

## ABSTRACT

This study sought to examine a history of women's labour in food crop production in Samia Sub-county, Kenya from 1895 to 2010. While food crop production in agricultural sector remains the main source of income for rural households during this period with women as the main participants, development processes seem to have marginalized women in this sector affecting their productivity and access to resources such as land thus the need to examine women's labour conditions in food crop production in Samia for which limited studies have been conducted. The study examined the forms of women's labour in food crop production in Samia on the eve of Colonial period, investigated the nature and trends of women's labour in food crop production in Samia during the Colonial period and assessed the developments in women's labour in food crop production in Samia in the post-Colonial period. The gendered theory was used to analyze the data as a framework for understanding the nature of women's participation in food crop production in Samia. Purposively, the study was conducted in two wards in Samia, namely Ageng'a/Nanguba and Namboboto/Nambuku through historical research design. Based on this design, interviews were conducted to a sampled population in the 10 sub-locations selected randomly. A total of 76 informants both men and women of varying ages were interviewed. The study relied on semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews, and Focus Group Discussions to acquire primary data from the sampled respondents. Other data sources such as archives were used to obtain relevant primary information. Secondary information was collected through a review of books, journals and internet, dissertations, theses, and government records. The data was analyzed qualitatively with thematic and content analysis being used to develop a comprehensive description of data under study. Guided by specific research questions and objectives, the study found out that during the pre-colonial times, Samia women focused more on food crop production rather than cash crop farming because farm labour was differentiated by gender and type of commodity produced. In the Colonial period, the study established that changes in the security of land, provision of labour and promotion of cash crops impacted on the production of food crops. The alienation of Samia land, consolidation and individual registration greatly affected people's access to productive land. This was, however, gendered, mostly affecting women because of the existence of patriarchal system which undermined women's tenure rights. Gender division of labour had changed over the years and was particularly enhanced by the migrant labour system. While in the post-Colonial period; Change in both land and labour organization affected the decision-making process on the type of food crops that were cultivated in Samia. There was shift from dependence on indigenous crops like millet, sorghum, cassava, and traditional maize to more market-oriented crops like modern maize, kale, sunflower, groundnuts, and rice. However, the study noted that though Samia women continued to provide most labour, they did not remain passive victims of patriarchal control, since they engaged in productive activities such as food-related trades to make of their own money. Based on the results of the findings, the study constitutes an important body of knowledge for policy formulation in agriculture in addressing issues affecting women in food crop production and for scholars in identifying the gaps that have not been filled in their studies. The study recommends that in order to improve the contribution of women in food crop production in Samia, there is need to improve reliable access and control to land, a basic resource of production devoid of patriarchal limitations placed by traditions.