the effort done by the Kuria women for sustained development and the measures to be taken by the Government. The data for this article were collected through interviews, focus group discussions and different current sources of relevant literature published at least after 2000s. This article is anchored on the theory of Gender Practices. The findings have revealed that language, gender and culture are interconnected and cannot be separated. Language is not simply the reproducing tool for the expression of thoughts but rather, is itself the shaper of thought/ideas, the platform and guide for the individual's mental action, for scrutiny of impressions.*

**Keywords:** *development, gender equality, cultural context, language and power*

### Introduction

Language is a powerful tool for exercising control of social power. One of its roles is to transmit ideologies through expression and communication in society (Boke, 2012). From the linguistic perspective, language reflects the cultural beliefs, social values, and understanding of the society and the way individuals are related in the society. Many scholars have investigated language use and language and gender in sociocultural contexts. Among them are Jaworski and Coupland (2006), Jorgensen and Phillips (2002), Cameron (2000), Swilla (2000), Boke (2012), Shertiel (2018) and Hung and Deng (2017). For instance, Hung and Deng (2017, p. 1) state that, "language is a natural human system of conventionalized symbols that have understood meanings. Through language, humans express and communicate their private thoughts and feelings as they act in various social functions." One aspect in which the social power has been exercising control is gender because it operates as a mode of social control from both biological to social contexts. The social functions include constructing social reality, performing and coordinating social behaviours such as conversing, arguing, fixing. Gender also controls what people should do or should not do. Boke (2012) identifies and describes the discourse topics in *Igikuria*

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proverbs while showing gendered power relations and social control embedded in them. Boke argues that:

Women as a group become the marked, endangered category and are always subject to the society's strict scrutiny. With this male-dominated system, the Kuria Woman inevitably occupies a marginal status. In their homes, women are often regarded as temporary members and pilgrims. They are seen to be a future loss to the family while the male child is viewed as an investment (p. 242).

The theory employed in this article views gender as a social practice. This approach views gender as something that is to be superseded; and upholds a view more closely centred on the dimensions of social and relational construction — that is, the view of gender as situated social practice. In other words, gender is actualized through social interactions. Gender as a social practice can be seen in doing, saying and performing gender relations.

This paper addresses itself to three themes; first, it seeks to identify and describe the power behind the language of Kuria male to female. Under this theme, the focus is on the cultural practices in planning, decision making and implementation of different plans in the society. Second, it describes women's efforts and challenges towards sustainable development; the objective under this theme is to examine different activities done by women despite being ignored in the community, the challenges which face them and how they manage to overcome them and maintain their family. Third, the paper addresses the measures to be taken by the government. The overriding idea, however, remains the attention to the language and culture; reflecting and maintaining gender inequality among the Kuria.

### **Methods**

The present article reviewed different sources of literature, including Swilla (2000), Wodak (2001), Jørgensen and Phillips (2002), Cameron (2005), Morris (2010), Boke (2012), and Jaja (2015). Other works were Wambura (2016), Masiaga and Namusonge (2016), Hung and Deng (2017), Ifechelobi and Ifechelobi (2017), Shertiel (2018) and Wambura (2018). These articles were selected because they give a general overview of how women are viewed and interpreted in different societies. This is the main issue that these articles have in common with the present article. The researcher used some arguments from this literature to assess, describe and discuss with the Kuria women, how Kuria society manifested the three tools, namely language, gender and culture in relation to women in the society. A qualitative research approach was adopted in this article while interviews and focus group discussions were employed. The study involved twelve Kuria women, who were selected randomly. The collected data were analysed qualitatively under the theories of Social Development and the Social and Human Development Theory. Additionally, the Critical Discourse Analysis was consulted as an attempt to link socio-cultural practices, economic and political endeavours with language practices. The aim was to see how language both reflects and maintains such issues. The Social Development Theory includes three major concepts, which are the Role of Social Interaction in Cognitive Development, the More Knowledgeable Other and the Zone of Proximal Development.

