

**WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIVE PARLIAMENTARY POLITICS
IN NYAMIRA COUNTY, 1992-2013**

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DECLARATION

This project is my original work and has not been presented for the award of diploma or degree in any university.

Sign.....

Date.....

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This project has been submitted for examination with our approval as university supervisors.

Sign.....

Date.....

Prof. Godfrey Muriuki

Sign.....

Date.....

Dr. Kenneth S. Ombongi

DEDICATION

To my beloved parents for their love, wisdom and understanding

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank God almighty for the mercy of providence and the gift of life that enabled me to write this project. In the course of writing this project, I benefited from the assistance of many people. While I generally humbly thank all those whose efforts and assistance greatly contributed to the success of this project, a few deserve a special mention here. To begin with I thank my two supervisors Prof. Godfrey Muriuki and Dr. Kenneth Ombongi for their incisive guidance and positive criticisms that made sure that this work came to success. Secondly, I thank all the lecturers, the staff and colleagues at the Department of History and Archaeology, University of Nairobi for their continued support since I joined the department for my undergraduate studies through to my postgraduate studies. I wish to thank Prof. Muriuki and Dr. George Gona for their continued encouragement throughout my postgraduate studies.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Affirmative Action
AAWORD	Association of African Women for Research and Development
AMWK	Association of Media Women of Kenya
CMD	Centre for Multi-Party Democracy
COVAW (K)	Coalition On Violence Against Women – Kenya
CCGD	Collaborative Centre for Gender and Development
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DP	Democratic Party
FIDA	Federation of Women Lawyer
GAD	Gender and Development
GPP	Gross Domestic Product
IEBC	Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission
ILO	International Labour Organization
KANU	Kenya African National Union
KEWOPA	Kenya Women Parliamentary Association
MYWO	Maendeleo ya Wanawake
MPs	Members of Parliament
NBPWO	Nairobi Business and Professional Women’s Organization
NARC	National Alliance Rainbow Coalition
NCSW	National Commission on the Status of Women
NCWK	National Council of Women of Kenya
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
FORD-KENYA	Forum for Restoration of Democracy, Kenya

KWPC The Kenya Woman's Political Caucus
LWKV League of Kenya Women Voters
NCSW National Committee on the Status of Women
UN United Nations
UNESCO United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
WAP Women and Development
WID Women in Development
WPSK Women's Shadow Parliament
WPAK Women's Political Alliance of Kenya

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Participation

This refers to the act of taking part with others in some activity. This can be in social, economic or political spheres of life. In this study it relates to engagement in parliamentary political activities and action.

Political Participation:

For this research political participation refers to engagement in political activities and action.

Women's Organization

Organizations that seek to enhance women's participation in development in all sectors: economic, social, and political from the grassroots to the national level.

Elective

Selection by vote.

Political Culture

Political culture is the traditional orientation of the citizens of a nation toward politics, affecting their perceptions of political legitimacy. For this study, political culture refers to collective opinion, attitudes and values about politics.

ABSTRACT

This study sought to establish the factors that inhibit women from participating in competitive elective parliamentary politics in Nyamira County. The study focused on the role that economic, educational and socio-cultural factors play in shaping the participation of women in competitive elective politics in Nyamira County.

The study was conducted among sixty respondents in the county. In addition, twelve key informants were interviewed and one focused group discussion held in each of the four constituencies that make Nyamira county. Data from the respondents was collected using questionnaires, key informant interview guide and focused group guide. The study also used secondary data from books, articles published in journals and periodicals, unpublished articles and newspapers. Three methods of sampling techniques were used; stratified, purposive and snowball sampling techniques to get a sample that was representative from the four constituencies.

The study was guided by two theories; the feminist theory and the theory of change and continuity. According to the feminist theory the discrepancies in the decision making in societies emerge from a social framework that espouses inequality. The premise of the feminist school of thought is that in a majority of social settings, patriarchy is an overriding scenario whereby males are the predominant wilders of wealth and power which determines the direction of societal operations. Thus, they consciously or unconsciously engage in behaviours that maintain this control. On the other hand, the central argument in the theory of change and continuity is that situations change over time, while at the same time people's attitudes and responses also change. Merton argues that adaptations take the form of conformity and innovation. This theory was useful since the study was concerned with political changes in women representation in Nyamira County.

