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## **Factors Affecting Socio-Economic Status of the Residents of Mbeere North; Embu County Kenya**

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# Factors Affecting Socio-Economic Status of the Residents of Mbeere North; Embu County Kenya

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## Abstract

Mbeere North, a rural constituency in Embu County, Kenya, faces significant socio-economic challenges despite its potential for agricultural productivity and resource utilization. The region, inhabited predominantly by the Mbeere community and characterized by diverse ethnic groups, suffers from inadequate infrastructure, limited access to quality healthcare and education, and a reliance on subsistence farming. These issues are exacerbated by environmental degradation and climate change, leading to high poverty rates and economic instability. This study assessed the socio-economic status of Mbeere North's residents by identify the factors influencing their well-being. The research employed a descriptive design, targeting a sample of 150 residents, including households, community leaders, business owners, and providers of education and healthcare. Data collection methods included questionnaires and interviews, with a focus on key areas such as infrastructure, health, education, and economic activities. The findings revealed a population with low levels of education, limited healthcare access, and average monthly household incomes of KES 15,000. Infrastructure development is rated moderately, with significant variability in perceptions among respondents. The theoretical framework integrated Gary Becker's Human Capital Theory and Structural Functionalism. The paper presents analysis of descriptive statistics on socio-economic indicators, alongside the results of regression analysis. This analysis sheds light on the relationships between various independent variables, including education, health, economy, infrastructure, social services, and welfare, and the dependent variable, socio-economic status. Regression analysis revealed a strong positive correlation between the independent variables (education, healthcare, and infrastructure) and socio-economic status, with an R value of 0.75 and an R Square of 0.5625. In conclusion, Mbeere North requires targeted interventions to improve infrastructure, diversify agriculture, and enhance healthcare and education services. Recommendations include promoting agro-processing industries, investing in modern farming techniques, and developing eco-tourism. These strategies are essential for fostering economic growth, improving living standards, and achieving sustainable development in the region.

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**Keywords:** *Effects of Socio-Economic Status on the Residents of Mbeere North; Embu County Kenya.*

## **1.0 Introduction**

Five Sub-Counties make up the Embu County namely Mbeere North, Mbeere South, Embu North, Embu East, and Embu West. Mbere, which means first, is the location from which the term "Mbeere" is derived. As a result, the Mbeere identify as the original inhabitants of the regions to the South and East of Mount Kenya (andu an mbere). The Mbeere people first came into contact with early Kenyan settlers in 1849 when Dr. Johann Krapf discovered them purchasing poison from the Akamba to be used as arrowheads (Mwaniki, 1973).

One of the constituencies of Kenya's Embu County; Mbeere North is mostly rural and encompasses an area in the Eastern half of the county. North to Tharaka Nithi County, South to Mbeere South Constituency, West to Kirinyaga County, and East to Machakos County are the borders of Mbeere North. The population of the constituency is diverse, with the Mbeere community- a subgroup of the Embu ethnic group making up the majority of the population. People from various ethnic backgrounds are also included in the population, according to Embu County Government (2020).

In Mbeere North, agriculture is the primary economic activity. Crops grown by local farmers include fruits, beans, bananas, and maize. Growing livestock is also practiced which includes typical goats, cattle, and poultry. Local businesses and commerce on a small-scale help to maintain the local economy. Over time, Mbeere North has observed progressions in its infrastructure, such as the construction of road networks that connect different regions of the constituency to nearby towns and markets. There are still challenges such as impassable road conditions during the rainy period. Regarding healthcare and education, the local populace is aided by schools and medical amenities situated inside the community. Though more can be done, efforts are underway to intensify access to high-quality healthcare and education. The people of Mbeere North continue to perceive a diversity of customs, including dances, ceremonies, and traditional activities. Cultural heritage preservation and promotion are crucial components of community development. Similar to other Kenyan seats, Mbeere North is politically represented by a Member of Parliament (MP) who represents the constituency's concerns before the federal government through Embu County Government (2020).

