

## **CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN MEMBERS OF COUNTY ASSEMBLY IN MOMBASA COUNTY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Africa has seen fast acceleration in female political representation as compared to the low rates that existed in the 1960s. In Kenya, women have traditionally been marginalized from the structures of state that determine political and legislative priorities. This study aimed at investigating the challenges faced by women in realizing their legislative and representative mandates in Mombasa County. The study adopted cross sectional descriptive study using qualitative data collection methods on 21 women Members of Mombasa County. Data was analysed NVivo 10 software and presented in inductive thematic approach. Challenges that women MCAs encountered stem mostly from their small number in leadership positions, negative community perceptions which make them lose their self-esteem, lack of unity amongst themselves, lack of clear understanding of what their roles entail in leadership positions and tribalism and nepotism that is rampant in appointments. The study concluded that women are faced with many challenges in the Kenyan community that is highly patriarchal. The community has not for a long-time embraced the fact that women can assume leadership positions and deliver. The

challenges that they have encountered stem mostly from their small number in leadership positions, negative community perceptions which make them lose their self-esteem, lack of unity amongst themselves, lack of clear understanding of what their roles entail in leadership positions and tribalism and nepotism that is rampant in appointments. The study recommends that there is need for continuous investment in movements by women which includes logistical and organizational support in a bid to improve networks country wide. The study recommends that the women leaders should engage different Non-Governmental Organizations and financial institutions to support the women groups encourage all the women to join the social-economic groups and organize for training seminars to impart the women with entrepreneurial and business skills. In regard to the challenges that women face in realizing their legislative and representative mandates in Mombasa County, the study established women various challenges.

**Key Words:** *challenges faced by women, legislative and representative mandates, leadership positions, community perceptions, self-esteem, tribalism, nepotism*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Representation of Women is very significant in democracies since it forms the foundation of political institutions legitimacy and assists the governments in responding to their citizens (Dovi, 2014). According to Barnes and Burchard (2012), including the women in institutions of politics is as well observed to motivate civic engagement among citizens. Nevertheless, there is a continuous underrepresentation of women in legislatures and cabinets worldwide (Ebeku, 2012: 56). As per the Inter Parliamentary Union (2015), women constitute 22.1% of upper and lower legislative houses combined. Overall, legislators who are female still don't have enough chances

of becoming cabinet members regardless of increasingly participating in politics, though this might not be the case in Latin American and various countries in Asia (Pearson and Dancey, 2011). For instance in Chile, women were represented well in 2009 in the Cabinet at 43 percent, whereas in Pakistan parliament, there were more women than men at 22% in the 2008 elections compared to 39.7 percent in 2013 (World Values Survey [WVS] 2009:6).

Africa has seen fast acceleration in female political representation as compared to the low rates that existed in the 1960s (Pearson & Dancey, 2011). The cases of Rwanda, South Africa, Mozambique, Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi and Kenya confirm the emerging trends in women's participation in politics in Africa. The recent trends in women's political participation have led to an increase in women's influence in political issues from diverse angles (Tripp, 2009). The increased representation of women has had a visible impact on the institution of parliament'. For instance, women parliamentarians in Rwanda changed parliamentary hours and calendars, creating institutions that drive feminist change, and introduced gender into debates and legislation, among other things (Pearson & Dancey, 2011).

Equally, in South Africa, the parliamentary calendar was matched with the school calendar and earlier ending times for debates were introduced (Bauer & Britton, 2006). Women have made much influence in the constitution making processes. Indeed, the most impressive women legislative record is also in South Africa, where significant changes or additions to law in the areas of abortion, employment equality and others have been made. For example, the alliance between activists outside parliament and women deputies was crucial in passing the 1998 Domestic Violence Bill (The African Development Forum (ADF), 2008).

There has been a noted trend also in countries such as Zambia, Malawi and Uganda where women influenced the inclusion into constitutions sections on women's rights (non-discrimination, support of affirmative action, and curbing violence against women) (Economic Commission for Africa, 2009). Women have also been influential in processes that have led to improving women's legal status. Women such as Margaret Dongo in Zimbabwe, Charity Ngilu and Wangari Maathai in Kenya (Tripp, 2009), and Winnie Byanyima in Uganda emerged among the fiercest opponents of corruption and patronage politics in their respective countries (Schlozman and Verba, 2011).