The study findings show that participation of women in competitive elective parliamentary politics is influenced by a number of factors that range from socio-economic factors, cultural stereotyping and the nature of political parties to religion. The study established that socio-cultural factors, such as personal attributes, age, marital status and family background of the individual, played a significant role in influencing the participation of women in parliamentary leadership.

COUNTIES OF KENYA MAP

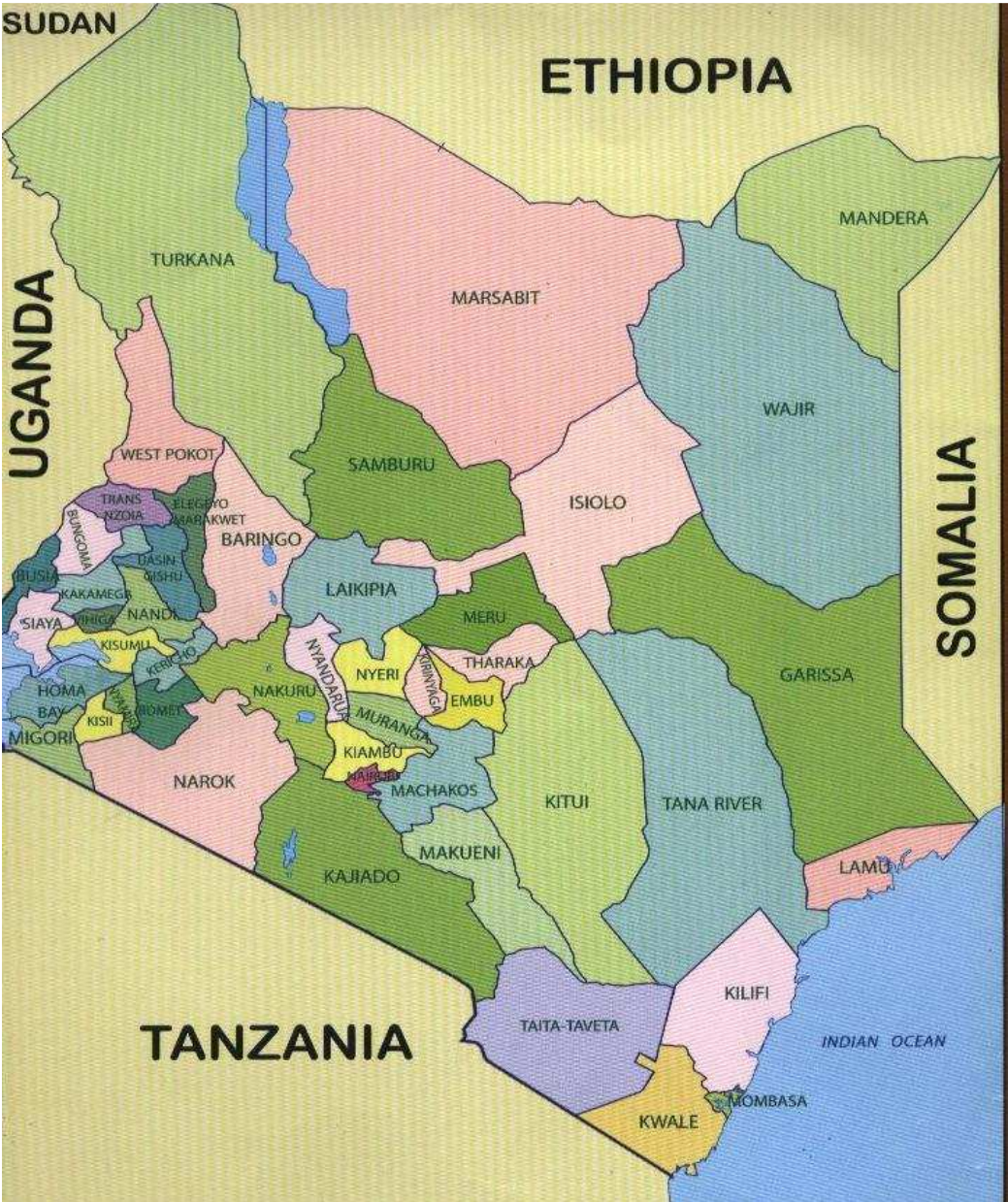


Figure 1. Counties of Kenya map.