### **Results of the Review**

Cameron (2005) shows that there is a complex relationship between language and gender in academic studies of language and gender. The present study views gender as socially constructed in interactions rather than something which is fixed in society. In the Kuria society, the way things are done indicate gender relations as manifested in the language used to refer to different social groups. It is not simply because men and women tend to do things based on their sex, but gender influences linguistic behaviour due to its consequences. For instance, as men interact in a way that seeks to maintain and increase power and status, women tend to interact to maintain and increase solidarity. Children in the family tend to learn based on their gender; for instance, male children do like their fathers

while female children do like their mothers; including how they use language. In Hadzabe, they call it 'specialization' as boys hunt with fathers, and girls gather with mothers.

Swilla (2000) investigated stories in two Kiswahili daily newspapers to find out the relationship between language and women. Content and linguistic analysis revealed that "more than two-thirds of the stories depicted women negatively, by using linguistics devices such as derogatory terms, metaphors, diminutive forms, compliments, self-incrimination and assignment of talk-turns." The author thus indicates that the contents and language use in media perpetuate negative attitudes and beliefs about women. She suggests that the press should be the agent of social change towards gender equality and equity. On the other hand, Shertiel (2018) investigated the role of practitioners in early childhood development centres in shaping the behaviour of children. The results established that the behaviour that children display in early childhood centres illustrates what occurred in their homes. As he contends, the attitudes of parents and practitioners were pertinent to the engagement between the three key players, i.e. parents, practitioners and children.

According to Hung and Deng (2017), there are dynamic language-power relationships that emerged from critical language studies, namely sociolinguistics, conversation analysis, and the social psychology of language and communication. They contend that two of them stem from pre-existing power behind language that reveals and reflects the transfer of extra-linguistic power to the communication context. The study indicates that the language relationships in communication can be grouped into micro and macro levels. Accordingly, at the micro-level, the power behind language is a speaker's possession of weapon, money, high social status, or other attractive personal qualities. By revealing them in convincing language, the speaker influences the hearer. At the macro level, the power behind the language is the collective power (ethnolinguistic vitality) of the communities that speak the language (Hung & Deng, 2017, p. 16).

In the context of the present study, the power of language aligns with the micro-level of the power, which views the power behind language as a speaker's possession of weapon. The study also concurs with the first and the third approaches which view power in terms of structural dominance in society by groups who own and control the economy; and the complementary approach, which views power as not the actual production of effects but the potential of doing it. It looks behind power to find the source or the bases of this potential. Therefore, the language reveals power, reflects power, dominates power, creates and influences power depending on what the society believe and persevere. Language cannot be left out in the fight against harmful traditions among the Kuria. Jorgensen and Phillips (2002, p. 1) are of the view that language is structured according to different patterns that people's utterances follow when they take part in different domains of social life. They add that discourse is a particular way of talking about and understanding the world. Jaworski and Coupland (2006) summarize the conceptions of discourse by saying that discourse has focally to do with language, meaning and context regardless of whether the term is used concretely or abstractly.

Apart from language being the instrument of power, there also exists a relationship between language and gender. For instance, language can reflect the power of one gender in a society according to their social-cultural life. Wambura (2016) examined gendered constructions in Kuria female circumcision songs. The study found that men and women are constructed in a binary and gendered way. Wambura (2016) asserts that "Kuria is a patriarchal society with all the power and decision making lying with the men while women take a subordinate position" (pp. 34-35). From Wambura's assertion, there is a need to investigate the position of women in decision making and implementing plans, coordinating and supervising the process. Although Wambura discussed the socio-cultural practices, she did not examine the efforts done by Kuria women towards sustainable development.

Historically, Kuria people have been divided into clans and sub-clans, which also divide up to the family level. Within the clans who live in the same area, they have their political and social organisations from the top to the family levels. Adada (2016) states that: “On political matters, each provincial government had a ‘senate’ or Council of elders. Within each province was the chief religious leader and he was a dreamer prophet” (p. 14).

