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**GENDER DISPARITIES AND SUSTAINABLE WILDLIFE ECOSYSTEM: A CASE OF MAASAI MARA
CONSERVANCIES NAROK COUNTY, KENYA**

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ABSTRACT

Gender equity and women's empowerment are prerequisites to effective biodiversity conservation, climate action and meeting the Sustainable Development Goals. In view of its ecological, social and economic value, wildlife is an important renewable natural resource. Its significance is felt in areas such as rural development, land-use planning, food supply, tourism, scientific research and cultural heritage. A better understanding of the different roles, knowledge, needs and aspirations of women and men with regard to wildlife management and conservation can help us achieve the twin goals of better conservation outcomes and increased gender equity. This study aimed at assessing the gender disparities and sustainable wildlife ecosystem in conservancies within Maasai Mara ecosystem, Narok County, Kenya with an aim of coming up with the best strategies to enhance gender responsive and sustainable wildlife ecosystem. The study was carried out in four Maasai Mara wildlife conservancies. Descriptive survey and sequential explanatory mixed method approach were adopted for the study. A sample size of 167 respondents comprising of wildlife managers, conservancy landowners and conservancy rangers participated in the study. Data collection was done using questionnaires, Focused Group discussion and interviews. The data collected quantitatively was analyzed using descriptive statistics and the findings were presented using percentages, graphs and tables. The findings showed that there were gender dimensions in wildlife ecosystem destruction in Maasai Mara ecosystem. Women were underrepresented as staff, wildlife managers and beneficiaries in payment for ecosystem benefits in conservancies. The study recommends that the wildlife conservancies, institutions and managers should incorporate more women into wildlife management and conservation projects as well as employ gender advocacy and empowerment programmes to facilitate gender equity and sustainable wildlife ecosystems.

Key words: Gender, Disparities, Sustainable wildlife ecosystems, Conservancy

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality and women's empowerment is a prerequisite to effective conservation, climate action and meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). International agreements on biodiversity (CBD), sustainable development (Agenda 2030) and most recently climate change (the Paris Agreement) present new opportunities for engaging both men and women and accelerating equitable action. From Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) processes to biodiversity strategies and climate change gender action plans (ccGAPs). Governments, businesses and civil society are now embracing gender-responsive solutions to address the world's most pressing development challenges, (IUCN, 2018).

In view of its ecological, social and economic value, wildlife is an important renewable natural resource. Its significance is felt in areas such as rural development, land-use planning, food supply, tourism, scientific research and cultural heritage, (FAO,2017). A better understanding of the different roles, knowledge, needs and aspirations of women and men with regard to natural resources can help us achieve the twin goals of better conservation outcomes and increased gender equity. Since the development of wildlife management and conservation initiatives one wonders to what extent both men and women are involved in the management and conservation of wildlife as a natural resource. Therefore, the need to investigate the gender representations in wildlife management and conservation in Maasai Mara ecosystem, Narok County.

Historically, higher participation rates of men in various wildlife activities, as well as traditional employment patterns, may account for the substantially greater numbers of men working in wildlife and other natural resource professions. However, a study by Torres-Cruz and McElwee (2012), explained how treating illegal wildlife poaching and trade in a gender-blind way and failure to incorporate women in wildlife related crimes at decision making and investigations may prevent understanding the issues fully and finding more effective solutions because wildlife crimes are highly gendered activities. There is a need of assessing gender disparities in wildlife management and conservation so as to design gender responsive wildlife management and conservation policies and strategies for sustainable ecosystems.