Source;<https://www.google.co.ke/#q=nyamira+county+map>

MAP OF NYAMIRA COUNTY

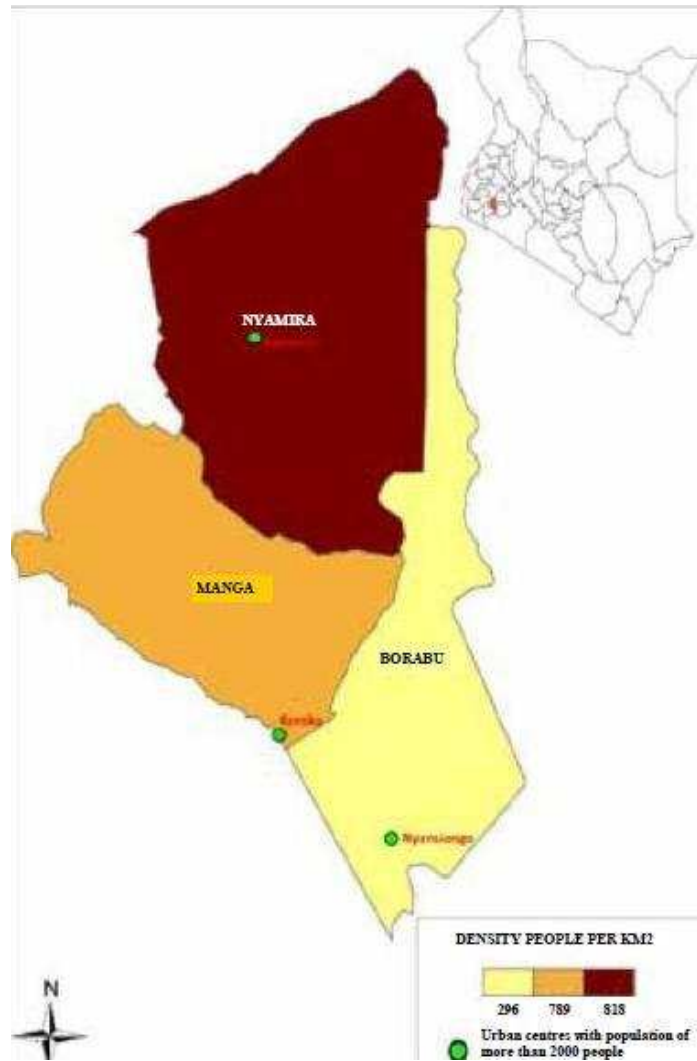


Figure 2. Map of Nyamira County.

Source; <https://www.google.co.ke/#q=nyamira+county+ma>

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background to the study

Academic interest in the study of women in Africa has grown enormously since the beginning of the last quarter of the 19th century. Among scholars and policy makers, there has been increased recognition of the importance of women's contribution to African development.¹ The immense potential and actual contribution of women to political, cultural and socio-economic development in Africa, as well as their special needs and problems in development have been reiterated in the expanding literature on women. Their situations as affected by government policies, administrative structures and development planning are also recognized at the national and international levels. Their contributions in the household, food production and national economies are increasingly acknowledged.² In fact this has been a dominant feature of the continent's social – political and development discourse among scholars from 1975, when the first world women conference was held in Mexico to address gender issues affecting women. Further, the involvement of women in decision-making and political leadership has become a major concern of governments and the civil society throughout the world.³

This concern arises from the observation that leaders play a very important role in resource allocation, which result to social, political and economic change in society. Historically, access to resources and opportunities for individuals and different groups has proven to be a critical issue in steering the level of socio- political and economic development.⁴ Political power has been an avenue through which privileged holders

¹ Hay, J. M. et al, (1984). *African Women South of the Saharan*, London: Longman Group, p.140.

² Mwangi, S. (2008). *Gender Policy in Kenya and the Impact on Women's Involvement in Politics*, in Nena T., Anna M. ,and Susan Mwangi (eds), *Assessing Gender Policies in the East African Region*. DPMF, Nairobi, p. 98.

³ Mulaki, G. et al (1984). *Kenyan Women Heroes and Their Mystical Powers*, Risk Publications, Nairobi, p.44.

