



Research Paper

## The Trend of Women's Participation in Politics In Kakamega Central District Since Independence.

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**ABSTRACT:** The main purpose of this study was to analyze the trend of women participation in politics in Kakamega Central district since independence. The sample for the study was taken from three divisions: Navakholo, Municipality and Lurambi in Kakamega County. The study was guided by Gender and Development (GAD) theory developed in the 1980s by Carolyn Moser and adopted historical research design. The sample size was 360 respondents; 349 women and 15 men. The data collection instruments were questionnaire, focus group interviews and document analysis. The data was subjected to corroboration, sourcing and contextualization in the historical domains and then analyzed using qualitative and quantitative techniques. Qualitative data was analyzed using words that outlined trends leading to development of patterns while quantitative data was analyzed numerically by use of descriptive method. The findings showed women in Kakamega Central district have not fully participated in elective politics due to various reasons such as; lack of awareness, historical and cultural trends engendered in the patriarchal society, lack of political commitment to implement Affirmative Action, political patronage, cultural beliefs and traditions. Recommendation from the study was that the society should mount sensitization and awareness targeting young women to pursue higher education to propel them to participate in politics and the government to implement the Affirmative Action to enable more women participate in elective politics. To increase women participation the study recommended improved women representation in the political arena.

**Keywords:** Women Participation, Representation, Politics, Affirmative Action

### I. INTRODUCTION

Women form a minority of elected MPs of the Kenyan parliament in the East African region. According to GAD (2002) Kenya is behind its neighbors (Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania and Burundi). Comparatively the trend in other parts of the world shows that the percentage of women's representation in legislation ranges from 16.8 % in the European parliaments to 4.6 % in the Arab states. In Africa, the average percentage of women representation was 12.8% in 2002 which constitute slightly over 50% of their total population and they occupy 65% of the continent's working hours (World Bank, 2003). In other parts of the world, there is stark contrast on women in politics which is even higher. Owing to this state of affair a need to determine the historical circumstances and cause of such a trend was key to this study.

#### 1.1 Historical Trend of Women Participation in Politics

During the pre-colonial period, society's leadership structure comprised council of elders which constituted and consisted largely of elderly men. From this composition, women participation in leadership and community affairs in most communities was nonexistent. The role of women and that of girls was mainly to farm the family land, harvest, care for the children, maintain the homestead and tend to their husbands (Gordon, 1992). Women also participated in religious activities with few attending established missionary school though most of them were controlled and restricted by their husbands. From this all decisions affecting the community in all sections were left for the councils of elders as women were seen as minors (Khasiani & Njiro, 1993).

During the colonial period, the trend slightly changed when men were recruited to serve in the Kenya rifles during the First World War (1914-1917). With their absence few women had a rare chance of being bread winners and decision makers but when men came back they assumed their superior powers (Kanogo, 2005).

However, at the end of the Second World War 1945, the trend of women participation and involvement in political arena was still low hence attracted global concern. Owing to this state of affair a survey by the United

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34 | Page

Nations Organization was carried out which showed that women faced hindrances such as high illiteracy level (UNDP, 2010) among other. A response towards this saw the setting up of UNESCO (1948) an agency that coordinated educational research scientific and cultural co-operation globally. Similarly formal missionary education was expanded and soon thereafter continued improvement was noted from both men and women (Trignor, 1976). For example, in Kenya the first training school for women was set up at Jeans School though still women were expected to retain their traditional roles and be submissive wives (Maathai, 2006).

Based on the above scenario the past practices and norms have over time created conflicts for women who venture into politics, both in the ways they are perceived and in the way they discharge their duties in a male-dominated parliament (Mitullah, 2003).

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Kenya's record of women's participation in politics and decision-making has been pathetic (Khasiani & Njiro, 1993). Despite concerted efforts by the Kenyan government, NGOs and the civil society in the country championing for women's participation in the political process, substantial changes have not been realized. It is for this reason that this study was set to determine the trend, likely causes and through its findings provide substantive recommendations.

### **1.3 Objectives**

To examine the trend of women's participation in politics in Kakamega Central district since independence

### **1.4 Research question**

What is the trend of women's participation in politics in Kakamega Central district since independence?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

Literature on women participation in politics in Kenya shows that there is very little information on the actual participation of women in political life. Many studies carried out have tended to concentrate on women representation in politics. This study focuses more on women's participation than representation. The significance of this study lies in its ability to determine the trend and actual factors affecting women's effective participation in politics which will inform policy makers and other stakeholders.

