

POLICY BRIEF



WOMEN LEADERSHIP: OPERATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

POLICY BRIEF

WOMEN LEADERSHIP: OPERATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES



September 2021

About Life & Peace Institute

We build peace one change at a time. For more than 35 years, we have promoted nonviolent approaches to conflict in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region. Working across 8 key programmes in 6 countries and with more than 70 staff, we support the capacity of people living with violent conflict to transform their own communities and societies into inclusive, just, and peaceful ones. We also work to influence regional and global policy agendas, making sure local voices are heard around the world.

Introduction

This policy brief is based on women talking circles conducted by Life & Peace Institute (LPI); in the lead up to the commemoration of the March 8, 2021, International Women's Day (IWD); to highlight the inequitable gendered nature of political participation and leadership in view of Kenya's upcoming general elections slated for 2022. It provides evidence on the societal practices and structures that hinder women from access to and meaningful participation in decision-making in the public sphere with a focus on six informal settlements namely, Kangemi, Kayole, Kibera, Korogocho, Majengo, and Mathare.

This Policy Brief is aimed at practitioners, legislators, and policymakers to promote change in national regulatory frameworks towards equitable gender representation in the political arena. It is expected that the findings of the women talking circles and recommendations of this brief will also benefit civil society actors promoting women's political participation, monitoring the impact of women in leadership, and working with communities to implement the broader Women, Peace, and Security agenda.

The Policy brief therefore seeks to:

- Explain gendered obstacles faced by women that impede their political participation;

- Outline the opportunities available for women in political spaces;
- Explore ways in which women can take advantage of these opportunities.

On March 8 each year the world marks International Women’s Day (IWD) which aims to celebrate the achievements of women and their contribution in the social, political, and economic spheres while raising awareness on issues that still need attention. The IWD 2021 themed “Choose to Challenge” called on women to confront the status quo on issues contributing to inequality with vigilance towards inspiring positive change. Although great strides have been made towards equality, women around the world still face many instances of gender inequality. Cognisant of this, the

Key findings: Kenyan women choose to challenge

Women are inextricably linked to both the destruction and building of a country’s social fabric and should be recognised as powerful agents of positive change. The women chose to challenge:

- Voicelessness
 - Politics of ethnicity

Box 1: Example: Mathare

One of the women wanted to vie for the Member of County Assembly (MCA) seat but her husband comes from a different ethnic group. Her community asked her to leave her husband if she wants to get the position. She opted to stay in her marriage.

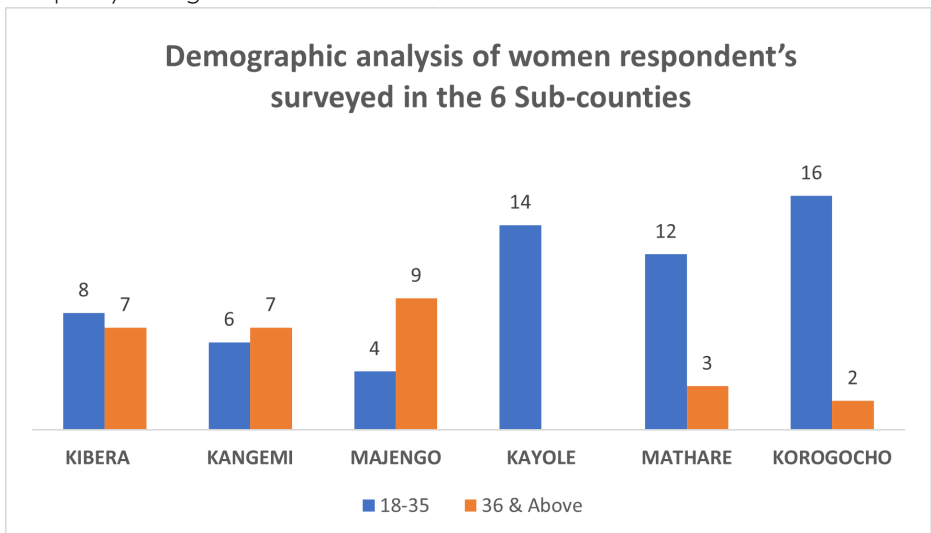


Figure 1: total respondents per district

Ethnicity is often depicted as a key cleavage in Kenya and therefore in the talking circles, the women advocated for inclusion and equitable treatment especially in domestic and political matters. Inter-marriages in Kenya can be used to assess the strength of societal cleavages since they combine a measure of segregation (who meets whom and where) with a measure of who is deemed a suitable spouse. Politicised ethnic tensions is the reason some may not be able to marry a partner of their choice.