In Kenya, women have traditionally been marginalized from the structures of state that determine political and legislative priorities (Sibonokuhle et al., 2013: 1). This is due to the fact that the political representation of women in leadership in Kenya is below the global average, despite improvements that were triggered by the dispensation of the 2010 Constitution. In 2013 women occupied 87 of the 416 seats of the newly-established National Assembly and Senate chambers, 5 of 20 positions of the Kenyan cabinet and 7 of 26 Principal Secretary positions which is below the constitutionally mandated a third gender rule (Wanyeki, 2009). Kamau (2011) concurs with Wanyeki by stating that in spite of Kenya having East Africa's strongest economy, leading

power of the region and modern, internationally networked institutions, her politics remains dominated by men.

Okello (2010) also posits that in pursuing equity in representation in parliament by women in Kenya have been difficulty journey which was initiated with the fight for independence from colonialists before 1963 up to the end of single party rule in 1992. Nzomo (2012: 232) reveals that; women in Kenya have encountered a lot of difficulties to penetrate the male-controlled structures of decision-making and state and the political parties' processes. Notwithstanding these difficulties, women with diverse backgrounds both ethnic and religious have adopted informal as well as formal political expression channels to deal with successive states and governments (traditional, colonial, modern), sometimes with mixed results (Wanyeki, 2009).

Though the Kenyan gender perspective of legislation emphasizes equality between women and men in the political arena, the dismal progression of representation of women in parliament indicates otherwise (Government of Kenya, 2011). The gender disparity persists when women attempt to access parliament as candidates and even as members of parliament their representation of women's interests is impeded. Historically, the monopolization of seats in parliament by men has resulted in women's interests being dismissed to the peripheries of national concerns (Sibonokuhle et al, 2013).

Women in Mombasa County have unique social and cultural context that hinders them from fully engaging and participating in politics. The social life of the Swahili is very distinct in that it is difficult for them to meet the time and energy requirements of political office as a result of worse cultures (Kamau, 2011). The traditional and persistent challenges have been shown to hinder the active pursuit of women to obtain positions of political leadership. The subordinate status of women *vis a vis* man is a universal phenomenon, though with a difference in the nature and extent of subordination across countries. Gender role ideology does not only create duality of femininity and masculinity, it also places them in hierarchical fashion in which female sex is generally valued less than male sex because of their socially ascribed roles in the reproductive sphere (Kabeberi-Macharia et al., 2011).

Various studies have been done in relation to leadership studies about women from developed and developing countries, for instance Nkomo and Ngambi (2009) did a study on African women in leadership: Current knowledge and a framework for future studies, Barasa (2011) conducted a study on the Trend of Women's Participation in Politics in Kakamega Central District since Independence, Nzomo (2012) conducted a study on the Kenyan women in politics and public decision making and found that the economic hardship in Kenya has a negative impact on women's political representation because it decreases women's ability to run for elective office while Wanyeki (2009) carried out a study on interrogating the Kenyan parliament. These researches indicate that women with limited access to resources have challenges in competing favourably with men in national politics. There is a need to examine the challenges faced by women MCAs with legislation and representative mandate.

## **RESEARCH PROBLEM**

The women participation in political leadership in Mombasa County remains minimal in spite of the resolutions passed in the UN Decade Conference of Nairobi in 1985 and the Abuja Declaration in the political sphere. This situation has persevered despite the fact that Kenya has ratified majority of human rights conventions, the most prominent being the 1979 convention of the Elimination of all Discrimination forms against Women (Yoon, 2010). Various studies have been done in relation to leadership studies about women from developed and developing countries, for instance, Nzomo (2012) on the Kenyan women in politics and public decision making found that the economic hardship in Kenya has a negative impact on women's political representation because it decreases women's ability to run for elective office. Nevertheless, the study by Nzomo did not cover information on the strategies used by women Members of County Assembly in realizing their legislative and representative mandates in Mombasa County and the contributions of women Members of County Assembly in their legislative and representative mandates in Mombasa County. From the reviewed studies, it is clear that number of researchers have documented the increased representation of women in a parliament. However, most the studies have been carried out in areas outside of Mombasa largely assessing the voters' perception of women political leaders. The narratives derived from such largely project third-party voices and may not be to unpack the institutional-based factors that can hinder or promote elected women's performance of their mandates. The current study pursued the latter trajectory to voice elected women legislators' experiences in the County Assembly. Additionally, the type of theories applied in the previous studies was different from the ones used in this study. Hence, to address the foregoing, this study was guided by the following research questions: What are the challenges faced by women Members of County Assembly in realizing their legislative and representative mandates in Mombasa County?

