

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DEFICIT OF MARITAL AUTHORITY IN THE HOMES OF WOMEN WORKING IN NGOS IN BUNIA (DRC)

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the factors influencing the deficit of marital authority within the households of women working for NGOs in Bunia (DRC). The objective of this research was to identify the specific factors contributing to this perceived decline in marital authority. The proposed hypothesis suggests that the financial independence of women, institutional acculturation, and conflicts arising from a woman's unavailability at home due to professional demands are key factors leading husbands to perceive a deficit of authority. To verify this hypothesis and analyze these factors, a functionalist method was employed. Data collection involved interviews with a sample of 60 spouses, complemented by documentary analysis to provide context for the study area. The results of the analysis indicate that:

Financial Dynamics: 41.7% of couples where women contribute to household expenses experience a crisis regarding marital authority. **Institutional Influence:** Households where women have undergone training on new social norms specifically gender equality ideology (33.3%) and the promotion of women's rights (33.3%) report significant challenges. **Professional Demands:** The deficit is most notable in households where women perform field missions (58.3%), leading to the disruption of family routines (16.7%) and requiring husbands to assume domestic roles (16.7%). **Subjective Perception:** Marital authority deficit is often a subjective perception by the husband rather than an objective reality; 50% of husbands feel social pressure based on the perspective of those around them (friends, in-laws), followed by stigmatization (25%). Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed to ensure family balance: **To Couples:** Promote "transversal communication" by transitioning from "vertical" authority (absolute head of household) to "horizontal" or participatory management. Couples should also negotiate and redefine domestic tasks to balance the mental and professional load of women working in NGOs. **To NGOs (Employers):** Implement family support programs, including awareness sessions on work-life balance that involve spouses to break stereotypes regarding women's salaries. Additionally, establish psychological support spaces for employees facing domestic tensions related to their socio-economic status.

Keywords: Factors, authority deficit, marital, women's households, working, NGO, Bunia (DRC).

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, family structures in Africa (and particularly in the DRC) have undergone profound changes. The traditional image of the "father as the provider" and the sole holder of authority was turned upside down by the emergence of a new class of working women. Among them, women working in Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) occupy a singular place.

By the nature of their jobs, they are at the heart of the dynamics of social change, the promotion of human rights and financial empowerment.

The power dynamics within couples where the woman works in Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) often focus on the concept of resources and identity negotiation. For example, NGAMIJE (2018) emphasizes that the deficit of authority is not due to a sudden conflict, but to a structural change in the perception of the couple, i.e. marriage moves from a model of "protection against obedience" to a model of "partnership between equals", which is often perceived by men (or society) as a deficit of authority (NGAMIJE, 2018).

This is how Jean-Marie Mbelu (2025) conducts an in-depth sociological analysis conducted mainly in the context of developing countries (with a focus on Central Africa). The author explores women in the humanitarian and development sector as a catalyst for the transformation of traditional family structures. He demonstrates through the deconstruction of the model of the "provider husband" that traditional marital authority is based on a pact of economic dependence. And the impact of mobility and space-time on field missions and autonomy of movement: the cultural defector and the ideology of the NGO on the impregnation of values and the network of solidarity. Finally, tensions and the "crisis of masculinity" on identity withdrawal and society's gaze (MBELU, 2025).

N'GORAN (2025), analyzes the radical financial autonomy, the transition from a living wage to an international wage creates a status shock within the household. Institutional acculturation: Gender and inclusion trainings attended by NGO employees change their perception of traditional marital obedience.

As for SOW (2009), she analyzes how women's financial independence is perceived as a threat to "traditional marital authority": women's access to external economic resources (such as NGO salaries) shakes up traditional power relations.

Marital authority, traditionally perceived as the husband's power of direction over his wife and children, seems to crumble as soon as the economic and intellectual balance of power shifts. Access to education and the job market has transformed the dynamics of the household. Women are no longer "housewives", they are a major economic player. Working in NGOs (often demanding, well-paid and involving a certain autonomy) places women in an unprecedented position of financial and decision-making power. The woman's financial independence reduces her dependence on the husband.

1.1 Research question

Our concern has been to know: what are the factors that influence the decline or reconfiguration of marital authority within the households of women working in NGOs in Bunia (DRC)?

1.2 Assumption

To guide this study, we hypothesized that:

The financial independence of the woman, institutional acculturation and the conflict of the unavailability of the housewife due to professional requirements are some of the factors

influencing the husband to be perceived as a lack of authority in the home of women working in NGOs in Bunia (DRC).