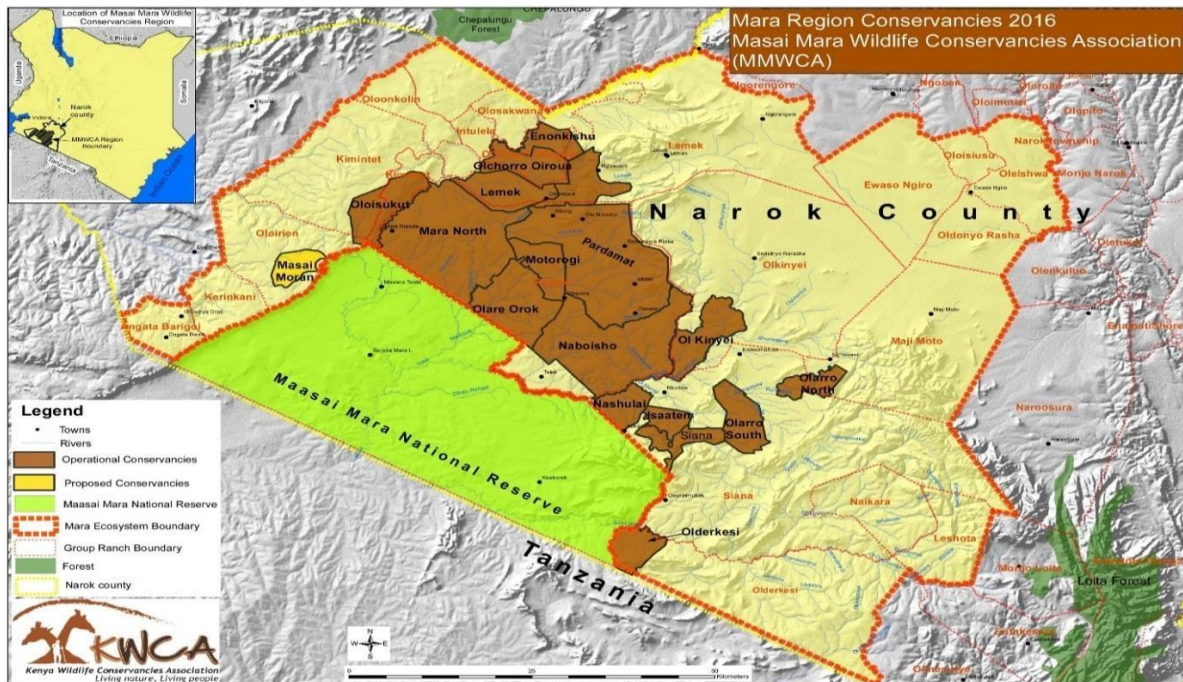
There is a long history of community based conservation (CBC) throughout Africa, but in Kenya a new and important group of initiatives known as conservancies has emerged over recent years. Despite their growing importance there have been few attempts to evaluate the outcomes of conservancy establishment, (Keane, Kaelo, Gurd, Said, Rowcliffe and Homewood (2016). Thus a critical need to come up with gender disaggregated data on wildlife management and conservation for sustainable wildlife conservation interventions. It is thus essential to keep the changing patterns of gender relations in wildlife management and conservation under continual examination, to monitor the extent to which progress is being made towards gender emancipation and to interrogate the adequacy of prevailing strategies towards this goal (IUCN,2018), hence the current study.

Statement of the Problem

Establishment of wildlife conservancies creates potential local level partnerships for improving wildlife management and addressing gender inequalities in wildlife management and conservation for sustainable wildlife ecosystems. Despite their growing importance the attempts that have tried to evaluate the outcomes of conservancy establishment, are limited in their ability to unveil the gender disparities in wildlife management and conservation. This therefore makes it difficult for any intervention focusing on gender equity in wildlife management and conservation to know which direction to reinforce. There is therefore a critical need to come up with gender disaggregated data and gender analytical information on wildlife management and conservation for sustainable wildlife conservation interventions hence this study.

Study Area

The study was conducted in selected conservancies in Maasai Mara ecosystem, Narok County, Kenya. The Maasai Mara National Reserve ecosystem covers 1,510 km² in south-western Kenya. It is the northern-most section of the Mara-Serengeti ecosystem, which covers 25,000 km² (9,700 sq mi) in Tanzania and Kenya. It is bordered by the Serengeti Park to the south, the Siria escarpment to the west, and Maasai pastoral ranches to the north, east and west. The Talek and Mara rivers are the major rivers draining the reserve. Shrubs and trees fringe most drainage lines and cover hill slopes and hilltops. The terrain of the reserve is primarily open grassland with seasonal riverlets. The long rains occur from March-June, followed by the dry season from July-October while the short rains fall during November-December, and a short dry season finishes off the year. The Altitude of Maasai Mara is: 1500-2180m; Rainfall: 83mm/month; Temperature range: 12-30°C.