Abuso states that: “It is, therefore, important to note that the culture of present *Abakuria* community is an amalgam of many different cultures which originally were in fact opposed to one another” (1980, p. 135). When people stay and live closer, they tend to share some characteristics. As Abuso shows, Kuria are Bantu speaking community, but culturally are Nilotic-community closely resembling the Maasai and Kalenjin. It is important to investigate the socio-cultural aspects in relation to women’s development struggles to find out the challenges which pull back women initiatives. Adada (2016, p. 13) studied the *Abakuria* in the Pre-Colonial period, with a focus on the political, social, economic organization, and their material culture. She found that the *Abakuria* have intricate culture.

Hlongwa (2015) investigates gender inequality and language reflections in African Indigenous languages. The study discusses how IsiZulu and Kiswahili languages enhance inequality through words and phrases. The study of Hlongwa comes up with recommendations for reducing if not entirely eradicating gender inequalities in both languages. The paper advances that the desired change among members of society can only take place through the provision of adequate knowledge and information. This in turn might help females and males to be persuaded, motivated and inspired to engage in cultural and social principles that enhance gender equalities (Hlongwa, 2015). Kuria is a patriarchal society that is based on patrilineal relationships, in which males have authorised power in the community. This can be seen from the time of birth to marriage age (Wambura, 2004). For instance, when a male baby is born, the family has to do something as an indicator of the coming next of the kin of the family while nothing happens when the newborn is a baby girl. Kuria women have been marginalized in the society as they are given low respect and regarded as temporary members of the society while men appear as rulers of the family and the community and so, they exercise their power over females, no matter how aged they are.

Wambura (2018) investigated gender and language practices in female circumcision ceremonies among the Kuria in Kenya. The findings of the study show that:

Kuria female circumcision ceremonies are a site of many gendered discourses; male dominance and female subordination are legitimised through such discourses as: ‘man as provider’; ‘man as protector’; ‘woman as domestic’ and ‘woman as object’. These function as building blocks of the three main discourses, ‘proper woman discourse’; ‘economic value discourse’ and ‘power and control discourse’ in the songs and which are largely re-articulated and confirmed in the interviews (p. v).

The same cases have been seen in the gender literature, which indicates that in most African traditions in general, and the Kuria specifically for the present case, women are not given the chance to participate in decision making, and their right place is in the kitchen to prepare food for the family. The situation has never changed much today as women are still denied the decision making space they deserve, and their ideas cannot be regarded as constructive, however good they might be. Language is a very useful tool to get into the minds of the society and reveal how they conceive of their socio-cultural practices. This is also supported by the theory of gender as a practice on the concept of ‘doing gender’ by Poggio (2006). The concept of doing gender has its roots in symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology. Poggio (2006) indicated that as “the conventional and ritual dimension of gender behaviour, which he set in relation not to an essential property but interactional portrayals embedded in situated contexts” (p. 225).

The present article argues that this is socially guided which perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine. Studies by Amiri (2019), Wambura (2016) and Mhando (2014) on gender in Kuria society have mostly focused on education, gender and domestic violence, sexuality and marriage, early marriage and cultural issues. However, there is virtually no literature on women's struggle and challenges of their development economically, politically and socially in Kuria society in Tanzania. Similarly, no attempt has been made so far to see how language reveals and perpetuates gender inequalities especially as women struggle to participate in development endeavours in society. This paper is an attempt to fill this gap.

## **Discussions**

The key issues presented in this article indicate that, apart from mothering and nurturing the family, women are innovators of national development as they are very creative and ready to sacrifice. Sometimes, women have been ready to endure problems and pains inflicted on them by their male partners and in most cases, perform men's roles in the family and the community in general. To be brief, women are strong, tolerant and forward-looking. To achieve sustainable development, some changes should be done. Therefore, not only do women need to be regarded as key pioneers but also directors in their families as they also perform different activities in the family and assign to family members what they should do. Women can discharge all these responsibilities more effectively, if and only if they are respected, empowered and accepted in the family and the community in general. Apart from all the roles they play, women constitute a group that is the most discriminated against in most communities of the world and Kuria specifically. In particular, women are considered as powerless, indoors oriented and subordinate to men. This is typical of the Kuria society in which female discrimination is a common practice, although Kuria women perform many activities in their families which are not always visible. Men, on the other hand, are regarded as householders and leaders because they are the decision-makers from the family level to the national level, due to the power behind language in the society. This can be seen in performing gender aspect in the theory of gender as a practice. Butler (1990) views that:

Performing as a doing that constitutes a being; an activity that creates what it describes. Performativity (meaning a stylized repetition of acts) reifies and naturalizes the binary categories of gender and sex, producing the illusion of an interior psychological core. On this view, the body has no ontological status independently of the act, gestures and enactments that constitute it as real. Like West and Zimmerman, Butler also maintained that 'gender is always a doing', but she stressed that it is not 'a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed', because identity 'is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results' (p. 33).