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Sub-county Mbeere North in Kenya's Embu County is affected by solemn socioeconomic glitches that impend both the growth and wellbeing of the local population. Although the region has the possibility of being industrious in farming and in the use of natural resources, it is still categorized by high rates of deficiency, deprived infrastructure, constrained access to high-quality healthcare and education, and a dependence on subsistence farming for economic purposes. The effects of climate alteration and environmental deprivation worsen these problems.

## **1.2 Research Objective**

To assess the factors affecting socio-economic status of the residents in Mbeere North, Embu County, Kenya.

### 1.3 Research Question

Which factors affects the socio -economic status of the residents in Mbeere North, Embu County, Kenya?

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework for studying the socio-economic status of Mbeere North, Embu County, Kenya, would involve integrating various theories and concepts to explain how different factors influence the socio-economic conditions of the residents. Here's a comprehensive outline:

*Gary Becker*, Nobel laureate, is associated with the Human Capital Theory, which has roots in older economists Alfred Marshall and Adam Smith, who also focused on human capital. Nevertheless, Becker is credited with formalizing and evolving the theory to a great level, significantly continuing our knowledge of the association between human capital investments such as schooling, training and economic advancement and efficiency. G. S. Becker (1964). A theoretical and empirical analysis of human capital.

By developing the notion of human capital, Gary Becker's fundamental work "Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis, with Special Reference to Education" transformed the field of economics. The 1964 book examines the notion that, similar to how businesses invest in physical capital, people can invest in themselves to increase productivity and earning potential through health care, education, and training. Becker (1964). A theoretical and empirical analysis of human capital.

Becker's theory suggests that human capital, like physical capital, should be considered an asset, with investments in education and training potentially yielding higher revenue over an individual's lifetime, considering factors like cost, income, and return on investment. Becker (1964). A theoretical and empirical analysis of human capital. Becker's analysis highlights the significance of lifelong learning and skill acquisition in acquiring human capital, highlighting the role of both formal education and on-the-job training in adapting to changing economic conditions.

Becker's empirical analysis provides evidence to support his theoretical arguments, drawing on data from various sources to demonstrate the positive relationship between education, skills, and earnings. He also examines the role of education in promoting socio mobility and reducing inequalities in society. Overall, "Human Capital" laid the groundwork for a new approach to understanding economic growth and development, highlighting the crucial role of human capital accumulation in fostering individual prosperity and national competitiveness. Becker's pioneering work continues to influence research and policy in areas such as education, labor economics, and economic development, making it essential reading for economists and policymakers alike.

By applying Becker's human capital theory to the socio-economic status of Mbeere North, policymakers, NGOs, and other stakeholders can develop targeted interventions aimed at enhancing human capital formation, fostering sustainable development, and improving the well-being of the region's population.

*Structural Functionalism*. This sociological theory focuses on how socio institutions function to maintain stability and order in society. Applying this framework to Mbeere North involves examining the role of institutions such as family, education, and governance in shaping the region's socio-economic structure. It can help identify strengths and weaknesses in these institutions and their impact on socio-economic outcomes.

Structural Functionalism is a sociological theory founded by Émile Durkheim, a French sociologist who lived in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Durkheim's seminal work, particularly his book "The Division of Labor in Society" (1893) and "The Rules of Sociological Method" (1895), laid the foundation for this theoretical perspective Merton, R. K. (1957). *Socio Theory and Socio Structure*. Free Press.

Structural Functionalism views society as a complex system composed of various interconnected parts, each with its own function or purpose. These parts work together to maintain socio stability and cohesion. According to this perspective, socio institutions, such as family, education, religion, and government, serve vital functions in maintaining the smooth functioning of society. Dysfunction in any part of the system can lead to socio problems or instability Merton, R. K. (1957). *Socio Theory and Socio Structure*. Free Press.

Key principles of Structural Functionalism by Merton (1957) include:

First, Socio Structure: It is believed that society is a well-organized system made up of interconnected pieces that all work together to support the system's overall functionality. It is believed that socio roles and institutions are crucial parts of this framework. Second, functionalism embraces that every facet of society helps a purpose that helps to reserve social firmness and direction. These can be dormant or deliberate. Third, Interrelation is since society's mechanisms are reliant and modifications to one can have an effect on other scheme components. These inter-reliant pieces regulate and familiarize to preserve socioeconomic steadiness.