⁴ Kabira, W. et al (2001). *Making Gender Count in Development Strategies that Work*. The Collaborative Centre for Gender and Development, Nairobi, p.34.

have had exclusive access to material and other favours that are associated with power.⁵In this case, parliamentary and civil authorities have played a leading role in resource allocation. Parliamentary and civil leaders have fought for the interests of their constituents by making laws and by-laws; monitoring the work of the governments and how they spend the money they collect from taxpayers. They also contribute to debates on national issues. As the debate on Kenya's political future rages, involvement of women in decision making has been one of the key suggestions made by a number of interest groups. This is because the process is central to human development since it is the basis of mobilization of socio-economic and political capital for governance and decision making.⁶

Women play vital roles in economic production and contribute enormously to government revenue. In Kenya, statistics show that women contribute 85 per cent of the national agricultural production.⁷ Despite contributing enormously to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) women tend to be poorly represented in leadership organs of the society.⁸

Given that politics is the driver of influence determining who gets what, when and how, participating in political affairs is an important facet of the overall life in the community. Since every political system exists within a socio-economic setting, much of the regulation of social and economic system is done through the political process. For this reason, it is critical for women to be among those who make policies and decisions at all levels of government, if their plight is to be adequately addressed. In the context of

⁵ Nyachae, S. (2001). *An Inclusive Unity in Kenya*, seminar paper presented in Safari Park Hotel October 30th 2001, Nairobi, p.4.

⁶ UN, (2000). *United Nations Millennium Declaration*, UN A/RES/55/2, UN, New York.

⁷Kimani, E. (2001). *Gender and Economic Recovery*. Paper presented at Forum on National Dialogue on Economic Revival, 30thoct, 2001, Nairobi.

⁸ Leisinger, M. K. et al (2002). *Six Billion and Counting Population And Food Security in the 21st Century*. International Food Policy Research Institute (IPFRI),John Hopkins University Press, p. 48.

elective politics, this participation can be in the form of voting, standing for office and campaigning for a political party.⁹

The importance of promoting participation of women in politics and decision making in Kenya has been addressed in a series of national, regional and international instruments and agreements. At the regional and international front, these instruments include: the 1985 Nairobi forward looking strategies on women, the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the 1989 Abuja declaration, the 1995 Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action, 1995 Commonwealth Plan for Action on Gender and Development (UN, 1996) and the Millennium Development Goals.¹⁰

Evidence pointing to the Kenyan government's commitment to promotion of gender equality in the sphere of politics and decision making at the national level include ratifying these international instruments, establishment of the Ministry of Gender, Culture and Social Services and publication of Sessional Paper no. 2 of 2006 on gender equality and development. The aspirations are strongly embedded in the country's new constitution, which came to force in 2010 in which special seats in political and decision-making positions in the country are reserved for women, and the provision of the one third-gender rule commonly known as Affirmative Action. There is also the creation of Gender and Equity commission to spearhead the elimination of gender disparities.

Despite the existence and commitment of these elaborate national, regional and international instruments for the promotion of gender equality in politics and decision-making, trends and levels of female representation in political structures of the country have largely been dismal. Women comprise over half of the Kenya population, but have consistently been under-represented in political leadership positions of the country.

⁹ O-MakDwallo, A. (2010). *Gender politics: participation of Kenyan women*, MA project paper. Institute African Studies, unpublished, University of Nairobi, p. 11.

¹⁰ UN, (2000). *United Nations Millennium Declaration*, UN A/RES/55/2, UN, New York.

The forces that shape Gusiiland electoral politics are more or less similar to that elsewhere in Kenya. However, a number of mediating factors, such as the local political rivalry and the region's stake in the national politics, real or perceived, accord, it's electoral practice some peculiarity.¹¹

Electoral politics in Gusiiland since independence have been dominated by the Kenya African National Union (KANU) until 2002 when Ford People came into the scene and Orange Democratic Movement in 2007. Other parties such as Ford Kenya, Democratic Party of Kenya and Social Democratic Party have all campaigned in Gusiiland, occasionally capturing one or two parliamentary seats.