This is also supported by Jaja (2015) who states that "Women participation is important in the development of their communities. No human society is complete without women. God did not stop creation until women came on board. When women are marginalized, sustainable development cannot be attained by any society" (p. 47).

Land is a very important asset in any life of a human being. However, in Kuria society, it is owned by the male gender. No matter whether a female is born or married to a certain family, they have no right to own land. In Kuria society, the final decision making is given by men. When a woman wants to contribute, she will be asked to keep quiet because there is no room for a female to rule or to control the family. The review shows that there are cultural practices that guide, control and maintain some traditional aspects for the welfare of the present and the coming generation, regardless of how oppressive they are. At the same time, some laws become obstacles to human development especially in the current era of

globalization. Language is a mirror that reflects the culture of a certain society. Ifechelobi and Ifechelobi (2017) show that:

In a male-dominated society, language is used to reflect the “women’s downgraded” social status. Women are treated as “second-hand citizens” so much so that language is used to degrade, derogate, downgrade, and maltreat widows, single mothers, and in some African societies, the female gender as a whole. Gender exclusive language presents stereotypes of both females and males but more often to the disadvantages of the female gender (p. 23).

This kind of discrimination is also explained by Wambura (2016) as stated above when examining the constructions of gender in Kuria female circumcision songs, as she argued that “men and women are constructed in a binary and gendered way” (p. 34). From a linguistic point of view, naming indicates gender discrimination. For instance, in the circumcision song for men, they are named as ‘a rock’ indicating a stone of the family while females are named as earing which indicates beauty, attractiveness, who later bring cows to the family when married; and soda ‘something which is very light’. This is also seen in Kuria proverbs which discriminate against the female gender and value the male gender. For instance, one of the Kuria proverbs states: *Tenkari ekobaha hai* ‘no female rule’, which on the surface aims to discourage women from being leaders. As Wambura (2016) states, the language “is used to admonish any woman who shows authority and power and wants to be involved in decision-making processes in the community” (p. 38). Therefore, language as one aspect of culture in Kuria tends to discriminate against the female gender through the power embedded in the language.

From the point of view of Kuria culture, females are not valued as compared to their male counterparts. Females are taken as a source of income and are not regarded as belonging to the family, but as passing from where they are born to where they will be married. Consequently, they are not allowed to own land in their families. However, some women have made efforts to overcome oppressive cultural practices especially by going to school, running away from the family to avoid forced marriages, and engaging in different activities to gain income. All these shape the contemporary attitudes of the community towards gender equality and equity, and women emancipation in that regard. Kuria women have started struggling towards their rights and for their position to be recognised in the family and society in general. One can thus see the need to support Kuria women mentally to make them aware and untie them from the outdated cultural aspects, and consequently have a new generation with new minds which can activate individual and community development.

In supporting that, the research done by TAMWA on gender violence found that gender-based violence is very common in Kuria society. The report states that:

The existence of oppressive gender-based norms and values to women and girls in Mara Region are the main problem. Mara region is governed by traditional gender-based oppressive norms and values as well as gender-based violence. They are deeply rooted and socially accepted despite the negative effects they pose to women and girls. Among the oppressive norms and values that negatively affect women and girls are Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Early Marriages, Women’s Property and Inheritance Rights. The problem is accelerated by traditional beliefs, ignorance of policymakers and law enforcers, peer pressures that humiliate young girls who do not abide by the norms and values (TAMWA)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Based on the research done by Tanzania Media Women’s Association-(TAMWA) in collaboration with No Peace without Justice (NPWJ) and AIDOS in (2002).