Box 2: Example: Kangemi

A Kikuyu woman from Kangemi wanted to marry a Luo man in 2007 unfortunately her family objected to their relationship, and they had to part ways.

- Bride Price

The payment of the bride price has ramifications for gender relations, values, expectations, and roles. Men are frequently forced to assert their control in the family on the grounds that they paid bride price. When it comes to raising children, the women shared that they are often left with the sole responsibility. This is somewhat

pegged on the fact that once dowry has been paid, men feel that women ought to take care of all familial responsibilities. Masculinity has strongly been tied to earning an income and avoiding things that are considered feminine. The habit of paying bride price may influence a culture of violence by perpetuating negative preconceptions about male dominance and female subjugation in marriage. Therefore, if young people cannot even imagine what a model of men's time at home may look like, it's a sign that our gender views are deeply ingrained and need more unpacking.

Box 3: Example: Kayole

A woman from Kayole who got married at a young age stated that her husband was supportive, but this changed after she got pregnant and had children. He no longer assists around the house, and she felt like a slave. When she raises the issue, he retorts "I paid the cows in your family for you."

The men said they 'own' the women and women should work for them because they have paid the bride price.

- Inheritance:

Family-owned land is usually left to the male children after the demise of the parents as it is presumed that women are married and will benefit from their in-laws. Kenya's Law on Succession has numerous clauses that acknowledge and support the idea that men and women should have equal rights to inherit property.¹ Women are allowed to inherit under the rules of the Act. The Succession Clause 131 of 2013 Section 38² stipulates that all children are entitled to inherit property from their parents regardless of gender, the Act treats male and female children equally. Despite these safeguards, this does not translate into implementation and significant discrimination still exists.

Box 4: Inheritance

One woman revealed that her father was selling the land and the family had nowhere to go. She went to the chief, who upon hearing of her ordeal, dismissed her, telling her that she is a woman and has no say in it unless one of the son's objects. She tried bringing in village elders, but they did not support her either even when she made an offer to buy back the land for the welfare of her mother.

- Sexual objectification and exploitation of women

Sexual objectification is a gendered problem that affects both victims (mainly women) and perpetrators (usually males). It reinforces negative gender stereotypes that normalise violence against women and girls. These preconceptions are harmful not only to girls, but also to boys. In all six areas, women shared how they were sexually harassed as they looked for employment opportunities. Unfortunately, majority of the women felt discriminated against in their job search, and that their physical appearance mattered more than their education. Human welfare depends on the freedom to work — on one's own terms, in conditions of dignity, safety, and justice. Ensuring that women have access to this right is a significant goal in and of itself.

Overt sexism was also experienced by women in formal settings. Women are expected to do "office housework" such as serving their male colleagues tea during meetings. Some reported being dismissed from meetings to serve tea demeaning their contributions and presence.

1 Law of Succession Act, (1981) Cap. 160 35(5), 38, 40(2), 41

2 Succession Cause 131 of 2013 <http://kenyalaw.org/caselaw/cases/view/125462>

Box 5: Sexual exploitation of women

An intern's employer kept telling her that she was hired because of her beauty and not her papers or work.

The man kept touching her inappropriately and eventually started asking her for sexual favours so that she gets the job and she had to comply. Any time she wanted to say no the man reminded her why she hired her just because of her beauty. There were those who refused to give in and ended up missing out on job opportunities.

Box 6: My dress my choice

One of the respondents mentioned that she experienced sexual harassment when she wore leggings. On one occasion a public transport conductor touched her inappropriately and when she complained, others joined in shaming her stating that she was asking for it.

- Male dominance in influential positions

Being a woman means that they are judged on how they dress, talk, and interact. Overall, most of the respondents reported that they had experienced some form of humiliation because of their dressing, physique, and hairstyle. Sexual harassment against women was considered commonplace in public transport vehicles, the workplace, and the streets. This forces women to change their preferences in order to conform to societal demands.

Despite the unacceptability of overt sex discrimination and growing recognition that women are capable leaders, the advancement of women into positions of leadership remains gradual. Huge levels of vertical and horizontal gender segregation continue to characterise leadership, decision-making, and governance positions. This is linked to structural barriers and institutional mindsets which encourage women to give up on their aspirations to join politics, family dynamics encouraging women to stay home take care of the children and do housework, religion, and cultural support for male leadership. Other hindrances to women's participation include sexual harassment and exploitation against women interested in any

political positions; cultural norms pushing women to shy away from leadership; stereotypes of weakness; men's fears that women in power will try to change structural norms that enforce patriarchy, and thus they try to pit women against each other.