1.3 Objective of the research

The objective of this study is to identify the factors influencing the deficit of marital authority in the homes of women working in NGOs in Bunia (DRC).

The choice of this study was dictated by a double reason, namely: subjective and objective. Indeed, this study, which took place in the city of Bunia, in the Commune of Mbunya, over a period from 2024 to January 2025, is based on the following points:

In addition to the introduction, the material and methods, the study environment, the results and finally the discussion of the results.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

We considered it appropriate to use the functional (functionalist) method to analyse the functioning of the women's shelters working in NGOs in Bunia. The family as a system in search of balance. From this perspective, the "crisis" of authority is not seen as a simple personal conflict, but as a structural adjustment linked to the change in the economic role of women.

2.1 Study environment

The present work took place in the city of Bunia, capital of the province of Ituri in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). It is located in the north-east of the country around Lake Albert (Mobutu), which partly forms the border with Uganda. In its eastern part, it lies below the Blue Mountains mountain ranges that form the western flank of the Albertine rift from Lake Albert in the north through Lake Edward to the northern end of Lake Kivu (MPOSO 2025).

2.1.1 Location of the city of Bunia

The city of Bunia is therefore limited to the north by the chiefdom of Baboabokoe, to the east by the chiefdom of Bahema banywagi, to the west by the community of Bahema d'Irumu and to the south, finally, by the chiefdom baboabokoe on the axis of Dhele. This city is located on the latitude: 30° 15'00" East, the longitude: 1° 34'00" North and on the average altitude of 1250 m (Figure 1). It covers an area of 5,760 ha = 57.6 km² (MPOSO 2025).

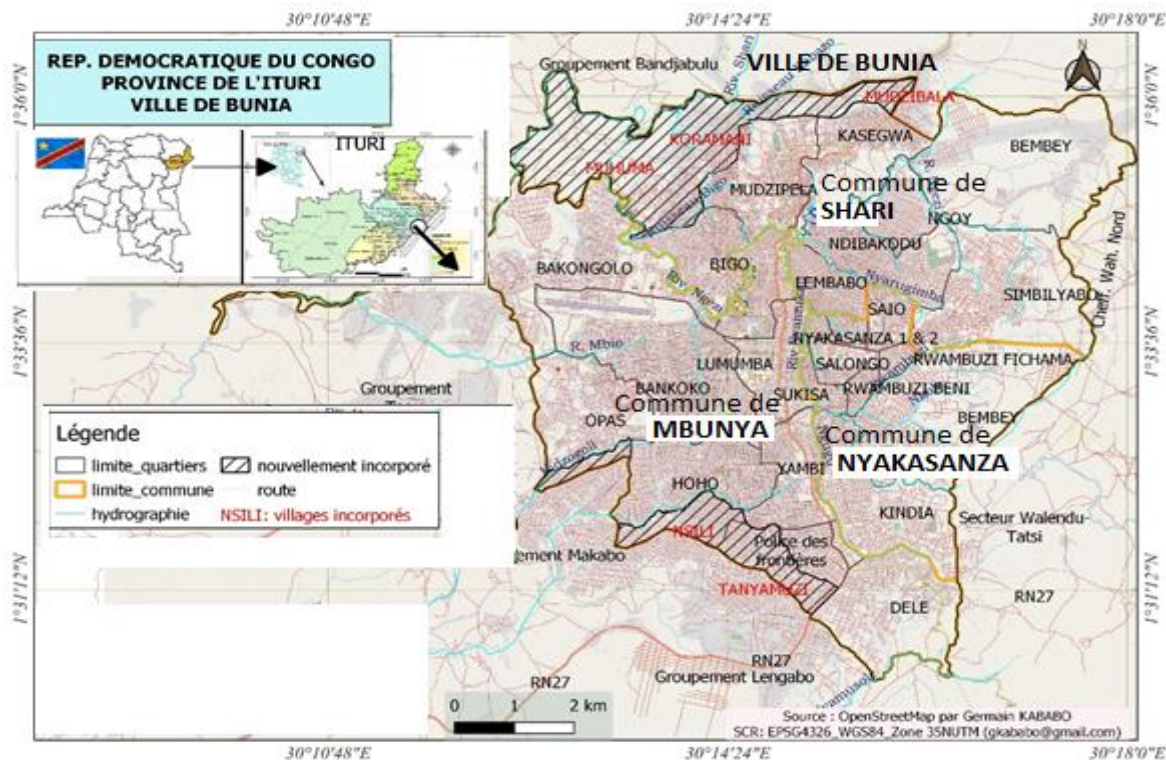


Figure 1: Administrative map of the city of Bunia using QGIS 3.22 (MPOSO, 2025).