Although new issues have come into play, clannism, patronage and personality have been the determining variables of the nature and the course of electoral process for a long time in Gusii politics. Like in other parts of Kenya, electoral politics has been run by a number of 'big' men who not only could never imagine being led by a woman, but often based their political clout on the mobilization of women groups for their own support.¹²

Male prejudice, conservativeness and traditionally- inclined opinion makers in Gusiiland, and indeed in the country, is hard to prove or deny without further investigation. Today and since independence, there is no elected woman MP in the four constituencies that form Nyamira county, save for the post of county woman representative reserved for only women in the Kenya constitution of 2010. This scenario calls for the need to understand the factors underlying the male dominance in parliamentary elective politics in the area.

1.1 Introduction to Nyamira County

Nyamira County is located in the former Nyanza province. Nyamira County is one of the two counties that form the larger Gusii land. It has an area of 912.5 Km² divided into five

¹¹ Ombongi, S. K. (2001). *Gusii Politics: An Analysis of the 1997 Elections*, in Rutten M., Mazrui A. Grignon F. (eds), *Out for the Count: The 1997 General Elections and Prospects for Democracy in Kenya*, Fountain Publishers, Kampala ,p. 171.

¹² Ibid, p. 147.

administrative divisions; Borabu, Ekerenyo, Manga, Nyamira and Rigoma. The county is divided into four consistencies; Borabu, North Mugirango, West Mugirango and Kitutu Masaba.¹³ The county is majorly occupied by the Abagusii ethnic group. Between them and Lake Victoria are the Nilotic Luo, to the east they are bordered by the Kipsigis, and to the southeast they are bordered by the Maasai. To the west and south are closely related Tende people who are also called the Abakuria. But between Abakuria and Abagusii there is a small corridor of Luo separating them. The Gusii people though surrounded by different groups belong to the Bantu group of people.¹⁴

The Gusii ethnic group comprises of six major sub-tribes. These are Abagirango, Abagetutu, Abanyaribari, Ababasi, Abamachoge and Abanchari. The main occupants of Nyamira County are the Abagirango and Abagetutu, although members of the other sub-tribes are also settled there.

In traditional Gusii society the clan was the largest political unit. The family (husband, wife and children) was the smallest. In a homestead comprising of many families whose male elders belong to the one father, that father was the political head if he happened to be alive. If he was dead, his eldest surviving son was the political head of the homestead and not the wife. The indigenous Gusii society, therefore, was patrilineal and patriarchal. A typical homestead consists of a homestead head (omogaka bwomochie), his several wives, his married and unmarried sons, daughters and his grandchildren.

Such a homestead may have as many people as one hundred and may occupy a large area, but still they all belonged to the homestead head. This is so even if the married sons have established their own homes and are economically independent. So long as the old man is alive all members regard him as the head of the homestead. They can never

¹³ Republic of Kenya, (2010b). The Population and Housing Census, Vol. 1 B, Nairobi, Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, P.133.

¹⁴ Monyenye, S. (1977). Indigenous Education Among the Abagusii People, University of Nairobi, MA thesis, p. 7.

engage in any activity without consulting him. Within the homestead, he is the sole authority and his decision is final.¹⁵

Agriculture is the main economic activity in the county. The main cash crops are; tea, coffee and pyrethrum. Other crops include maize, beans, bananas and sugarcane. Dairy farming is also practised in the county. The county experiences relatively good weather patterns with a rainfall range between 600 mm and 2300 mm per annum

1.2 Statement of the research problem

In Kenya, previous national census statistics have found women to be slightly more than men. The statistics indicate that women constitute about 51% of the total population.¹⁶ These national statistics are a true reflection of the population in Nyamira County which stood at a women population of 328,783 against a male population of 303,252. These statistics for the year 2009 showed women as constituting 52% of the total population of Nyamira County. Women in Nyamira County have for a long time played a pivotal role in economic growth and overall development of the County. Most of them have lived in rural areas where they have formed the backbone of the small-scale economic sector. Women from the County therefore have contributed significantly to Kenya's Gross Domestic Product, and generation of employment. However, despite their central role in the county and country's economy and their population size, women have had little access to key decision making positions.

Although Kenya has been pursuing development policies committed to equal access to opportunities and resources for both men and women and has a constitution that protects, upholds and recognizes women in areas of political participation, representation and property ownership, this has not been subsequently realized.¹⁷ Indeed, women

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 8

¹⁶ Republic of Kenya, (2010b). *The Population and Housing Census, Vol. 1 B*, Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, Nairobi, P. 134.