The Kuria women have no say even in what they produce themselves. As informed by one of the respondents, a woman was injured by her husband with a machete because she picked some maize from their farm, boiled and gave them to their kids. The husband asked, who has given her (his wife) permission to pick maize from his farm. This happened in one of the villages in Tarime Districts. It should be recalled that it was the woman who cultivated and did the weeding. From this point, one can see how tolerant women are, especially when denied to use even what they produce. This is beyond the violation of human rights.

Some efforts have been made to make women visible in development endeavours. The Government of Tanzania (1992) perceives women development as:

The integration of women in national endeavours to bring about social, economic, ideological, cultural and political liberation. The integration of women in development must be based on social justice, equality, peace, honesty, truth and mutual appreciation by ensuring that the planning and implementation of development activities, the distribution of resources and income and provision of services and important opportunities are done without gender bias (p. 7).

Despite the support given by the Tanzanian Government, international organisations, NGOs and the private sector to encourage and support women's development in their society, Kuria women are still behind and live in very low standards of living. In the Kuria society, specifically, men tend to use their power to undermine women. This is also evident in the language used in proverbs. For example, *Mokali atana robhaaraa* (a woman has no land/plot), means that a woman cannot be given a portion of land because she will be married and join another family; *Mokali atana wabho* (a woman has no home) because she is just passing; *Mumura ataghusuka wabho* (a young male cannot deny his home) because he is going to be the father of the family and the next of kin in the family.

Kuria culture is among the main factors which hold back women's struggles in all aspects, economically, politically and socially. This statement aligns with Masiaga and Namusonge (2016) who state that:

Unfortunately, efforts to attain sustainable development through women economic empowerment are continually crippled by the cultural influence which is usually discriminative against women equitable development in most societies in developing countries. In Kuria land, the situation is worse where women's development is discriminated against by culture (p. 677).

All these have become obstacles to women's effort for participation in economic, political, social development, and women empowerment in Kuria society. They have been remained as a dream due to the cultural aspects which maintain women discrimination and gender inequalities. Despite the good number of cultural studies in Kuria society, none of them investigates the effort done by Kuria women for their development, and the challenges they face in Tanzania. The present study analyses and discusses the challenges espoused in the language as part of culture.

The term "development" has various meanings in different aspects, it can be explained in different contexts. Development should be seen as progress towards complex goals such as the elimination of poverty, the provision of employment, the reduction of inequality and the guarantee of human rights (Abuiyada, 2018, p. 119). Development as a process or progress means a lot; a situation in which improvement can be done in all aspects, regarding the human life-changing from poor to a better life, by achieving new and good technology which enhances the acquisition of the human basic needs for a standard living in all stages, from the family to the national level. In any society, development can be identified in four

dimensions, namely economic, political, social and cultural dimensions. For complete development, all these should coalesce and support one another to enhance quality achievement, and this can be indicated by good/high income, education level, modern transport and accessibility of resources from family to national level.

Browne and Millington (2015) refer social development as “many of the non-economic processes and outcomes of development, including but not limited to: reduced vulnerability; inclusion; wellbeing; accountability; people-centred approaches; and freedom from violence” (p. 2). They argued that, “it is fundamentally concerned with human rights, formal and informal power relations, inequality and possibilities for building greater equality among individuals and groups within societies” (p. 2). Morris (2010) states that, “social development is the bundle of technological, subsistence, organizational endeavours; and reproduce themselves to explain the world around them, resolve disputes within their communities, extend their power at the expense of other communities, and defend themselves against others’ attempts to extend power” (p. 144). Gender inequality is seen by Browne and Millington (2015) as “unequal power relations between men and women which affect people’s ability to fully access resources, services, institutions and power that lead to human development” (p. 1).

The analysis shows power is everything and it is everywhere. Lack of power is a source of other problems. The study reveals that Kuria women lack the opportunity to participate in decision-making in their families. In Kuria society, women are powerless and have no chance to argue or to give their opinions no matter how good they are. Kuria women are regarded as having nothing in their minds and they cannot provide any constructive ideas. This is the main problem which starts from the family to the community level. It tends to demoralize their thinking capacity and makes them feel inferior to participate in all aspects as they believe that they cannot help anything in their society, hence they create a negative ideological perception that they are nothing in their society but only to be used by men, which is absolutely untrue since women are capable, genius, powerful, and full of wisdom.