2.1.2 Population and administrative situation of the City of Bunia

The town of Bunia is inhabited by the large original tribes from the different territories of Ituri province, including the Biras, the Walendu-Bindi (Ngiti, Lendu-bindi or South Lendu), the Hema, the Gegere (North Hema), the Lendu, the Nyali, the Alur, the Lugbara, the Lese, the Kakwa, the Ndo, the Ukebu and the Kalikoo. The first inhabitants of the city were Biras. They were settled there before the colonial era. After the creation of this city in colonial times, several other original tribes arrived and settled there. This city has gained momentum on all socio-economic levels to such an extent that it has become a multicultural administrative and commercial center for the entire province of Ituri (TSHINYAMA et al., 2023 cited by (MPOSO, 2025)).

2.1.3 Economic situation

The main economic activities of the city of Bunia are; general trade, the exploitation of timber and gold, the importation of oil and other various commercial finished products. The city also contains magnificent hotels and a few private transport and mineral water production companies. The activities of the shops of the main agricultural products (beans, potatoes, onions, vegetables, etc.) and agropastoral products (fish, meat and dairy products) make the city of Bunia an agricultural granary. The city is certainly endowed with an energy plant called Budana which served the whole province and the neighboring provinces with electricity, but at present the large company (Sokimo) operates with the limited means at its disposal and it is unable to supply electricity to the whole city of Bunia

This plant constitutes a significant potential for the economic emergence of the province of Ituri and in particular the city of Bunia. The industrial slaughterhouse in Bunia was the second in Africa after the one in Cameroon at the time of the former president of the republic, Mobutu; but currently it operates with great difficulty, there is no electricity or the water supply system in this slaughterhouse (MPOSO, 2025).

2.1.4 Relief

The morphology of the relief of the city of Bunia immediately presents a plateau aspect. The city of Bunia is located in the tectonic plain of the territory of Irumu, the whole of which is commonly called the "Irumu plain" made up of the plateaus. Its average altitude is 1250m, the highest point of the city is located in the Simbilyabo district at an altitude of 1275m, the lowest point is located at the Shari River with an altitude of 900m. The Bunia-irumu depression is a tectonic divide parallel to that of Lake Albert, from which it is separated by the Blue Mountains, which constitute the watershed between the Congo River basin and the Nile River basin. The same author adds that Bunia-Irumu forms a tectonic plain framed by escarpments (MEESSEN, 1951).

2.1.5 Climatic characteristics

The city of Bunia has a humid tropical climate with two seasons. The rainy season starts in March and ends in December. On the other hand, the dry season begins around the end of December and lasts until the end of February. The length of the seasons is currently varying as a result of the climatic disturbances observed. November is the hottest month of the year while February is the coldest month of the year. The average temperature is 23.8 °C at this time. The variation in precipitation observed from 2014 to 2024 between the driest and wettest month is 104 mm. The average temperature throughout the year ranges from 0.9 °C. The Koppen-Geiger classification is of the Af type. (Climate-Data.org / AM OP) (Figure 2).

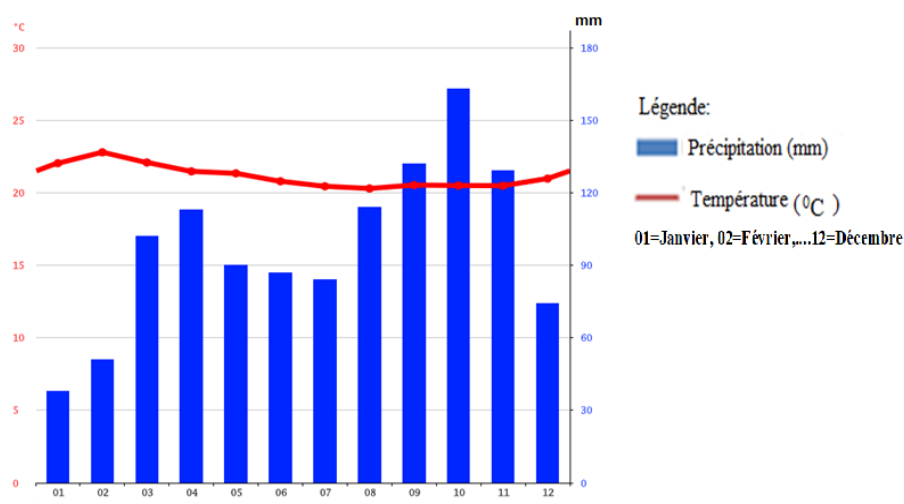


Figure 2: Rain Flow Chart of Mean Precipitation (mm) and Mean Temperature Curve (°C) (RONALD GELARO et al.,2024).