¹⁷ Republic of Kenya, (2010). *The Kenya Constitution 2010*, Government Printer, Nairobi.

representation in politics and decision-making has been low and they themselves have been slow to translate their relatively high numerical strength into political power. The situation of women participation in competitive elective politics in former Nyanza Province, and especially in Nyamira County, has been wanting. There has been a fundamental gender inequality when it comes to participation of women in elective politics in this part of the country. It is against this background that this study was carried out to primarily respond to the question: what are the economic, cultural and educational challenges that have hampered women participation in elective politics in Nyamira County?

1.3 Objectives

The general goal of the study will be to explore the economic, cultural and educational challenges facing the participation of women in competitive elective politics in Nyamira County.

1.3.1 Specific objectives

- i. To examine the implication of gender relations, norms, values, ideologies and practices of the people of Nyamira County on women participation in elective politics.
- ii. To analyse the influence of education on the participation of women in elective political process in Nyamira County.
- iii. To assess the effect of income on women participation in elective politics in Nyamira county.

1.4 Justification of the study

Despite the various legislations, enormous time, financial and human resources that have been spent on civic education, gender awareness and advocacy campaigns, the participation of women in competitive elective politics in Nyamira County still remains very low. Thus, the findings from the study would lead to new orientation in formulation and implementation of new affirmative action policies that could enhance women's participation in parliamentary politics in Nyamira County. They will enable scholars and

policy makers to design more progressive policies aimed at ensuring equal participation of men and women in politics. The study will benefit women aspiring to contest for parliamentary seats from the county in identifying and understanding obstacles they might face. Overall, the findings of this study will contribute to the body of existing literature on women participation in politics, with special emphasis on Nyamira County.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

This study focused on women participation in competitive elective politics in Nyamira County in the former Nyanza province. It specifically focused on the challenges associated with income, educational and cultural gender relations facing women participation in competitive elective politics with specific reference to Nyamira County between 1992 and 2013. Nyamira County was chosen since it is one of the counties in Kenya that has never had an elected woman member of parliament since independence. The study sought to understand the reasons for that, yet women from the county have been actively involved in the Women's Movement in spearheading the gender equity course. This period was chosen because the repealing of Section 2A of the Kenyan constitution in December 1991 considerably strengthened the women's movement, since the freedom that characterized the democratic rule enabled women to challenge the social values and structures which undermined their role in society. From this time, a majority of women were forced to re-examine themselves and assess their role in the emerging and evolving milieu with ongoing power relations.

The study faced various challenges. First, the mere mention of the terms political participation made some respondents to demand cash from the researcher since most of them were used to cash handouts from politicians. The researcher had to explain that this was an academic exercise and there was no money to give out, some accepted and responded to the questions while others declined. Second, accessibility to key informants was difficult. This forced the researcher to spend more time in trying to access them. Third, the study coincided with the rainy season and since most of the roads in region are not tarmacked, movement from one point to another was a big challenge, this made the

researcher to conduct the interviews in the morning to avoid being caught up with the rains in the field.

1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.6.0 Introduction

This section gives an analysis of the existing literature on women's participation in political leadership. It assesses the extent to which women's participation in political leadership has been made a subject of study in the available literature. The section is divided into three sub-topics; women's participation in politics in the world, their participation in politics in Kenya and the political socialization process in Kenya.

1.6.1 Women in politics: A global perspective

The immense potential and actual contribution of women to political, cultural and socio-economic development, their special needs and problems have been reiterated in the expanding literature on women. Their situations as affected by government policies, administrative structures and development planning are also recognized at the national and international levels. Their fundamental contributions in households, food production and national economies are increasingly acknowledged. However, women continue to face enormous obstacles due to lack of translation of the growing recognition of their contributions into improved access to resources or increased decision –making powers.¹⁸

Kabira observes that in no society women have the same opportunity as men. Women and men have unequal access to jobs, advancement and positions of authority.¹⁹ Women constitute half or more than half of the disenfranchised population in the world. They hold only 10% percent of seats in the world's parliaments and 6% in National cabinets

¹⁸ Mwangi, S. (2008), *Gender Policy in Kenya and the Impact on Women's Involvement in Politics*, in Nena Thundu Anna Marie Kiaga and Susan Mwangi (eds), *Assessing Gender Policies in the East African Region*. DPMF, Nairobi, p.100.