Map of Maasai Mara conservancies

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender Representation in Wildlife Management and Conservation Institutions

Biodiversity conservation and management practices are social processes in which women and men across various classes, castes, ages, occupations, and power groups are important actors in helping to conserve, manage, and use biodiversity in a sustainable way (Leach,2007,FAO,2017).Therefore, diverse elements of gender analysis such as gender roles, responsibilities, and division of labor, gender relations of power, and rights, ownership, access to, and control over, biodiversity are useful in analyzing the gender differentials embedded in biodiversity conservation and management practices. Most studies of men vs. women wildlife-related recreation globally have found higher participation rates among men in institutions of conservation. This contrast is especially striking when activities involve consumptive use, for example, hunting, trapping, or fishing (Hendee and Potter ,1971; Schole ,1973; Bryan ,1979; Boddicker, 1980).

Historically, higher participation rates of men in various wildlife activities, as well as traditional employment patterns, may account for the substantially greater numbers of men working in wildlife and other natural resource professions. However, a study by Torres-Cruz and McElwee (2012), explained how treating illegal wildlife poaching and trade in a gender-blind way and failure to incorporate women in wildlife related crimes at decision making and investigations may prevent understanding the issues fully and finding more effective solutions. This is because wildlife crimes are highly gendered activities. Thus there is a need of assessing the gender disparities in wildlife management and conservation so as to come up with gender responsive wildlife management and conservation policies and strategies for sustainable biodiversity.

Westermann (2005) found that women's participation in natural resource management groups across 20 countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia increased collaboration, solidarity and conflict resolution in groups. It also increased groups' ability for self-sustaining collective action but noted that women participation was less compared with that of men. In India, for instance, women are poorly represented at the decision-making level, and even if they participate in discussions about wildlife management, their power was limited due to the social and cultural settings (Douma, 2002). Chetri (2008) also argued that the importance of gender is not recognized to the same extent in protected area policy.

For example, the Department of National Parks and Wildlife (DNPWC) in Nepal India does not keep track of the number of women participating in buffer zone management. As at 2011, there had been only one woman on a buffer zone management committee, who happened to be the chair (personal communication, DNPWC staff member). The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) recognizes the role of people, especially women and indigenous peoples, in the conservation and sustainable use of biological resources (UNDP, 2007). It also affirms the need for the meaningful participation of women at all levels of policy-making for biodiversity conservation (UNDP,2012, FAO,2010). However, critics point out that merely mentioning women in CBD documents is not enough to strengthen their access to biological diversity (Momsen, 2007). There is hence a need of evaluating the existing strategies on gender responsive wildlife management and conservation.

In Africa, women rangers in Virunga national park in Congo and the Black Mamba Anti-Poaching women rangers of Balule national reserve in South Africa are excellent examples of gender inclusion in wildlife management. Since its inception in 2013 the Black mamba women rangers have reduced snaring and poaching in Balule national reserve to a large extent (UNDP 2012). This study hence sought to interrogate and document the gender representations in the selected conservancies and wildlife institutions in Maasai Mara ecosystem. Among the vhavenda people of Zimbabwe, dialogue inclusiveness and complementarily among men and women in management of natural resources were the major pillars that helped to sustain ecological systems at the same time benefiting the human race, (Manuku, 2013). Ogra argues that experience and attitudes relating to the gendered used of space in conservation areas must not be overlooked (Ogra, 2008, 2012). This position is supported by Gnyawali (2011) whose case-study research in the Khata Community in Nepal, India has demonstrated the advantages of working with communities in a gender inclusive way in order to reconcile the needs of both humans and wildlife within a conservation setting. Similarly, support for a gender approach to biodiversity conservation is provided by Rajasekharan Pillai and Suchintha (2006) in their study of women self-help groups in the Periyar Tiger Reserve in the Kerala where groups of women regularly patrol the forests to discourage illegal entry and control biomass extraction. Therefore, there was a need to establish the adequateness of the gender representations in wildlife management and conservation in Kenyan wildlife ecosystems.