### **1.6 Theoretical Framework**

This study is guided by Gender and Development (GAD) theory that was developed in the 1980s by Carolyn Moser. This theory was suitable to this study because GAD approach is not concerned specifically with women, but with the way in which a society assigns roles, responsibilities and expectations to both women and men.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Political Participation Of Women In politics**

Newman and White (2012) provide statistics of women participation in politics throughout the world with an argument showing participation being low because of the political structures which vary in various countries. A comparative analysis of women participation reflects that in USA Congress both in the Senate and House of Representatives, historically and currently data shows low representation while in Jordan show weak and low participation in the electoral process. On women parliamentary members, a survey provided the following; Rwanda (56.3%), Sweden (47.0%), Cuba (43.2%), Finland (41.5%), the Netherlands (41.3%), Argentina (40.0%), Denmark (38.0%), Angola (37.3%), Costa Rica (36.8%), and Spain (36.3%). However, women participation Nepal (33%) UK and USA are in line with world average ((Newman & White, 2012) while China lags behind in terms of increasing women's representation in powerful political bodies (Goldthorpe, 2010).

Survey by Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), (2011) showed women occupy only 18% of parliamentary seats around the world. For example, USA currently ranked 68<sup>th</sup> among 134 nations worldwide with only 16.8% elected to the House of Representatives and 16% to the Senate (Steinhauer, 2011). In Kenya, Kamau (2010) aver that the situation is not any different as women continue to be marginalized in leadership and decision and emphasized that patriarchal structure was the main hindrance though they play an active role in development.

Nzomo (2003a) in her article "*The 2002 General Elections in Kenya*" illustrated how the patriarchal structure and political cultures constrain the legislative process in formulating law on gender relations. The incisive article highlights the significance of numbers in dictating bills which tend to favor men. Thus the low levels of political participation by women in Africa is becoming alarming and disturbing (Arowolo, 2010).

## **2.2 Extent Of Women Participation**

During the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods, women were prohibited from active participation in political matters although certain cases were noted. In Kenya, for example, the colonial experiences on women involvement can be traced to the Mau Mau period when they were used as instruments of communication and political mobilization. Munga & Awori (1984) acknowledged Mekatiliwa Menza (coast) Wangariwa Makeri (central) Field Marshall Muthoni (central) among others. (Wanjiku & Wasamba, (1998) Mugo (1985) averred that though women played an equally significant role as men in the liberation struggles more credit was attributed to men

At the global to national level slow limited to reasonable changes has seen women involvement and participation in politics. For example South Africa within a short space of time have made efforts toward a gender-neutral society. Rwanda, 56.3% women representation in national parliament compared to an average of 15.1% for the rest of the world, 24 out of the 80 seats are reserved for women in the Lower House of parliament. Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo and Madagascar had less than 10% of women's representation in the National Assembly's following their last elections while Zambia and Zimbabwe women representation is between 10 and 14 % (Kunin, 2008). On the contrary, Liberia President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's women composition in the legislature remains very (14%). Although President Sirleaf has pushed to pass legislation to implement a national quota of 30% women's representation, so far she has been unsuccessful (UN Report, 2006). A survey women proportion in parliament show varied representation Angola (15.4%), Botswana (12%), Lesotho (14.4%), Malawi (17.14%) while South Africa (32.8%) and Mozambique (37.2%) shows (Kunin, 2008)

On women participation, the trend during and after the Kenyatta's and Daniel Moi regimes only less than 5% of the leaders were women and their roles in political parties was social rather than political (Kahiga 1995). However, the fourth parliament 1979 -1983, 5 (3.1%) women were elected to parliament out of 158 and only 1 was appointed as a Minister. But in the 1990s an improvement was witnessed with the numbers of women in parliament rising to reflect 3.5% from a constant 2.0% from the previous years

However, the former President Mwai Kibaki regime though saw the promulgation of the new constitution, one- third of all public positions were to be reserved for women, but did not make practical (UNDP, 2010). For example in the ninth parliament 2002-2007 from the 210 MPs, only 10 (4.76%) women were elected and eight were appointed to ministerial positions. The 2007-2012 parliament from 210 MPs, 18 (7.7%) women elected and out of the 35 cabinet ministers, only 2 (5.7%) were women down from 3 (7.6%) in 2005. Comparatively this was noted as the highest representation of women in parliament since 1963, but it was seen as far below the neighboring countries of Uganda (24.7%) and Tanzania (22.3%) (World Bank, 2003).