¹⁹ Kabira, et al, (1998). *Reclaiming Women Space in Politics*. The Collaboration Centre for Gender and Development, Nairobi, p.36.

and only rarely occupy leading public roles.²⁰ This arguments and statics sufficiently meet the interest of the study as they provide valuable background and foundation on which this study will be grounded.

Mwangi argues that comparatively, very few women are in positions of significant responsibility. All over the world, women rarely hold more than 10% of top executive positions. Globally, they occupy only 14 percent of managerial and administrative positions in the corporate sector jobs. Women make less than 5 per cent of the world's heads of state, major corporations and international organizations. In Africa, they hold only 2.5% of ministerial posts and only 3.6% of the four sub-ministerial decision making positions.²¹ Therefore, they have only a few opportunities in shaping the national and communal policies that improve their lives or help them make such improvements. These observations were helpful in trying to understand the factors that accounted for such low percentages, a key objective of this study.

In some African countries like Uganda, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, South Africa and Namibia, the Affirmative Action (AA) policy has been implemented in their political arena for a more focused decision making process. In most of the socialist parties in the world, a quota system has been implemented where women are allocated 30% or 40% of the seats in party or political functions.²² In these countries, some parties have installed a “Zipper” system which demands that women must have a share of 50 per cent in all party functions, including leadership. This form of participation has given a new positive drive to the political culture in the European countries.

²⁰Leisinger, M. K. et al (2002). *Six Billion and Counting Population And Food Security in the 21st Century*, International Food Policy Research Institute (IPFRI) DC John Hopkins University Press, p. 73.

²¹Mwangi, S. (1991). *'Not Yet Paradise'. Women, Environment and Sustainable Development in Africa, In Sustainable Development , Governance, Globalisation: Africa Perspective*. Hermann Boll Foundation Nairobi, vol. 9m no 4.

²² Kimani, E. (2001). *Gender and Economic Recovery*, Paper presented at forum on national dialogue on economic revival 30thoct, 2001, Nairobi.

Leisinger sums up such statistics by observing that in general women in the industrialized countries occupy about 12 percent of the highest public positions. Moreover these are in areas categorized as typically 'female'; that are, in education, culture and issues related to women or children. Men occupy the more powerful positions. In developing countries, the situation is more precarious; women have only 9% of the leading public positions in both public administration and private companies. Most women have subordinate positions and small corresponding salaries. The greater the decision making powers attached to a position the fewer the number of women found such positions ,an indication that women have little access to key decision making positions.²³

According to Miller throughout history the 'traditionalist' culture of the Commonwealth has proven disadvantageous for women.²⁴ Although organizational affiliation is high among women, their gain from pressurizing states has been minimal. In Africa, women occupy minute numbers of decision making positions.²⁵ Mwangi supports such arguments, that women are truly outsiders in relation to the state machineries. Political rhetoric claims that political space belongs to all citizens but throughout the world, men monopolize it.²⁶ Statistical evidence points out that woman political participation is generally higher than that of men at the voting level, but is generally lower at the level of holding public office. Such arguments provided an interesting basis to the study in trying to understand the factors underlying such dismal performance.

Giddens argues that during the 20th century women gained the right to vote and to be elected to political office in almost all the countries that had representative institutions. It is evident that women fought prolonged battle in their bid to be accorded voting rights.²⁷

²³ Leisinger, M. K. et al (2002). *Six Billion and Counting Population And Food Security in the 21st Century*. International Food Policy Research Institute (IPFRI) DC John Hopkins University Press p.74.

²⁴ Miller, P. (1999), *Political Leadership and Progress of Women*, Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, p. 6.

²⁵ Op.cit, p.75.

²⁶ Mwangi, S. (2008). *Gender Policy in Kenya and the Impact on Women's Involvement in Politics*, in, Nena Thundu Anna Marie Kiaga and Susan Mwangi (eds), *Assessing Gender Policies in the East African Region*. DPMF, Nairobi, P. 101.

²⁷ Giddens, A. (1995). *Sociology, England*, Cambridge, p.11.