The TRY Oyster Women's Association is an almost exclusively female Producer association with exclusive rights to the cockle and oyster fishery within the Tanbi Wetlands National Park (TWNP) area of The Gambia on Africa's West Coast. The project has resulted, not only in restoration of the oyster stocks through the establishment and enforcement of an optimal harvest season and size limits for harvested oysters, but also in the reforestation of local mangroves, thereby impacting positively on the conservation of marine forest biodiversity. It provides a valuable example of a gender aware approach to conservation which ensures that measures to regulate the harvesting of a common pool resource are drawn up and agreed upon together with representatives of the communities whose livelihoods depend on it, Antipode (2012). Maasai Mara ecosystem is a common pool resource for the Maasai community whose livelihoods depend on it. For this wildlife ecosystem to be sustained, a gender awareness approach to wildlife conservation is critical.

A study by Sayuni (2016) on impacts of protected areas (PAs) on gender, Tanzania indicated variations between the two PAs studied. In the Enduimet wildlife management area, men and women have access to natural resources for household use, and derive some direct and indirect benefits from tourism activities, while in the Kilimanjaro National Park, resource access is denied and local tourism benefits are minimal. The PAs impact both men and women, but the most significant impact is felt by women due to inequality in the gendered division of labour and resources at the household level. Further, poor men and women are stricken more severely since they lack livelihood and subsistence alternatives. In addition, women in female-headed households are affected more than their counterparts in male-headed households. The study also found that the PAs' attempt at benefit sharing as compensation for resource restrictions does not meet the felt needs of men and women. The PAs have aggravated people's workloads and risks, instead of addressing community interests, paying attention to relevant livelihood needs, or improving wellbeing. This study therefore suggested strategies for a gender responsive wildlife management and conservation which can be replicated in conservancies in Africa with similar characteristics for sustainable wildlife conservation.

There is a long history of CBC throughout Africa, but in Kenya a new and important group of initiatives known as conservancies has emerged over recent years. Despite their growing importance there have been few attempts to evaluate the outcomes of conservancy establishment, (Keane et.al.2016). Thus a critical need to come up with gender disaggregated data on wildlife management and conservation for sustainable wildlife conservation interventions. It is thus essential to keep the changing patterns of gender relations in wildlife management and conservation under continual examination, to monitor the extent to which progress is being made towards gender emancipation and to interrogate the adequacy of prevailing strategies towards this goal.

Theoretical Framework

This study was grounded upon feminist political ecology theory. Feminist political ecology (FPE) emerged in the 1990s as a subfield of political ecology, building on previous Work by feminist scholars, and feminist theorists. Feminist political-ecology was developed by (Rocheleau, 1995,) The approach has extended "the multiple scale analysis of environment and power in political ecology to gendered relations both within and beyond the house-hold, from individual to national scales".

The theory demonstrates that gender is an important element in influencing access to resources, knowledge, and control over natural resources. This study thus adopted this gender-based political-ecology approach in analyzing biodiversity conservation and management issues. Access to, control over, and ownership of natural resources such as biodiversity resources and land are negotiated within and between households, and therefore gender and household relations are a focal point through which the relations of production are studied.

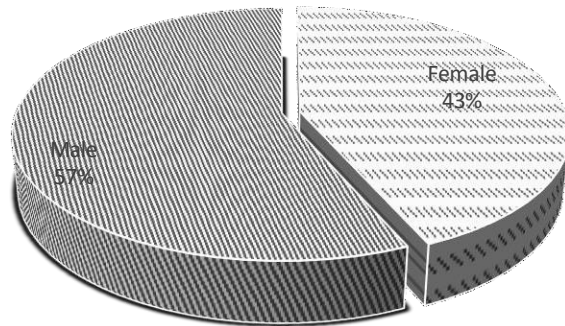
METHODOLOGY

The research design for this study was descriptive research. Orodho (2009) states that a descriptive research design is suitable where the study seeks to describe and portray characteristics of an event, situation, and a group of people, community or population as it is. Since descriptive research allows for a multifaceted approach to data collection and analysis, sequential explanatory mixed method approach was used to guide the data collection and analysis process of the study. This approach is characterized by collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by a collection and analysis of qualitative data. The fundamental principle of mixed method approach is that the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches provides a better understanding of the problem than either approach can achieve alone (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Gender of the Respondents (Wildlife Managers)