The Kenyan situation seems to be similar with that of Nigeria where the low levels of political participation is becoming disturbing and alarming (Arowolo, 2010). From statistics presented by Sadie (2005) on the South African Development Community (SADC) parliamentary structures, it is evident that the target of 30% representation by women in political and decision-making structures has not been met. Countries such as Botswana, the Democratic Republic of Congo have less than 10% of women representation in politics. Despite efforts made to ensure that female representation is achieved at all levels of governance, women are still under-represented in many and non-governmental organizations particularly in positions of power and leadership (Steinhaauer, 2011)

Kamau (2007) was emphatic that the marginalization of women in political leadership and their continued exclusion in political decision making was seen as a product of a history of patriarchal state from the pre-colonial, colonial and independent state This exclusion was legitimized with the generalized notion that women were weak bodily and in mind and therefore needed to be protected on basis of tradition (Ndeda, 1999). It is the early opportunities in leadership, patriarchal structure, environment and tradition that provided the men with advantages in future political competitions (Kahiga, 1995).

## **III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Research Design**

This study was guided by the historical research design, a process of systematically examining past events to give an account of what happened and to recapture the nuances, personalities and ideas that influenced an event

### **3.2 The Study Area, Target Population and Sampling Procedure**

The study area was Kakamega Central district in Kakamega County. The target population was 364 respondents. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the 364 respondents with age limit being above 18 years. The composition of the respondents comprised included farmers, traders, local leaders such as chiefs and sub chiefs, retired-teachers and church leaders who were hoped to be knowledgeable enough on the issue under study.

### 3.3 Research Instruments

This study employed four research instruments to collect the data. The questionnaire, historical document analysis, focused group discussions and one to one oral interview.

### 3.4 Methods of Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed mainly by use qualitative and quantitative techniques. Qualitative data was presented descriptively in form of words which were grouped into categories and eventually formed themes and patterns while quantitative data was provided in tables, frequencies and percentages. The historical approach used in collecting the data was checked by allowing external and external criticism. In due time the use of corroboration was adopted in data analysis

## IV. DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Demographic Data of the Respondents

The study purposively included 15 men drawn from the three divisions of Kakamega Central district. The intention of the researcher was to get a collaborative insight on the challenges women in leadership face from the male perspective

**Table 4.1: Gender of the Respondents**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	15	4.1	4.1	4.1
	Female	349	95.9	95.9	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>364</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Source: Field data 2013

### Trend of Women's Participation in Politics in Kakamega Central District

The participation of women in political leadership has not been as overt as that of men since independence. The study provided the following results.

Table 4.2: Trend of Women's Participation in Politics in Kakamega County/Kakamega Central District (Local and Parliamentary Levels)

Year	Political position	Women elected in KC	Women elected in KCD	% Women elected in KCD	Male elected	% of men elected in KC	Total	Women elected Lurambi constituency in KC 1963-2012
1963-1968	Councilor	00(00%)	00	00	24	100%	24	00%
1968-1974	Councilor	00(00%)	00	00	24	100%	24	00%
1974-1979	Councilor	00 (00%)	00	00	27	100%	27	00%
1979-1983	Councilor	00(00%)	00	00	24	100%	24	00%
1983-1988	Councilor	00(00%)	00	00	38	100%	38	00%
1988-1992	Councilor	00(00%)	00	00	39	100%	39	00%
1992-1997	Councilor	00(00%)	00	00	39	100%	39	00%
1997-2002	Councilor	05(6.9%)	01	1.3	67	93%	72	00%
2002-2007	Councilor	05(9.3%)	01	3.8	49	90.7%	54	00%
2007-2012	Councilor	03(7.5%)	01	2.5	37	92.5%	40	00%
2013-2017	County representative	04(6.7%)	1	1.6	56	93.3%	60	00%

Source: Kakamega County Council Records, 2013.

\*Kakamega County was established in 2012, as a successor of the old Kakamega District (Minus Vihiga County/District). \*KC represented kakamega county while KCD kakamega central district

Document analysis established that in the (1963-1992) civic elections, none of the women aspirants was elected to the County council 0 (0.0%) based on the minutes of the locational meeting held on 21/12/1974 since 1963 (Archival, HP/1/21) (Appendix 1). In the 1997 general elections, 5 women out of 72 members were elected to the County council 05 (6.9%); 2002 general elections, 5 women out of 26 members were elected to the County council (9.3%); 2007 general elections, 3 (7.5%) out of 40 members who were elected to the County council were women while 2013 general elections, 4 out of 60 County representatives are women (6.7%). None of the women an aspirant has been elected as MP for Lurambi since 1963.