## **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The objective of the study was to assess the challenges faced by women Members of County Assembly in Mombasa County.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Discrimination historical experience of women renders them economically disadvantaged. Campaigning in politics is expensive and needs one to have strong financial support for them to be successful (Devlin et al., 2008). Over the years, sexual labour division as well as job opportunities based on sex have given men productive gender roles, making them more powerful compared to the female counterparts. Therefore, it's commanding advocating equality of gender to focus on the development gendered nature and challenge the international development capitalist paradigm which generates and restructures gender differences, while still working towards generating an environment for enabling for women to participate in development (Ballington et al., 2011). Women's historic exclusion from political structures and processes is

the result of multiple structural, functional and personal factors that vary in different social contexts across countries (Wanyeki, 2009).

Kanthak et al., (2012) established that men and women degrade their female colleagues as the part of women population in the Congress of US increase. In United States, success of women in passing their proposed legislation likewise lessens as their numbers increase (Bratton, 2011). Access of women to “masculine” and “powerful” committees has been decreasing as the legislative women’s share expands. Quotas limit politicians who are female power accessibility and as well shorten their leadership tenure. For instance as demonstrated by Towns (2013), despite women success as legislators, quota of Italy women were significantly less likely for re-election into office than their non-quota counterparts, because the elites of the party places them in unwinnable positions on the list of the candidates.

A study by Afifu (2008: 17) revealed that poverty in rural areas is the main challenge for women who wish to take part in Kenyan electoral politics. The gap economically amongst the Kenyan rural and urban parts is big. Urban population in Kenya is 37% in contrast to 63% living in the rural areas (Census Report, 2009). As explained by Wanyeki (2009), regardless of the increasing growth in urban areas, most of people in Kenya are still living in rural areas and a most of them are women who have hindrances to accessing resources hence making it harder for them to favourably compete with men in national politics. And as explained by Ballington et al., (2011: 42) the crisis in the economy in nations with underdeveloped democracies have intensified the poverty risk for women, which, like unemployment, have a likelihood of feminized increase. Poverty eradication has a positive impact on increase in participation of women in the democratic process. The empowerment of women economically, along with education and information access, will ease women from household constraints so as to fully participate in politics and political elections (Ballington et al., 2011).

In this study, Fanthorpe (2011) found that the main challenge for most of women is inadequate capacity and confidence in operating among the political environment dominated by male, often in the face of discrimination or segregation by male counterparts. As per Afifu (2008), all the interviewed councillors and MPs who female reported to have received training on skills of campaigning prior to elections, very few seemed to have received training after being elected. Majority had a feeling that they required training so as to efficiently operate, particularly on their own roles and duties, on speaking publicly and on budgets some of them indicated that their inadequate basic financial skills implied that they had inability to play any role in oversight. Female leaders for Wards seemed to have little training and, in several cases were not aware of their common duties. The ability of women efficiently operating within formal politics is dependent on part of their ability of building political alliances through which they have an opportunity to get a chance in winning elections.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted cross sectional descriptive study using qualitative data collection methods. The population of interest of this study was thirty-one (31) women Members of Mombasa County in both the 1st and 2nd County Assemblies. The study used qualitative data which was derived through Case narratives, Key Informants Interviews and the perusal of secondary data from the Mombasa County Assembly Library. Former Women MCAs were interviewed to give their perspectives on the strategies used by women MCAs to fulfil their legislative mandates. The current MCAs were also interviewed on their experiences and a comparison done with those who had been in those positions to ascertain the changes if any in their experiences. Secondary data was obtained from; Gok (2013) provided information on County Composition per gender in Mombasa County in both the 1st and 2nd County Assemblies. Data used in this study is both qualitative and quantitative form. Qualitative data analysis was descriptively presented explaining the variables investigated. The qualitative data was obtained from Case Narratives and Key Informant interviews. The data that was collected was subjected to thematic analysis. The data was cleaned, sorted and categorized around the themes that emerged from the participants' responses and categorized thematically around the research objectives. Data was collected verbatim from the participants with the help on audio recorder. The transcripts were imported into NVivo 10 software for qualitative analysis. Auto-Coding was used in organization and creation of nodes for each interview question and organization of the data into nodes. The collected data was analyzed by use of an inductive thematic approach that assisted in identification of the major themes from the collected data and the themes developed directly from the data.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **Lack of Funds**

Elections in Kenya have become even more costly for candidates since the introduction of devolution. Women cite the financial costs of running a campaign as a major barrier. This affects women disproportionately who do not, as a general rule, have equal access to financial resources as male candidates. However, those occupying nominated seats cited lack of funds to implement their development agenda and funds to campaign when they seek the elective positions to represent the people.