The Ministry of Community Development Women Affairs and Children in the Republic of Tanzania (1992) argues that:

Despite the various steps taken, our country has not been completely successful in ensuring that women have the freedom, opportunity and respect that is enjoyed by men in economic, political, social and cultural development. One of the reasons contributing to this has been the lack of a specific policy for promoting the development of women in the country (p. 2).

This has also been revealed in Kuria society where women are not given chance to participate fully in all aspects politically, economically, and socially; not only at the community level but also in the family level. This situation demoralizes their efforts as they think more about their families. From the Ministry’s point of view, female discrimination has been exercised not only at the family level but even at the national level.

Apart from mothering and nurturing the family, Kuria women engage in economic activities to raise their income to achieve a better life. They are also involved in farming and animal keeping, handcraft and manufacturing of goods from natural resources. Through the mixed economy, they gain some income for their basic needs for their survival.

As informed by the respondents, economically, Kuria women practise crop production and animal husbandry. In terms of agriculture, Kuria women cultivate different crops such as maize, millets, sorghum, cassava, sweet potatoes, and bananas. Some of these crops are sold to earn income which might be used to cater for different needs in the family. Some of them are engaged in horticulture where they have vegetables, tomatoes, onions, carrots and



fruits for their daily needs and trading. Mara Region is among the areas which have double seasons for agricultural activities; and this also gives them chance to cultivate two times a year, which increases their products. They also practise animal keeping, such as goats, chickens, cows etc. for milk and meat. They sometimes turn them into capital and exchange them with other commodities.

Apart from being agriculturalists, Kuria women are businesswomen; they are involved in local trading 'buying and selling commodities. They also sometimes sell what they have harvested to fulfil their needs. In their daily life, they also need to buy other things for their needs which they don't get through agriculture. Therefore, through business they solve some problems which are manageable. Another business that gives them income is local alcohol, which they normally prepare for two days before selling it in clubs (local bar). They make it a routine every weekend especially on Saturdays and Sundays as people gather to drink local beer. By doing this, they earn some income which they also use for survival and solving some problems. Handicraft is also among their activities which also make them busy and earn some income. In the industry, they normally produce cultural products like pots, winnowing basket '*ungo*' and other materials. Kuria women also establish local restaurants where they prepare and sell foods in order to get money for their needs.

Politically, Kuria women are capable but due to some cultural issues, they tend to be marginalized and hence remain powerless and undermined by the male gender. Although they sometimes struggle to become leaders, they end up undermined by men. Due to gender discrimination, they organise small women groups in which they share and discuss their problems. Under this kind of organisation, there are leaders who conduct and direct others on different issues. They also initiate underground discussion on their discrimination and ways of reducing it by planning some strategies which in one way or another might help them. One of the strategies is education. They perceive education as a powerful instrument through which they can attain some higher position in any organisation. They motivate and mobilize themselves to go to school, no matter how old they are. As I have been informed, some years ago, in Kuria society there were adult education classes, and in most cases, they comprised women. In their classes, they learn a number of issues, including economic, political, social and cultural issues. However, currently, adult education centres are very few and in some places, they do not exist at all.

All in all, Kuria women have been trying to struggle for their development, no matter the many obstacles they face in attaining their development. There is a need to ensure that the needs for women development are fulfilled to allow sustained development among women and to society in general.

Kuria society is still controlled by traditions, norms and cultures which seem to be against poverty eradication effort. The first and most challenging is gender discrimination. As stated by Shastri (2014) "Gender discrimination is the prejudicial treatment of an individual or group due to gender. Gender discrimination is not biologically defined but rather socially constructed through norms, culture, people, who create the atmosphere of gender discrimination" (p. 27). The present article argues that Women discrimination in Kuria Society has been armored by various institutions, such as, legal organizations, socio-cultural, economic, political and religious practise all emphasize women's discrimination from the families to the community level. Thus, restrict Women's right to use the resources.