Using focused group interview, women indicated that their access to leadership positions has been hindered by discrimination and stereotyping, lack of adequate time due to their reproductive roles, traditional prejudice, social pressures, women's sensitivity to people's misconceptions of successful women, and the tendency of men to choose 'family-oriented' wives. To determine individual views interviews conducted from five respondents indicated that the trend of women participation in Kakamega Central has been very slow and

this might still continue if proper mechanisms aren't put in place to improve on the current situation. They noted that; from 1963-1979, women from Kakamega Central district were shy to participate in elective politics.

But in the 2013 in Kakamega County elections, a new twist occurred where women contested for the positions of County representatives who included; Florence Machio (Butsotso West), Judith Bunyere (Butsotso West), Freda Matati (Butsotso East) and Phoebe Indeje (Bukhungu). The respondents noted that the trend of women's participation in the district was improving although at a very slow pace.

A focus group discussion was conducted and the findings provided were; 'The trend has been slow because many of us have a lot of domestic chores to engage in and have no time for politics. Many of us are not elected to political leadership because of our customs and traditions.

A woman from Navakholo exclaimed! 'How can I elect a fellow woman to parliament to go and fail me? I am happy the way things are now, the fewer the women leaders we have, the better for some of us' The women in the FGD noted that they cannot elect their fellow women because; on average women hate each other; the few women who have been elected to the County council have done very little to assist them at the grassroots level, furthermore, women who have made it to parliament are very arrogant and hardly interact with them. On civic education, attending political rallies or not and women nominated, the table below provides:

**Table 4.3: Other Levels of Political Participation in Kakamega Central District**

Political position	% C EDU KC	% WACE. KCD	% WAPR KCD	% WAPR KCD	WN KC	% WN KC
Councilor	00	0.0	05	1.43	00	00
Councilor	02	0.57	15	4.3	00	00
Councilor	04	1.15	17	4.9	00	00
Councilor	10	2.9	20	5.7	00	00
Councilor	20	5.7	22	6.3	00	00
Councilor	50	14.3	26	7.4	00	00
Councilor	52	14.9	29	8.3	03	00
Councilor	100	28.7	32	9.5	05	00
Councilor	106	30.4	40	11.5	07	00
Councilor	127	36.4	46	13.2	07	1
County R.	204	58.5	50	14.3	23	03

**Source:** Field Research 2012

Note:\* C.EDUC KC represents civic education in Kakamega county; WACE KCD: women attending civic education in Kakamega county district; WAPR KCD: women attending political rallies in Kakamega county district; WN KC: women nominated in Kakamega county;

From 1963-1992, the level of participation in civic education was below (15%). This could have been due to the patriarchal political structure and low level education of women. However, the situation improved in 1997 to 26.7% this could have been due to the efforts put in place by the civil society in creating awareness among the women. Between 2002-2012 women's attendance in the civil society meetings improved and this could have been due to the rising education standards in the district, the efforts put in place by the IPPG and the Affirmative policy in the new constitution (2010) where more chances have been created for women in politics. On the slots of nomination from 1963-2002 no woman was nominated to the local council however the situation progressively changed 2007-2012 and was attributed to affirmative action as provided in the new constitution

#### 4.2 Interventions

Despite all efforts made by women little success have brought in changes which have enhanced women interest in politics beyond being voters (Wanjiku & Wasamba 1998). For this reason certain interventions have been made both at global and national levels. For example, the 1985 Women's Conference in Nairobi reviewed the state of gender relations at the end of the United Nations Decade for Women (1975 - 1985) also formation of the Platform for Action Beijing Conference in 1995 which was tasked to implement the Declaration for women empowerment

Similar the end of Cold War period in 1990s, saw International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank emphasized to Third World countries to shift to good governance and promotion of democracy. Other development partners pressurized Kenyan government to expand the political space for greater involvement of other actors like women and the civil society (Wanjiku & Wasamba, 1998).

The Beijing Conference of 1995 stressed that equality in decision making to be integral to the advancement of women's rights and that women's equal participation was not a question of simple justice or democracy, but a necessary condition for women's interest to be taken into account (CEDAW, 2010). The 1990s witnessed an improvement in the numbers of women in parliament which rose to reflect 3.5% from a constant 2.0% from the previous years. This was attributed to various factors such as advocacy by civil society for greater inclusion of women, role of international partners and citizens pressure on the government and the

political parties to reform and open space for more women to conform to the international political climate (The League of Kenyan Women Voters, 1997).