*“And then also when you try to find out, how much our Wards have been allocated...Yes, it becomes difficult, because the Governor is the one controlling the funds, so we may, like I told you, there are many good projects that we want to do on the ground, but the funds are not available. There will be propaganda to have you impeached, so you are forced to toe the line. So he controls the money and he decides what should happen, so usually when we come with our proposals, he decides when, and where and how he is going to implement them. So it*

*becomes a challenge because we don't have access, especially you cannot do anything without money." [Interview with elected Women MCA]*

The finding is in line with Fraser *et al.*, (2004), who cited that those women occupying nominated seats within national and county legislatures are not entitled to the same benefits, privileges and development funds as those who are elected. The ability to fund and spearhead development projects is one of the main ways in which constituents judge their representatives' effectiveness. As most women in 2013–2017 held nominated seats, without the same resources as men, they were perceived as having less power and authority compared to their elected male colleagues (Fraser *et al.*, 2004). However, one of those interviewed disagreed by declaring that women are given equal opportunities to that of men. She revealed that what makes women feel neglected is the absence or little research by the women leaders on matters to be discussed on the floor which hinders them from contributing adequately on issues pertaining to development.

*"Okay in parliament, I believe we are given equal opportunities, the only thing is that most of the women have-not utilized the research, if for example you are supposed to discuss a matter, concerning maybe ECD, you must have that passion on how you can assist the ECD but if you don't have that passion, then, it will also hinder your passion in regards to discussing the matter on the floor but we are given, equal opportunities" [Interview with nominated Women MCA]*

An interview with elected women representative noted that women do not get support from men when seeking elective positions in Mombasa County. However, they rely on friends for help to finance their ambitions for political positions. An elected woman representative stated:

*"And then when it comes to funds, it was all...I didn't have much funds, it was the goodwill of the people. It was all. I can't remember my husband giving me money, I didn't get a shilling from him, it is sad, yes and I don't have an organization, but you know these small harambees, here and there, you have got a few friends you trust and everything. We are still paying some of these loans [laughter], those that I borrowed. Am still paying, so campaign funds were not a lot. It was the goodwill of the people." [Interview with elected Women MCA]*

The findings concur with a study conducted by Afifu (2008) who argued that revealed that poverty in rural areas is the main challenge for women who wish to take part in Kenyan electoral politics. In another study by Wanyeki (2009: 23), regardless of the increasing growth in urban areas, most of people in Kenya are still living in rural areas and a most of them are women who have hindrances to accessing resources hence making it harder for them to favourably compete with men in national politics. Various societies consider the political participation as a preserve for the males and the situation is further aggravated by financiers and sponsors who show preference toward the male candidature as opposed to the female candidature. This is so because they believe that the males are best suited to hold leadership positions. In majority of the cases where women have successful contested leadership positions with their male counterparts,

women organizations and sponsors have been key in sponsorship. The culture of women depending on men for financial support in political campaigns reflects the dependence of women on men in the family setting, since the men are considered as family heads. This shows the extent to which the females are incapacitated.

### **Political Parties**

Despite the various ways in which women can capitalize on party affiliation, most participant described parties as barriers to women's representation in politics. The study established that internal political party processes lack of transparency means that even though women hold party positions, party decisions are dependent on patronage and key powerbrokers who are most often men acting as gatekeepers. These party dynamics unfold differently from one county to another and between the county and national level. In places of dominant parties, political party can hinder women with limited political networks to access political posts. While women are busy campaigning and seeking the support of the electorate, many men attend late night meetings for backroom deals to secure the nomination. One respondent noted that 'ODM calls the shots' and 'determine who is nominated. A women leader key informant stated that:

*"Because most of the ones were given on the basis of I know your father, it's not because they real wanted the seat or but it's on the basis of favouritism. So you find because you were given that seat because you were related to a certain politician, so at times you want to rally a Bill, you are not able to, because you weigh your options between your personal interests and the interests of the Party" [Interview with nominated Women MCA]*

Concurring with that opinion, another key informant succinctly put it that the party leaders would even nominate their girl friends and relatives to those leadership positions:

*"The problem is that it depends on who is being nominated because if you are nominating your own girlfriend and she does not know why she is there in the first place in the County Assembly, then if change is to come it's very difficult. So unless they come up with a clear roadmap on how to nominate these MCAs, because I have seen a trend because those who are being nominated make use of friends or relatives." [Interview with Key Informant]*

In Nyandarua, the ethnic homogeneity opens the door for intra-ethnic competition as struggles for power between county notables are rooted in local historical contexts and not ethnic differences (Cheeseman, Lynch & Willis 2016). International observers found that across the country, very few women were nominated by their parties for competitive seats during the 2013 elections (Carter Center, 2013). Focus group discussion for men revealed that women who are nominated were there to serve the interests of the appointing person or party and therefore the interests of the common people were not addressed. Appointed candidates were given conditions

that accommodate the interests of the party leaders. This makes appointed women fight for the interests the people who appointed them and the interests are only political.