The study established that 57% of the respondents were men while 43% were women. This can be interpreted to mean that there were more men than women working in the wildlife management and conservation institutions as staff and even as wildlife managers. The findings are presented in Figure 1 below.



a) Gender of the Participants (Conservancy Landowners)

The total number of the conservancy land owners that participated in the FGD were 128. Out of these only 10 representing (7.81%) were women and the rest 118 representing 92.1% were men. This disparity can be attributed to land ownership as majority of the women do not own land in the Maasai community.

Gender of the Informants (Rangers)

The number of rangers who participated in the study were 16 of which 2 were women and 14 were men. This can be represented as 12.5% women and 87.5% men. Although Kenya wildlife service has played a great role in employing women rangers nationally, a lot needs to be done in mainstreaming gender in the recruitment patterns in the Maasai Mara conservancies.

Gender Representations in Selected Wildlife Management and Conservation institutions in Maasai Mara

Gender Representations among wildlife managers

Figure 1 above displays the analysis of men and women wildlife managers who were sampled for this study. According to the analysis, 57% of the respondents were men while 43% were women. The study further probed on the gender representations in the respective departments where the sampled respondents' worked. This was done in order to get a deeper understanding of the other staff working in wildlife management and conservation institutions. The sampled respondents were asked to give the number of the staff who work in their respective departments in terms of the gender composition. They were also asked to give the number of men and women who work in the management/supervisory level in their respective departments. The responses were tabulated below.

Table 1: Gender representations of the staff in the sampled wildlife institutions

	N	Max	Sum	%
Women staff in the department	23	8	63	22.5
Men staff in the department	23	20	217	77.5
Women in management level in your department	23	3	28	24.5
Men in management level in your department	23	8	86	75.4
Valid N (list wise)	23			

From the table above, the responses revealed that the total number of men staff in the departments of wildlife management and conservation where the sampled respondents worked was 217 which comprises 77.5%. The responses further revealed that the women staff who were working in wildlife conservation institutions where the sampled respondents worked was 63 in number which represents 22.5%.

The study further interrogated on the number of men and women who worked in the management level in the various departments that the sampled respondents worked. The responses as shown in table 1 above shows that men in the management level were 86 in number in the sampled institutions of wildlife conservation which represents 75.4% whereas women in the management level were 28 in number which represents 24.5%. This reveals a wide gap of disparity in staff working in wildlife conservation institutions as well as those holding managerial and decision making levels in these institutions. This study hence concurs with the feminine political ecology theory discussed earlier on which argues that gender is considered to be a critical factor in “shaping resource access, and control, interacting with class, caste, race, culture and ethnicity to shape processes of ecological change. The findings mean that existing strategies to enhance gender responsive wildlife management and conservation are inadequately implemented in hiring and promotion processes in wildlife management and conservation institution.

The slow transition in wildlife management and conservation equity can be explained by Lopez and Scott (2000), who argued that social and organization structures influence the human resource and social processes leading to division of labor and related gender differentials. Social structures comprise the patterns of social interaction thereby influencing the primary and secondary socialization at the family and at workplace respectively. Socialization is the transmission of social norms, values and role expectations to the members of the society within socializing agencies such as the family, the education system, and the workplace. The socialization process leads to gendered division of labor, as women and men learn their gender role expectations. The division of labour is transferred to other institutions leading to gender differentials and inequalities in wildlife management and conservation institutions.

The findings from the informants (rangers) also revealed that women were underrepresented among the scouts and rangers employed by the wildlife conservancies in Maasai Mara. They argued that most of the women could not make it as rangers due to fear of wildlife especially the dangerous ones and that domestic work such as caring for children, grazing cows and cleaning activities restricted women from seeking employment.