2.1.6 Geological and hydrogeomorphological situation of the city of Bunia

The city of Bunia is located in the Kibarian region characterized by sedimentary Meta formations highlighting volcanic facies. (<https://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/afrique-structure-et-milieu-geologie/> on 06/16/2021 at 7:12 pm).

It is crossed by a few rivers, three of which are the most important, in particular; the Nyamukau River in the heart of the city, which separates the city from part of the city on the north-south side and flows into the Ngezi River, which in turn separates the city from the Mudzipela district on the northwest side and also flows into the largest Shari River some three kilometers from the city and constitutes the watershed of the city of Bunia. These hydrographic networks feed the Congo River basin through the Shari River, which eventually flows into the Ituri River (MEESSEN, 1951).

2.1.7 Soil and vegetation

The city of Bunia has a type of sandy-clay and fertile soil, and cassava, sweet potatoes and vegetable crops are grown in the lowlands near the city. This town is supplied with food products from the surrounding villages. (<https://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/afrique-structure-et-milieu-geologie/> on 06/16/2021 at 7:12 pm).

It is a herbaceous vegetation with a xenomorphic character. Anthropogenic action is considerable and manifests itself in crops, pastures, urbanization and bush fires, it is the consequence of the occupation of the territory of the order of 100 inhabitants/km².

The city of Bunia is generally dominated by grassy savannah vegetation. The latter is severely degraded by human activities in particular; the huge demand for firewood, construction wood, peri-urban agriculture and infrastructure, etc. But the trees planted in the concessions, along the avenues and in the individual plots, in particular Eucalyptus, Argentine oaks (*Grevillea robusta*), cypresses and other fruit-bearing plants (Mango, Avocado, Oil Palm, Guava trees, etc.) dominate this city with woody vegetation. The forest formations have disappeared, the few islands of the forests remain and constitute transitional forests and mountains around the city and on the DRC-Nile ridge (KAKISHABO, 2014).

2.2 Research Methodology

To analyze and explain the factors that influence the deficit of marital authority in the homes of women working in NGOs in Bunia, the functional (functionalist) method was better indicated. To apply functionalism to this subject is to see the family as a system in search of balance. From this perspective, the "crisis" of authority is not seen as a simple personal conflict, but as a structural adjustment linked to the change in the economic role of women.

By working in an NGO, the woman invests in the instrumental sphere. It often brings a stable or even higher income. The "deficit of authority" can then be analyzed as a break in the specialization of roles: the husband loses his monopoly as a "provider", which destabilizes the traditional basis of his authority. In addition, the interview with a sample of 60 spouses in the homes made it possible to identify the causes of these factors. The literature review was useful

for the presentation of the study environment. The information collected was submitted for analysis in order to verify the hypothesis.

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

In order to identify the factors that influence the deficit of marital authority in the homes of women working in NGOs, certain variables that are at the origin were taken into account, namely: the financial independence of the woman, the clash of values, the professional constraints and physical absence of the housewife and the crisis of male identity.

3.1.1 Women's financial independence

Table 1: Distribution of respondents' opinions on women's financial independence

Financial autonomy	Frequency	Percentage
Contribution to household expenses	25	41,7
Legitimate claim of right	20	33,3
Decision on investments	10	16,7
Daily management	5	8,3
Total	60	100

Couples in which women contribute to the household expenses (41.7%) and those who claim (33.3%) are experiencing the crisis of the deficit of marital authority.

3.1.2 The clash of values

Table 2: Distribution of respondents' opinions on the value clash

Exposure to new social norms	Frequency	Percentage
Ideology of gender equality	20	33,3
Promotion of women's rights	20	33,3
Imbalance between traditional and modern roles	10	16,7
Break with social expectations	10	16,7
Total	60	100

Women's households that have received training on the new social norms, namely: the ideology of gender equality (33.3 per cent) and the promotion of women's rights (33.3 per cent), are experiencing problems.