### **Cultural Norms**

Cultural constraints remain a big barrier to women's representation in leadership positions. Interviews with nominated and elected women MCAs suggest that Kenyan society is not yet fully at ease with women's leadership. Electorates in rural communities look down upon women since they don't believe that women can participate in parliament. They describe women as motherly, nurturing and meek. Expressions such as 'women are mothers', 'they can manage money better than men' and 'they have children so must take care of citizens' are common. An elected MCA stated that:

*"When a woman wants to vie for a certain post, let's say a Governor, or a Senator, most of the time people will vote maybe for men, because they have that notion, a woman can't do anything, what will a woman do in parliament....if not sleeping with men and all that, so we need to change that perspective and we need to love each other because, if a woman is a friend of a woman, then we can prosper".*

Kenyan politics is consistently described as combative, the portrayal of women as weak contradicts stated beliefs that women belong in this sphere. The finding concurs with Kivoi (2014), who found that the role of women, as opposed to men, is to be caretakers. While public servants should be responsive and concerned about their constituents' needs, the general public's perception of Kenyan woman politicians. Stemming from the negative community perception of women as weak, those who make it to be nominated are often ridiculed with terminologies such as (*flower girls, bonga points*) which results in these leaders having low self-esteem to the point of not working to fulfil their legislative and representative mandate.

Most research participant did not express concern at the way masculine attributes are privileged in Kenya politics. Rather, the sense that women should conform to the norms was more widely expressed. This suggests that the potential for women to display characteristics and perform roles that subvert traditional gender roles, both on the campaign trail and in office, is limited. The persistence of these beliefs and perceptions despite the change in the political and legal arrangements in Kenya since 2010 underscore the necessity of continuous civic education not just in the lead up to the elections. The domination of the Kenyan political landscape by men affected the participation of women in politics and on the other hand, the women themselves felt inferior when competing against men. Interview with nominated Women MCA stated:

*"Because I think, Kenya's politics is dominated by men, so women feel inferior, they don't feel confident, then another thing, politics is all about money and you will find that most women are not financially empowered, so they tend to shy away from politics, until maybe they get a person who has a lot of money who will*

*sponsor them, and know it comes, if maybe I sponsor you in your campaign, you have to return the favor.” [Interview with nominated Women MCA].*

Kenyans have been socialized to believe that men are more suited to leadership, especially in the political arena. Consequently, voters are much more forgiving of male politicians' flaws than women. In Kenya, women must prove that they are good wives and homemakers before they are elected, including by female voters, as a prerequisite to being a trustworthy political leader. Culture determines the frame in which people operate in and if any development is to be realized, there is need for transcending of cultural barriers and confines (Dowerje, 2008). In many African communities, women are not allowed to express themselves freely before their male counterparts who have resulted in an untapped or lack of exploitation of the potential of women. The women are also limited in property ownership and participation in inheritance of family property. This puts a limit in their contribution to economic activities which are responsible for economic development. Therefore, if there will be increased participation of women in political processes, there is need for change in mind-sets which will result in more equity between men and women in leadership positions. Interviewed nominated Women MCA revealed that some women feel inferior and intimidated when competing with men. She stated:

*“One is when they are running against a man they feel inferior they themselves feel inferior, its only few ladies people like Ngilu, Mboko, those who have big mouth, the rest they just feel inferior, they feel intimidated and of course men want when they for election, they want to win, and they first have to intimidate these ladies and the ladies feel intimidated, those are the challenges which actually face the women and women don't have money, especially in our politics, there are only three things which one has to do and he will walk tall, one is financial resources, human resource and time” [Interview with nominated Women MCA].*

Assuredly, cultural beliefs of different groups of people are a key determinant of the cultural beliefs espoused by those people. The assertion that women are inferior cuts across most of the major religions in different parts of the world, and that being the case religious beliefs have been used in excluding women from political and social aspects of life (Kunovich *et al.*, (2007) The major religious affiliations around the globe reveal conservativeness and patriarchy in their views about the place of women in the society even in the church setting.

Authority is divinely vested with men in most communities. Hence, women are called upon to submit and carry out subsidiary roles. Debate about the position of women is present in all major religions (Kunovich *et al.*, (2007). The internalization of this belief has played a major role in women being their own worst enemies believing that politics is a preserve for their male counterparts and it is dirty all together (Douglas L (2014).