One-man ranger for example explained that:

The women cannot do the work we men rangers do. This is a risky job especially when the animals become wild and women do not know the tricks of escaping and running. Even the few women rangers we have are left behind to guard the camps, they don't go to patrol. (OI Martin*, 29/6/2019).

They also added that most men could not allow their wives to seek employment in wildlife conservancies as rangers since they regarded this job as a man's domain. Further, they concluded that women rangers could not make good wives as they will be very aggressive and this may destabilize their homes.

A woman working as ranger elaborated this by saying:

Most of the tourist camps and lodges that are in these conservancies are far from our residential homes because the game reserve is so wide. If you happen to get a job, as a woman you will be needed to stay in the staff houses which most of the men will not condone. If you decide to go very early, it is not safe because of wild animals roaming all over. Most married women decide to let men go as they are left behind to take care of children and cattle. She added that the ranger job requires a lady who is not married because she is not under any external authority (OI Nalinkunkera*, 29/6/2019).

Boone and Galvin (2014) argue that environmental education is an important tool to improve attitudes related to wildlife. For instance, education through direct experiences, such as visits to protected areas by local residents, can be a valuable learning tool. Particularly in the case of women, such visits can help reduce the participants' fear of wildlife and increase their support for the conservation of species that they rarely see or may view negatively due to human wildlife conflict. Further research in Maasai Mara ecosystem needs to be done to evaluate the adequateness of environmental education in fostering gender responsive wildlife management and conservation. The findings from the informants have also revealed some form of cultural stereotypes in wildlife conservation roles in that women who work as rangers are labelled aggressive hence cannot make good women. This confirms Keane et.al. (2016) findings which supported that women have fewer opportunities to participate in making environmental decisions due to cultural stereotypes that devalue women opinions. As a result, their perceptions and interests are sometimes ignored or excluded when policies are designed. The absence of opportunities is often due to reproductive work, cultural restrictions, women's lack of schooling and low self-esteem. The findings confirms that nothing much has changed in Maasai Mara ecosystem in terms of penetrating the cultural seal to awaken the Maasai community on the benefits of gender responsive wildlife management and conservation.

Additionally, the participants (landowners) discussed that all the conservancies were managed by land owners committee (LOC) that was elected by the land owners themselves. They however stated that women were underrepresented as land owners in all the conservancies. The reasons given for this was that majority of the women did not own land in Maasai Mara. Further probing also revealed that those women who owned land in Maasai Mara were either windowed or were empowered economically.

The study further interrogated whether the differentials in terms of prevalence of men and women in wildlife institutions impacted on the wildlife ecosystems. The responses were tabulated below:

Impact of gender differentials in prevalence of men and women on wildlife ecosystem

Question	Responses	F	%	men	wom	both
Do the gender differentials above impact on this wildlife ecosystem in any way? Identify the major actors in the listed factors	Resistance to conservation initiatives	6	26			
	Destruction of trees in the conservancies	4	17			
	Increased wildlife trade	4	17			
	Illegal cattle grazing	5	22			

Most of the respondents i.e.26% noted that there was resistance to conservation initiatives by women in the conservancies. Destruction of trees by both men and women for charcoal and firewood was also revealed by 17% of the respondents. Other 17% recorded that there were increased cases of wildlife trade whose actors were both men and women. Lastly, 22% of the wildlife managers unveiled that illegal cattle grazing in the conservancies was majorly a women activity. From the above findings, all the listed activities have a detrimental effect on the wildlife ecosystem. The results have also confirmed that women are also core actors in wildlife ecosystem destruction contrary to (Leach,2007) findings that men are major culprits of ecosystem threats and form the majority globally in consumptive use of wildlife.

Destruction of trees for example will lead to wildlife habitat loss. Wildlife trade on the other hand is a global disaster which is threatening existence of wild animals. Illegal cattle grazing leads to competition for pasture among wildlife and cattle and may cause migration of wildlife to other countries. Nellemann, (2016) in his study found out that women have creative and powerful ways to negotiate, contest, resist, and create room to maneuver in their struggles over biodiversity resources. Resistance to conservation initiatives could be one way in which women in Maasai Mara ecosystem are struggling to lift up their voices of inclusion in wildlife conservation.