3.1.3 The professional constraints and the physical absence of the housewife

Table 3: Distribution of respondents' opinions on women's professional constraints and physical absence.

Working in NGOs often imposes a rhythm that conflicts with traditional domestic workers	Frequency	Percentage
Field mission	35	58,3
Availability of the housewife	5	8,3
Destruction of the family routine	10	16,7
Husbands in domestic roles	10	16,7
Total	60	100

The deficit in marital authority is observed above all in households where women carry out field missions (58.3 per cent), which leads to the destruction of family routine (16.7 5) and husbands assume domestic roles (16.7 per cent).

3.1.4 The Male Identity Crisis

Table 4: Distribution of respondents' opinions on the male identity crisis

Lack of authority	Frequency	Percentage
Social pressures	30	50
Stigma	15	25
Assisted	5	8,3
Lack of adaptation	10	16,7
Total	60	100

The deficit of marital authority is sometimes a subjective perception of the husband rather than an objective reality. This is what we see (50%) of husbands who are subjected to social pressure through the gaze of those around them (friends, in-laws). Then comes stigma with (25%).

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 Women's financial independence

This table shows that couples in which women are financially independent through their contribution to household expenses (41.7%) make legitimate claims to their rights (33.3 5). In this regard, NGAMIJE (2018) emphasizes that marital authority is historically rooted in the dependence of the wife. When the wife provides for the basic needs (rent and school fees for the children), the husband loses his lever of command.

The author speaks of a "shift in authority": the husband cannot impose his will through financial constraint. We are witnessing the erosion of the authority of the "head of the family".

3.2.2 The clash of values

Women are exposed to new social norms, including the ideology of gender equality (33.3 per cent) and the promotion of women's rights (33.3.5 per cent). GENESTE (2005), analyses how women in leadership positions in NGOs face a triple challenge, namely: the reconciliation of professional and private life, the tension between the original humanist values and the requirements of management (rationalization, performance), and the adaptation to an organizational culture that is increasingly focused at the risk of losing the initial militant flexibility.

3.2.3 Professional constraints and physical absence

The deficit in marital authority is more noticeable in households where women carry out field missions (58.3 per cent), which leads to the destruction of family routine (16.7.5 per cent), and husbands assume domestic roles (16.7.5 per cent). This is how GENESTE (2005) devotes an important section to the analysis of temporal and spatial investment. By the highlights concerning the physical absence:

- The need for mobility: working in an NGO often requires frequent travel to the field, which creates a physical break with the domestic space;
- Role conflict: physical absence is analysed as a factor of guilt in the face of traditional social expectations related to the role of mother or wife;
- Work overload: the authors emphasize that the "militant" commitment for these women not to count their hours, which drastically reduces their presence in the home;
- The impact on authority: although the article focuses on organizational management, it highlights that this physical absence forces a constant renegotiation of the family balance.

3.2.4 The Male Identity Crisis

The table shows that since the lack of authority is sometimes a subjective perception of the husband rather than an objective reality (50% of husbands are subjected to social pressure through the gaze of those around them (friends, in-laws). And then comes stigma (25%). WELZER-LANG (2000), a specialist in the sociology of gender and masculinity, describes the crisis of masculine identity not as a fatality, but as a reaction to the end of unquestioned patriarchal privilege. This study makes it possible to understand that this "crisis" is often correlated with women's financial and social empowerment, which changes the power structure within the couple and the family.

4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our study demonstrates that the lack of marital authority in the homes of women working in NGOs in Bunia is not a simple domestic rebellion, but the consequence of the redistribution of power resources. Financial independence, coupled with exposure to the values of encroachment advocated by the employer, creates a new conjugal paradigm where the classic patriarchal model struggles to sustain itself.

4.1 Recommendations

The recommendations are addressed to the specific actors:

A. Towards couples (spouses)

- They must promote transversal communication: encourage the transition from a "vertical" authority (absolute head of household) to a "horizontal" management of the household;
- They have to negotiate roles: recommend a redefinition of domestic tasks to compensate for the mental and professional burden of women working in NGOs.

B. To NGOs (employers)

- That it has family support programs: integrate awareness sessions on work/life balance, sometimes including spouses to break stereotypes related to women's salaries;
- That there is psychological support: to set up listening spaces for employees experiencing domestic tensions related to their socio-economic status.

C. With regard to social and religious structures

- Gender education: deconstructing the idea that marital authority is only linked to financial power;
- Family mediation: creating conflict resolution frameworks adapted to the new realities of women's professional changes.

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