Women leaders pointed out that culture and religion proved to be big challenges while they sought leadership positions to serve their people and more so represent the women. The

participant's said that culture being male dominated or being predominantly male had an issue. An effort of Women defending themselves before people was laborious because people do not believe in what a woman can say

*“what will a woman say? What will a woman do?’ You see, ‘How will a woman fight with me?’ [nominated Women MCA].*

Supporting this assertion, an elected MCA pointed out that the patriarchal nature of the Kenyan society did not allow women to be louder than their male counterpart which explains why they shy away from discussing issues that affect them. Interviewed with Key Informant stated:

*“The male and of course, there could be reasons for that of course. We come from a society where patriarchy is very esteemed, and some positions like the headship positions are mainly given to the male that is what society believes and especially here in Mombasa County where women are not even supposed to be louder than their male counterparts. So yes the leadership of some of these committees is male dominated but we have two or three which are female dominated.” [Interview with Key Informant]*

The findings of the study confirm the study by Agbalajobi (2010) who asserted that some religious doctrines in an equal measure worked against the active participation of women in politics. He argued that patriarchy appeared to be supported by both Christianity and Islamic doctrines which barred women from political involvement. Key informant revealed that women leaders engaged themselves in cultural issues which affected women. It was established that religion and culture were a big challenge to the empowerment of women and as such women could not articulate their issues openly. One key informant working as a journalist focusing on women issues posed that the Muslim religion did not favour women and most of them were intimidated about openly discussing issues that concerned them. The fact is that the local culture in Mombasa, the Swahili culture, contributed to women not being open in sharing the problems that faced them. A problem that is not shared cannot be addressed. The informant cited the main culture in Mombasa as a challenge to the empowerment of women.

*“Not really as I have said you will see out of the five elected MCAs, three are Muslims, and two are Christians, so as I have said that culture in Mombasa, women are not supposed to talk, so most of them you will find they don't really articulate those issues or if there is that instance, I think when they were campaigning, they left the men campaign for them, so not really, I think they have to work together.” [Interview with elected Women MCA]*

In addition, it was established that the culture in Mombasa was mainly patriarchal in nature which worked against the women in their desire of seeking leadership positions. Once in political roles, many women find their voices and opinions marginalized by male political actors because of the patriarchal nature of political systems. Women are assigned ‘soft portfolios’, such as

health, tourism, housing, education, culture, while men are assigned ‘hard portfolios’ such as finance, trade or foreign affairs (Htun and Piscopo, 2010).

### **Insecurity**

Insecurity is a major concern for women vying for legislative seats at both the national and county levels. Elections in 1992, 1997 and 2007 saw large-scale violence in different parts of the Kenya. Beyond these high-profile violent episodes, candidates and their supporters are also subjected to routine violence and protests at local levels throughout the campaign cycle. What makes this type of political violence more challenging for women is the fact that it is coupled with pervasive misogyny and high rates of gender-based electoral violence. This research revealed that such violence differs from that directed at men throughout electoral process, as women are targeted to dissuade them from vying. Then, once in political office, women face continuing violence, which manifests itself in various ways. A former MCA described:

*Imagine I was attacked; I was attacked by three men at my gate. They tried to cut me with knife but I evaded... I just found people by my gate when I was just about to get in and they started harassing me...” [Interview with former MCA]*

A significant portion of the violence during the electoral cycle is deployed during the primary stage between people of the same party. This violence is not uniform across the county, but it is more likely to be concentrated in certain regions with contested elections. Violence during the party primaries not only impacts candidates, but also voters. A nominated MCA explained that many voters don’t participate in the primaries because they fear the chaos. The 2017 primaries resulted in several deaths and many reports of abuse, kidnappings, and injuries. Those most likely deterred by the violence are women and other vulnerable groups. For instance, a sitting MCA described how her opponent hired ‘goons’ to identify her key mobilizers to intimidate them. The study revealed that used goons are youths who are engaged in drugs and crime in Mombasa. Focus group discussion with men stated that, there was great number of cases where the young people engaged themselves in drug use and abuse and therefore, this was an area that needs to be prioritized as one participant noted:

*“If we take an instance of Mombasa County, as a county we have high level of young people involved in drugs and drug trafficking, so it’s my opinion that the county should do more on curbing that menace, that is as my friend has mentioned probably by increasing the job opportunities for our youth and then empowering the youth probably to do small businesses that is SMEs businesses whereby they will get occupied and also put a lot of pressure to the drug barons so that they stop using our youth, that is if they put proper policies and stern measures and rules to ensure the whole thing will go down that is my opinion.” [Focus Group Discussion with Men]*