Kuria culture does not allow women to inherit resources especially land and own property. As also stated by Masiaga and Namusonge (2016), "women are usually restricted to household duties and are not the providers of the household needs. Inheritance usually passes from father to son in a patrilineal pattern" (p. 677). This has been a problem in the

family. When a woman bears children of the female gender, they should continue bearing kids until they have males, and if the woman will not be able to make it, the man will marry another wife. He will not stop marrying new ones until when he gets the male gender. This preference may be related to such cultures as raiding cattle from neighbours, which cannot be achieved by females. All in all, this indicates that Kuria men need education on the reproduction process. It seems that they are not even aware of how reproduction takes place. This kind of situation shows directly that females are not valued in the Kuria society as are males.

### **Measures to be taken by Kuria Society towards Women Development**

In general, cultural practices need to be considered to foster women's emancipation and participation in development matters. For instance, women are not allowed to participate in decision making and planning at the family level. This is also reflected in the language use; as one proverb goes: *Tenkari ekobaha hai* 'no female rule'. These are outdated norms and traditions which should be abandoned to provide a ground for women to participate in other essential aspects for their benefit and the community in general. This will help them to give and speak up their ideas and opinions from the family to the community level. The government should ensure women's participation in decision making at different levels, and more specifically the Kuria women. This will give them chance to decide what they think is good and essential for the community development and to the nation in general. They will use the chance to create some laws which are against gender oppression and discrimination against females. This will also support young girls and protect them against early and forced marriages and insist on good and quality education for sustainable development.

Another aspect is inheritance and ownership of properties; for instance, women are not allowed to inherit land or any assets in the family. They are regarded as having no home, and they can thus go and live anywhere. In Kuria society, there are some proverbs that undermine women by showing that things are culturally prohibited for the woman to be counted as a family member. i.e. *Mokali atana wabho* (a woman has no home because she is just passing); *Mokali atana robhaaraa* (a woman cannot be given a portion of land because she will be married and join another family). Kuria women have no right to own land and other properties because males think that if they allow them to have full authority on them and hence become planners, implementers and supervisors of activities in the society, they will eventually become leaders. The male gender in Kuria society believes that no women can rule men, which is among outdated ideologies which should be abandoned.

The government should ensure women's economic empowerment and development in society and the nation in general. The government should also allow them to be stakeholders and directors on different issues related to their development such as being given a higher position in Government. They should be given chances to initiate various projects, implement and supervise them to gain good profits and consequently solve their problems for their survival and the survival of the next generation.

Education is among the essential women's development needs. This is because education makes someone wise and a critical thinker. This also allows individuals to have a wider chance for participation from the society to the national level. Education also makes individuals aware and wake up their minds towards what is going around them and solves their problems. Education can act as a catalyst of changes in a woman mindset.

Financial support should also be extended to women to foster their development; different organisations both governmental and private should find a way to support not only Kuria women but all women in Tanzania, to ensure their full participation in different aspects of the family and national development. The main areas of support include the establishment of economic projects from which they can earn income and reduce poverty, good and quality

education, good medical care and treatment when they need it because daily activities need a healthy human resource.

Lastly, the Government should allow women to participate in policymaking. This will help them to create good policies which will allow them to have full power in decision making from family to National level, authority/power to inherit the land and other properties within the family.

## Conclusion

The findings have revealed that language, gender and culture are interconnected and they cannot be separated. Language is not simply the reproducing tools for expression thoughts but rather is itself the shaper of thought/ideas, the platform and guide for the individual's mental action, for the scrutiny of impressions. This article has discussed the experiences of Kuria women and their struggles for development, the challenges they face economically, politically, socially and culturally, and the measures to be taken. All these show that Kuria women are ready to attain sustainable development but some cultural issues hinder their development and hence make them powerless and irresponsible to the family and the community. The study also reveals that in Kuria society, there are still outdated traditional practices that should be abolished and hence provide the ground for women's full participation in the national development in all aspects, i. e., economic, political, social and cultural matters. The Tanzania government should intervene in some cultural issues to save Kuria women and wake up their minds so that they are aware of the cultural issues which basically undermine the female gender.

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