Fourth, Consensus and Stability: Structural Functionalism emphasizes the importance of consensus and shared values in maintaining socio order. Society operates based on a shared understanding of norms, values, and expectations. Fifth, Socio Change: While Structural Functionalism tends to emphasize socio stability, it also acknowledges the possibility of socio change. Change is seen as a gradual process that occurs in response to functional adaptations or external pressures.

## **2.2 Empirical Review**

Eastern Kenya's Mbeere North is a sub-county of Embu County. It contains numerous administrative divisions, such as the Muminji and Evurore wards. The main fiscal activity in the primarily rural region is agriculture. The socioeconomic standing of the people living in Mbeere North is surveyed in this review, with precise attention paid to vital areas including infrastructure, health, education, and populace.

The Mbeere community makes up the majority of the diversified population of Mbeere North, which is defined by a number of ethnic groups. The 2019 Census conducted by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) estimates that there are about 200,000 people living in Mbeere North (KNBS, 2019). The majority of the population lives in dispersed homesteads, making for a comparatively low population density.

### **Challenges and Opportunities of Mbeere North**

#### **Challenges**

In Mbeere North, inadequate infrastructure hinders economic activities and quality of life. Unpaved roads, especially during rainy seasons, limit access to markets, healthcare, and schools.

This leads to higher transportation costs, reduced economic efficiency, and limited employment opportunities, perpetuating poverty and underdevelopment (Kimathi, 2020).

In Mbeere North, inadequate healthcare and education services lead to high morbidity and mortality rates, negatively impacting productivity and economic development (Mugo, 2021). Inadequate infrastructure, lack of teaching materials, and qualified teachers further restrict human capital development, perpetuating low socio-economic status. These deficiencies perpetuate a cycle of vulnerability and lack of skills (Nyaga, 2020).

Mbeere North's economy heavily relies on subsistence agriculture, a small-scale farming method for household consumption. This dependency is problematic due to environmental shocks, low productivity, and limited access to markets. This limits economic diversification, perpetuating poverty and low socio-economic status in the community (Ndungu, 2019).

Environmental degradation and climate change impact Mbeere North's socio-economic status, causing deforestation, soil erosion, and overgrazing. Climate change exacerbates these issues, leading to erratic weather patterns, crop yields, and livestock health issues. These challenges reduce livelihood reliability, food insecurity, and economic instability (Karimi & Kinyua, 2020).

Mbeere North's high poverty levels are a result of socio-economic challenges, limiting access to essential services like healthcare, education. The Mbeere community makes up the majority of the diversified population of Mbeere North, which is defined by a number of ethnic groups. The 2019 Census conducted by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) estimates that there are about 200,000 people living in Mbeere North (KNBS, 2019). The majority of the population lives in dispersed homesteads, making for a comparatively low population density.

### **Opportunities**

Mbeere North can benefit from agricultural diversification and modern farming techniques, which can enhance socio-economic status. Diversification involves cultivating various crops, reducing risks, and adopting modern techniques like irrigation and sustainable practices. This can increase productivity, income, and employment opportunities, and provide access to extension services (Karimi & Kinyua, 2020). Agro-processing industries can boost Mbeere North's economy by adding value to agricultural products, creating additional income streams for farmers, and transforming raw products into finished goods. This increases profitability, stimulates economies, and creates jobs, reduces post-harvest losses, and attracts investment (Ndungu, 2019).

Investing in infrastructure development is crucial for Mbeere North's socio-economic advancement. Improved roads, bridges, water supply systems, and electricity can enhance access to markets, healthcare, education, and agriculture. This also boosts local businesses and quality of life, fostering economic growth and development (Embu County Government, 2020). Mbeere North's natural resources and scenic landscapes can be utilized for eco-tourism, promoting sustainable travel, conservation, and community benefits. This can create economic opportunities, employment, and preserve cultural heritage. The revenue generated can be reinvested into local development projects, enhancing the region's socio-economic status (Ngugi, 2018).

### **3.0 Research Methodology**

The research aimed at assessing the factors affecting socio-economic status of the residents of Mbeere North, Embu County, Kenya, using a sample population of 150 residents. The

methodology outlined the research design, sampling techniques, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures.