The pervasive violence during the primaries dissuades women from voting and participating in the political process, thereby decreasing the likelihood of women to secure party nominations. The additional financial resources that many women candidates must expend on their security creates a further financial hardship for female candidates. An elected MCA clearly stated that once goons are aware that you are in power and they note you are walking around, they robe and steal all the belongings. Women tend to fear being a public figure for the privacy of their life. She stated that:

*“I will talk about insecurity, insecurity has become a nuisance in Mombasa, I cannot walk at night even at the day time, you just pass at a short distance am robbed, like yesterday, I don’t know like last week a policeman was killed in Kisauni, two of them I think actually, a flying squad and when they went to the hospital no one cares about them, our hospitals are also bad, you are told you should come with what letter from who and the person is there.... Apparently one of the areas involved in crime is Kisauni followed by Likoni, Fortris and Miritini. Fortris around Mabongo area, because they rotate, I don’t know they have Wakali kwanza, Wakaliwao, I don’t know Watalia,” [Focus Group Discussion Women].*

Women also reported being subjected to abusive language and insults during campaigns. They are accused of being ‘loose women’, ‘prostitutes’, and ‘adulterers. Members of the public, male colleagues, journalists and even fellow women scrutinize and criticize the way women candidates dress. Often this abusive language continues after they arrive in office, as women in government continue to face pervasive allegations about their sexual promiscuity. An elected MCA stated:

*“The challenges is that many a times, they are not given that first priority. Some will even be named as flower girls, bonga points, prostitutes, so with time it diminishes you as a leader... Some women, you see the moment, you feel that after all I have been called am a bonga point, someone feels bad” [Interview with elected MCA].*

Participants also alluded to the use of violence as a campaign tool and women’s reticence to use violence as a barrier to access. Men are aware of the pervasiveness of violence against women and understand women’s unique vulnerabilities. Despite a robust legal framework including the penal code, the electoral code of conduct and political party sanctions, gender-based violence directed at women in politics rarely has any consequences for the perpetrators.

### **Lack of Unity among Women**

Women have a challenge of supporting each other. The study established that the lack of unity amongst the women proved to be a challenge in the realization of their legislative and representative mandate. Women do not work together ending up to be divided. One elected MCA

explained that women don't work together and they fear to give a direct direction on what is supposed to be done. They think what they doing is done wrongly, so they fail to give clear direction. A key informant stated:

*"I believe the Caucus is supposed to assist women greatly, especially in leadership and addressing the challenges that affect us in terms of leadership. But it just like the 'Chama Cha Maendeleo ya Wanawake' that of long time ago. We as women we don't support our own, everyone is doing his things on her own, everybody is fighting for herself, but we don't have the support and many of the times we are our own worst enemies as women. Me this is what I want, the other person will side step me, instead of supporting me, she will bring me down"*  
[Interview with Key Informant]

The uncooperative nature of women towards fellow women has led to the low number of women in the County assembly. Few numbers of women in the County Assembly was a challenge making it difficult for women MCAs to pass Bills on matters that affected them. One of the key informants thus stated:

*"Because there are few in numbers, so if at times maybe they want to pass a certain Bill concerning the women, they really have to rally the men behind them for that Bill to succeed. So because they are fewer in numbers they are not able to, like there is this rule, I think the Two Thirds Gender Rule, there was a Bill which failed in Parliament. Yeah, it failed, because men were not behind it, so and we need them to pass that Bill, so such issues, because they are fewer in numbers, and another thing, which, when you are a Nominated MCA, it's like and especially a woman, you don't have so much power unlike those who are elected because as they say especially Mombasa County, 90% or 95% of the Nominated MCAs are from one Party"* [Interview with nominated Women MCA]

### **Overcoming Challenges Faced by Women in Leadership**

Women interviewed for the study upheld the view that the Gender Principle has had a positive influence on women's participation in politics, with some citing it as the main driver behind their decision to run for office. The Gender Principle was an affirmation of women's rights to be included in politics, and for some, the security of affirmative action seats alleviated some of the personal risks associated with electoral campaigning for dual gender seats. The new constitution also lowered some of the structural and institutional barriers to women's representation by forcing the system to accommodate women.