Other international concerns from which the United Nations Security Council Resolution on Women, Peace and Social Security (2000), recognized women's role in political participation in nations affair (CEDAW, 2010). Member states called for adoption of 1997 Gender and development needs particularly to strengthen women participation in political and in decision making by 2005 but this has not been met.

Another experience that paved way for increased number of women was the 2005 National Referendum, which the government side lost its support for the Draft constitution. The small number women in parliament disadvantaged them as they were extremely silenced during the constitution campaigns (CMD, 2012). For example, Jebii Kilimo who had strongly supported the Draft constitution changed her mind as she feared for her political survival. To counter this steps were taken by women and gender activists before the 1997 general elections when they made the "Inter-Party Parliamentary Group" (IPPG) negotiations so as to strengthened multi-party democracy. It was strongly advocated that 6 out of the 12 seats of nominated Members of Parliament be reserved for women. Hon. Charity Kaluki Ngilu became the first woman ever to contest for the presidency since independence.

From the above, there is some little progress has/is being made on women's participation in elective politics in Kenya and is attributed to the rising work of the civil society in mobilizing the local communities and sensitizing them on the benefits of active involvement in party affairs (Kamau, 2010). Owing to this, variations have been the same worldwide showing significant barriers that hinder full integration of gender perspective in political participation at the country level (Bartels, 2003)

## **V. CONCLUSION**

The study focused on the trend of women participation in politics where the findings showed low to moderate participation across the world. Despite the interventions made such as improved electoral performance by women candidates and the government's subsequent marginal efforts to exercise affirmative action in parliamentary and public sector appointments and nominations, women gender agenda remains a major unfinished business that requires the attention of both men and women.

Though from the historical data in Kenya on women involvement and participation has improved change has been slow. Milestone was seen in the 2013 nominations when the Affirmative Action was brought into play which saw improvement. For example, county council nominations in Kakamega county, 23 (85.2%) out of the 27 nominated county representatives are women though there is still a belief among men that it is not yet time for women to hold political position. For this, there is need to engender men in the society to support women's participation Kenya's power structure.

From the Archival reports (1978-1989) by SimiyuSanja showed women in Kakamega district were not included in decision making hence played a marginal role in Kenya's political life even though they make up 52% of the country's population. For example, the League of Kenyan Women Voters (1997), showed the first parliament, (1963-69) had no women however the election on held 6th January, 1970, made a landmark when the first woman the former Hon. Grace Akinyi Onyango was elected (MP of Kisumu Town). Others elected included former Hon. Dr. Julia AumaOjiambo(MP Busia Central) and the former Hon. PhilominaChelagatMutai(MP Eldoret North). After the 1979 elections, both Mrs. Onyango and Dr. Ojiambo were re-elected to parliament (Kihoro, 2007). Document analysis done showed lack of a gender support structure limited women participation. There was need to increase Kenyan women's visibility in terms of voicing their concerns and inclusion in policy and decision making (Kiragu, 2006).

Today, women are still largely disadvantaged in political participation and decision making because their numbers are comparatively lower than that of men (Mitullah, 2003). That even with widespread improvement in education and training 'gender equality in terms of participation in education has not resulted in gender equality in other areas of political arena' (Kamau 2007).

## **VI. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FINDINGS**

To increase the trend of women's participation in politics in Kakamega Central district, the following have to be done: security to be enforced during the electioneering year to motivate more women to vie for political positions at various levels; the two-third gender rule to be enforced to allow room for more women to participate in politics ; more women to be nominated by political parties and be elected in political positions to eliminate gender disparity and the society to mount sensitization and awareness targeting young women in career selection in order to eliminate gender disparities. Women aspiring to be politicians need to be prepared for the various challenges that go with politics by consciously seeking mentorship from those who have made it in politics on positioning oneself in political parties, raising campaign resources, working with the media, handling issues to do with security, among others.

Women aspirants to network with fellow aspirants so as to encourage gender transformational leadership; the government to enhance women's capacity in participative politics and influence on decision making processes; promote the integration of gender and women in the design of intervention programs; reform of electoral systems including improving electoral financing and political parties to strengthen gender perspective within their parties to enhance chances of women being nominated as candidates and positioned at high levels

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**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

REF: **RESEARCH TOPICS- GRACE BARASA – ID NO. 6648767**

The above named person has been at our Archives and has used the following files in her research:

MYWO – 8<sup>TH</sup> March 1978 – 18<sup>th</sup> August, 1989

1. The role of Women Groups in development activities in Kakamega district.  
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