

Title: Effects of the civil service retrenchment programme on women in Nakuru town, Kenya, 1970-2006

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Abstract: The civil service retrenchment programme implemented in 2000 had great social and economic implications on the lives of different social groups in Nakuru town, Kenya. Given their multiple roles as wage earners and being in charge of household domestic duties, women were affected in different ways. This study specifically investigates the effects of civil service retrenchment on women's provision of family healthcare, nutrition and education in Nakuru town. The effects of retrenchment on women's decision-making power in the household in Nakuru town have been examined. The extent to which retrenchment of the male spouse affected the woman in the household has been evaluated. The mechanisms and coping strategies adopted by women in response to loss of regular household income have also been analyzed. The study traces the factors that precipitated retrenchment in the civil service from the 1970s and the modes of implementation in the year 2000. To achieve its objectives, both primary and secondary sources of data were consulted. To obtain the significant oral data, a field interview of women who were retrenched and those whose spouses were retrenched from the civil service in Nakuru town was conducted. For comparative purposes a small number of men who were retrenched were also interviewed. A sample of 100 respondents was purposively identified as follows; 96 women and men from 3 selected administrative locations of Nakuru town and 4 government officials from selected ministries. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed in analyzing the collected data. This study employs the social relations gender approach in its analysis and theoretical explanation of the subordination of women. In its findings, this work established that retrenchment in the civil service in Kenya was precipitated by lack of stringent and gender balanced recruitment procedures that resulted in an overstuffed service. This prompted a retrenchment exercise that was conducted without due consideration of gender. Since gender was not a consideration in its implementation, civil service retrenchment negatively affected women in their provision of family healthcare, nutrition and education of children in Nakuru Town. Loss of regular income through retrenchment was found to have eroded the woman's autonomy and decision making power. It was further established that that retrenchment of the male spouses negatively affected women in the household, who had to intensify their income generating activities to compensate for the loss of household income. Women in Nakuru town were found to have devised several coping mechanisms and survival strategies to deal with the negative effects of civil service retrenchment. Finally this study gives recommendations to the Kenya Government on how to conduct future retrenchment exercises to avoid suffering of the persons involved. This work further recommends that the government should initiate and promote gender sensitive policies and encourage affirmative action in recruitment of employees in the civil service.