The informers pointed out that there was need for those who have been elected and nominated to understand their roles, the need of unity among themselves, engaging with the women at the grassroots, developing positive attitude towards their leadership roles. The study established that one of the key ways of overcoming the challenges that the women faced in leadership was first

for them to understand what their roles. When they understand their roles they will be able to fulfil their legislative and representative mandates as one participant put it:

*“I have said one, women need to understand their roles and the importance especially after the new constitution because they have been given more power.”*  
*[Interview with nominated Women MCA]*

Main challenge for most of women is inadequate capacity and confidence in operating among the political environment dominated by male, often in the face of discrimination or segregation by male counterparts. The ability of women efficiently operating within formal politics is dependent on part of their ability of building political alliances through which they have an opportunity to get a chance in winning elections. Afifu (2008) revealed that poverty in rural areas is the main challenge for women who wish to take part in Kenyan electoral politics. The gap economically amongst the Kenyan rural and urban parts is big. Urban population in Kenya is 37% in contrast to 63% living in the rural areas. Regardless of the increasing growth in urban areas, most of people in Kenya are still living in rural areas and a most of them are women who have hindrances to accessing resources hence making it harder for them to favourably compete with men in national politics.

*“And another thing, they usually say, the enemy of a woman is a woman, so I think there needs to be love between women, they need to love each other because you will find women are many in terms of numbers. But when a woman wants to vie for a certain post, let’s say a Governor, or a Senator, most of the time people will vote maybe for men, because they have that notion, a woman can’t do anything, what will a woman do in parliament?”* [Focus group discussion, Women]

Political efficiency is dependent on how integration of the interests for both men and women are in the civil society, the political arena, and the nation. Civil society or lobby group of women role is mobilizing resources as well as concerns of the public on needs and guarantees of women on women independence movement. The women prospect succeeding in politics relies on how many parties are existing, their philosophies and associations, the relative finance or crime importance or ethnic and national unity discourse in politics. The state to democracy commitment, state welfare orientation, and the women’s positions advancement as well as empowerment determine how integration of women in politics.

Participant identified political parties as enablers to access. Key informant explained that in most cases, political parties are vehicles to access when politicians are members of the dominant political party in the region both at the county and the national level. Political parties in Kenya generally lack an ideological basis and tend to be organized around region and ethnicity with opaque organizational structures making them difficult to navigate. Notwithstanding this, women seeking nominated positions must be selected by their party. A nominated MCA explained that the only way her party had been an enabler to access was through her very nomination. But she

argued that the process does not come without a cost. She explained that this meant that in return, one has to ‘preach the word of the party to get more members.

Lack of research makes women leaders not to be aware of the nature of the issues that they are supposed to address. This challenge can be overcome through women leaders engaging other women at the grassroots, understanding their problems and seeking solutions. As one of the participant put it:

*“Then another thing as women, we need to know the problems of each other, in terms of we need to engage each other, create awareness among us, what really is ailing us, what is the problem among us? That way we can find solutions, but if you are a leader, you have been elected, you have been nominated and you feel like you are in your own class and this other women are, they are "others" It won't work, but if we engage each other, we will be able to overcome such issues and lets not be shy talking about our issues because there are some issues which men can't talk about, yeah, issue of let's say health.” [Interview with nominated Women MCA]*

The Kenyan society is patriarchal in nature, something that may not change very soon. This was established to be one of the challenges that face women as they sought for leadership positions. Therefore, for the women to overcome this challenge they need to believe in themselves, be bold and fight for their space as one of the elected informants put it. The study established that one of the reasons as to why the women MCAs nominated to the County Assembly have not been open in addressing the issues affecting them is that most of them do not even understand their roles. In a focus group discussion, one respondent noted that.

## **CONCLUSION**

Without any doubt, women are faced with many challenges in the Kenyan community that is highly patriarchal. The community has not for a long-time embraced the fact that women can assume leadership positions and deliver. The challenges that they have encountered stem mostly from their small number in leadership positions, negative community perceptions which make them lose their self-esteem, lack of unity amongst themselves, lack of clear understanding of what their roles entail in leadership positions and tribalism and nepotism that is rampant in appointments. The right people with qualifications do not get the leadership positions. The lack of funds hinders women from seeking elective positions since most of the elective seats need a lot of funds when campaigning. These challenges have to be overcome for any positive impact to be realized.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study recommends that there is need for continuous investment in movements by women which includes logistical and organizational support in a bid to improve networks country wide. The study recommends that the women leaders should engage different Non-Governmental

Organizations and financial institutions to support the women groups encourage all the women to join the social-economic groups and organize for training seminars to impart the women with entrepreneurial and business skills. In regard to the challenges that women face in realizing their legislative and representative mandates in Mombasa County, the study established women various challenges.

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