The study further concurs with McElwee (2012), who explained how treating illegal wildlife poaching and trade in a gender-blind way and failure to incorporate women in wildlife related crimes at decision making and investigations may prevent understanding the issues fully and finding more effective solutions. Underrepresentation of women in management of wildlife resources is an issue of critical concern that can put sustainable wildlife habitat in Maasai Mara ecosystem at stake. Wildlife tourism is central to the economy of Narok County and is stipulated as the second economic pillar in the Kenya vision 2030 that will lead to attainment of Sustainable development goals (SDG). All these may fail to be achieved as envisaged if timely gender responsive interventions are not implemented in Maasai Mara ecosystem. The findings from land owners and rangers also concurred that women were major actors in ecosystem destruction despite the existing myth that men are major culprits. They also cited that this could be as a result of women not being held accountable since they were underrepresented in wildlife institutions.

One ranger for example lamented that:

Women have made our work in these conservancies very difficult at times. When you find them with firewood, you cannot stop them, you cannot beat them like the way we beat men culprits. When you find them grazing they lament that the cattle strayed. They are even less suspected of serious crimes in this ecosystem yet they are directly or indirectly involved. (OI Morompi*, 29/6/2019).

The above statement confirms that women are also major actors in wildlife crimes but they are less suspected. It is also evident that women are also favored by law and the rangers as they are less severely punished or just left unpunished for gendered use of resources such as firewood and grass in the conservancies.

CONCLUSIONS

The study's objective was to establish the gender disparities in wildlife management and conservation and sustainable wildlife ecosystem. This was analyzed with indicators such as number of men and women in wildlife management and conservation institutions and those in the management and decision making level in wildlife conservation institutions. The study also further probed on those who managed the conservancies at the community level and how the wildlife managers were selected at local/community level. The study found that men were more represented in the wildlife management and conservation institutions as workers and occupy majority of the management positions. The study also revealed that men dominated the rangers jobs in the conservancies as was evident in some conservancies where there were no women rangers at all. Further probing noted that the community labelled rangers job as a man domain and women who ventured into it were considered hard headed/aggressive and not fit for home making. Among the landowners, women were also underrepresented and men comprised the majority. The reasons for this disparity was that very few women owned land in Maasai Mara as compared to their men counterparts.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY

While the government gender policy, SDGs, Kenya constitution 2010 and the Kenya wildlife act 2013 have been formulated, ratified and enacted, gender disparities continue to persist in natural resource management. This is because policy and legal frameworks cannot bring out gender equity unless they are properly communicated, implemented, enforced and institutionalized. This study recommends that the governmental and non-governmental organizations to revisit the policies and legal frameworks aforementioned so as to ensure they are effectively put into practice in wildlife management and conservation institutions. This calls for an evaluation Programme to address all the conformities and non-conformities with a purpose of implementing sustainable changes.

The study also recommends gender disaggregated data in all wildlife management and conservation institutions so that it becomes easier to track the non-conformities and rectify. This is because without this data, wildlife management and conservation institutions cannot know where to reinforce and the course of action to be taken. Hiring and recruitment personnel will not know the group that has a deficit and the one that is overrepresented.

Based on the research findings, it is recommended that wildlife management and conservation institutions give a fresh look on addressing the issue of gender equity in wildlife management and conservation. This is because women have been depicted to have fewer opportunities than men in wildlife management and conservation. This overall puts the sustainability of wildlife conservation initiatives at stake as both men and women are actors in both wildlife conservation and wildlife destruction. The study for example revealed some forms of wildlife conservation threats in the conservancies such as charcoal burning, overgrazing and crop cultivation. This depicts a shift in focus by the groups that benefit less or those that do not benefit at all from the conservation initiatives. It is against this that gender considerations in wildlife management need to be given a fresh look vis a vis the current situation.

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