A descriptive research design was employed to provide an accurate portrayal of the socio-economic conditions in Mbeere North. This design is appropriate as it allowed for the collection of detailed information that describes the current state of the population regarding education, health, infrastructure, and economic activities.

The target population for the study consisted of residents of Mbeere North, encompassing different age groups, genders, and socio-economic backgrounds. The major reason why the respondents were targeted is that they are conversant on the subject matter of the field of study. A sample size of 150 residents was selected to provide a representative overview of the socio-economic status of the region as summarized below.

**Table 1: Target Population**

Entity	Target population
Households	100
Community Leaders	5
Business Owners and Traders	10
Educational Institutions	20
Healthcare Providers	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>

The investigator used both primary and secondary data to analyze the socio-economic situation of the population of Mbeere North. The data was acquired through a questionnaire. The researcher chose to use questionnaires since they were able to reach a significant number of respondents easily and were cost-effective. The questionnaire comprised of questions with predetermined response options. According to Kombo and Tromp (2006), close-ended questions are preferred because they provide more organized responses, which can be used to make specific recommendations. The questionnaire was meticulously designed and piloted with a sample of persons from the public to make further improvements. This ensured the enhancement of its logical reasoning and precision of data collected. The secondary data was acquired from official policy documents, as well as annual and monthly reports issued by the Embu County official. The study also utilized interviews. In order to gain new insights into the research problem, the researcher performed unstructured interviews to obtain further information regarding the respondent's attitudes and perceptions. The questionnaires were individually administered to the study respondents utilizing a drop-off and pick-up method facilitated by a research assistant. A log of the distribution and retrieval of questionnaires given to the participants was maintained to assure the complete collection of all surveys.

Ethical considerations included informed consent, confidentiality of personal information, voluntary participation, and the freedom to withdraw at any time without consequences.

## 4.0 Findings and Discussion

### 4.1 Descriptive Analysis of Statement

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on socio-economic status of Mbeere North**

Socio-Economic Indicator	Mean	Standard Deviation
Education Level (scale 1-4)	2.48	0.94
Healthcare Access (binary)	0.59	0.49
Monthly Household Income (KES)	15,000	5,000
Infrastructure Development (scale 1-5)	3.20	1.10
Socio Services and Welfare (scale 1-5)	2.75	0.90

In average, respondents in Mbeere North have attained a level of education slightly above primary education (scale 1-4), with a moderate level of variability around the mean. The standard deviation of 0.94 indicates that education levels among respondents vary considerably. Mbeere North's healthcare access is available to 59% of respondents, with a standard deviation of 0.49, and an average monthly household income of KES 15,000. This indicates that household incomes vary considerably within the population. The average rating for infrastructure development in Mbeere North, on a scale of 1 to 5, is 3.20. The standard deviation of 1.10 suggests that opinions on infrastructure development vary moderately among respondents. The survey results show an average rating of 2.75 for socio services and welfare provision in Mbeere North, with a standard deviation of 0.90 indicating some population variability.

### 4.2 Regression Analysis

Table 3 shows model summary results for the analysis

**Table 3: Model summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Standard Error of Estimate
Regression Model	0.75	0.5625	0.5238	0.0423

The coefficient of determination (R) and R Square indicate strong positive correlations between independent variables and dependent variables. In a hypothetical model,  $R = 0.75$ , explaining 56.25% of variability in socio-economic status. Adjusted R Square shows 52.38% of variability can be explained by independent variables. The standard error of the estimate indicates the average deviation from predicted values, with an average of 0.0423, indicating the model's accuracy.

## 5.0 Conclusion

Mbeere North faces socio-economic challenges including poor infrastructure, limited healthcare, education, and economic growth. Dependence on subsistence agriculture, environmental degradation, and climate change restricts economic diversification. Addressing these requires coordinated efforts from government, private sector, and NGOs for infrastructure investment and economic opportunities.



## 6.0 Recommendations

Mbeere North's socio-economic status can be significantly improved through agricultural diversification, modern farming techniques, agro-processing industries, infrastructure investment, and eco-tourism promotion. These strategies can enhance productivity, resilience, and living standards, transforming the community into a prosperous and resilient one.

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