Box 7: Male Dominance

Utaenda wapi na hii mimba yako
(Where will you go with your pregnancy).

Women lacking the confidence to work in men-dominated fields also came up supporting the role congruity theory³ which stipulates that woman who lead in stereotypically feminine fields may face less prejudice and discomfort than those who try to lead in more masculine ones.

- Women participation in leadership.

At all levels of society, there are several barriers that prohibit women from participating independently in decision-making. Victims of domestic violence, poverty, or discrimination are more likely to be excluded from decision-making

processes because most of the time women have no voice to air out their grievances and are often looked down upon. Women are prevented from ascending to positions of leadership and participating in elections by discriminatory laws, a lack of education opportunities and increasing care commitments. Male family members vote in lieu of certain women who are denied access to their ballot papers or forced to vote for political candidates that their husband or ethnic group supports. Women are underrepresented as voters and leaders in governments and communities all around the world. Despite the structural and cultural violence challenges faced by women in leadership, most attest that they show compassion, understanding, and empathy while delivering services.

Policy Recommendations

To address the above opportunities and challenges for women, strategic efforts must be directed towards boosting access to political, economic education, religion, culture, and justice initiatives. In this regard, the following recommendations are meant to guide policy makers in their efforts towards bridging the gender gap:

3 Eagly, Alice & Karau, Stephen 2002, Vol. 109, *Psychological Review*, No. 3, 573–598, pp.575.

- **Education:** Literacy and education must remain key components in empowerment efforts. In some cases, educational opportunities must target girls, especially in the most vulnerable communities, to address their unique challenges and disadvantages.
- **Political Participation:** Leaders should work towards dealing with the stereotype that women are the weaker sex in political systems. To supplement government operations, women should be encouraged, supported, and promoted to become more organised in their communities. Civic education is an important vehicle to change political culture and also gendered/attitudinal cultures.
- **Women's Participation in Policy Making and Implementation on Peace and Security:** Because women are directly affected by conflict, they must be at the negotiating table for governance, peace-building efforts, and post-conflict decision-making. Statutory amendments and implementation of the rule of law are requisite to protect women. National security oversight bodies should have adequate gender representation, access to gender guidance, processes for dealing with discrimination complaints, and take other steps to ensure that women have equal access to their oversight mechanisms.
- **Economic Empowerment:** Microfinance projects particularly help women. While many humanitarian actors have been active in this field, we recommend more could be done in support of microfinance and in building partnerships. This enhances women's empowerment favourably affecting women's decision-making authority and improving their overall socioeconomic situation. The women contribute substantially to economic development and most of their proceeds go to their families. Women also need empowerment to venture into bigger businesses and embrace the culture of savings to grow their enterprises.
- **Women protection in employment spaces:** There is a need to enhance the reporting mechanisms and protection of women who want to report incidences of sexual harassment. There is also a need for provision of legal

support for women that have been sexually harassed. Raising public awareness on what constitutes sexual harassment cannot be underscored.

- **Advocacy:** there is a need for more robust campaigns to combat gender discrimination from all aspects be it in the way women dress, having a right to inheritance, being given equal spaces as men, having shared gender roles in the family among others. This will foster strides to gender equity and giving the future generation of girls' equal opportunities to live their dreams.
- **Networking:** among women leaders should be expanded. A Roster of Women Leaders should be established. Sharing of women's empowerment "best practices" between counties is essential. At the grassroots level, setting up women groups to encompass political, economic, and justice issues is a deliverable worth pursuing. In addition, seminars for women in political leadership positions should be encouraged to help mentor younger women to take up political positions and to have a positive influence that will encourage mindset shifts about their leadership in the society.

- **Policy implementation:** There is a need for the implementation of policies especially on gender empowerment such as the Women, Peace and Security agenda and the National Policy on Gender and Development in policymaking in order to confront persistent gender biases.
- Focus on deeper, structural hurdles to gender equality, as well as individual and financial capital of women to participate in ongoing engagements amongst policymakers on gender and leadership at the county and national level, to help keep the debate and talks on gender alive. Incorporate findings from multiple sectors into county bills on the need to recognise gender-based vulnerability drivers and barriers to gender-sensitive responses to conflict and development.

*Life &
Peace*
INSTITUTE

life-peace.org