But despite the considerable progress made in enhancing women capacities, the level of participation in competitive political leadership and economic activities remain at a peripheral level. Even in the world's leading democracy, the United State of America it is only in the late 1990s that women were elected to the senate in high numbers. Prior to the 1990s women in the USA Senate were few that there was no women's bathroom near the Senate floor.²⁸ This indicates that, when the US Senate chamber was being designed, the participation of women in the business of the house was not taken into consideration.

It is, therefore, clear that, at the global level although women form the majority of the voter population in regard to the total population, their participation in leadership is very low. State functionaries throughout the world are controlled by men who also control economic resources. Through this control, they are able to make and impose decisions aimed at alienating women from top political leadership. This low participation called for a systematic study to try and understand why women performance remained low despite the gains made.

1.6.2 Women and political leadership in Kenya

Mwangi gives an insightful and important account on the political developments in Kenya since independence has secluded the Kenyan woman. She argues that Kenya has had a legislative council since 1907, making it one of the oldest functioning legislatures in the Commonwealth Africa. The current national assembly is a direct descendant of the colonial Legislative Council. Since 1907, the legislative assembly has been dominated by men. In fact, no Kenyan woman was elected during the colonial period. After independence, it was only during the third general election that Grace Onyango was elected, becoming the first woman ever to be elected. In 1974, she was joined in parliament by Dr. Julia Auma Ojiambo and Philomena Chelagat Mutai, who were elected as MPs for Busia Central and Eldoret North constituencies respectively. Dr. Ojiambo was then appointed Assistant Minister. The female membership was boosted to

²⁸ Miller, P. (1999). *Political Leadership and Progress of Women*, Lexington, University of Kentucky press, p. 8.

five by the nomination to parliament of Dr. Eddah Gachukia and Jemimah Gecaga.²⁹ The chapter was important in the study as the study sought to answer the question why that was the situation in Kenya and particularly in Nyamira County.

In the 1979 elections, (the fourth elections after independence) Mrs. Onyango, Dr. Ojiambo and Miss Mutai were re-elected and Mrs. Phoebe Asiyo made a debut to parliament to represent Karachuonyo. The late 1970's and early 1980's saw more women serving in parliament with five elected members and two nominated. But their total number was insignificant since they were a mere 3.18% as compared to men at 96.82%. During the 6th parliament (1988-1992), two women were elected to parliament meaning that in 32 years of independence, Kenya had only a total of ten women elected into parliament. The number was insignificant given the fact that women constituted 51% of the total Kenyan population.³⁰

The largest number of female legislators elected was six during the 1992-1997 elections. Out of the six, only one was offered a cabinet minister post and another was appointed an assistant minister. The number of women in parliament in the 1992-1997 assembly encouraged a large number of women to register and contest parliamentary and civic posts in the 1997 polls. Several women groups and NGOs held numerous civic and voter workshops to educate women on their rights, both as contestants and voters.³¹

Despite women's involvement in all political parties in Kenya, their political performance remained dismal. In the 1997 elections, they comprised only 3.6 percent of the members of the national assembly. Charity Ngilu lost her presidential bid. World famous environmentalist, Wangari Maathai, also lost both the presidential and parliamentary race, Kenya's first and only woman cabinet member, Nyiva Mwenda, lost her bid for

²⁹ Mwangi, S. (2008). *Gender Policy in Kenya and the Impact on Women's Involvement in Politics*, in ,Nena, T., Anna M., and Susan M. (eds), *Assessing Gender Policies in the East African Region*. DPMF, Nairobi, p. 99.

³⁰ Ibid, P.101.

³¹ Achieng, J., (1998). Kenyan politics leave women more marginalized, inter press third world news agency, (IPS), Nairobi PACH article 25818, P. 13.

parliament at the party nomination stage. The outcome of the 1997 polls meant another five years of under-representation, hence issues affecting women would receive little attention from the government.³² Some analysts predicted that the small number of women in parliament meant that pressing issues pertaining to women's rights could be delayed and the Beijing Platform for Action would never be implemented by a male dominated government, since it acted as a pointer to the equality between men and women.

The 2002 general elections surprised the gender advocacy with the negative impact on the number that got elected. Mrs. Monica Amolo, Executive Director, Women's Shadow Parliament (WSPK) reported that women who vied for parliamentary seats in 2002 went through difficult and traumatic experiences. She stated:

Women believed in fair play and naively sought to contest party nominations by playing the rules. They saw the male candidates show up with certificates for nominations as party candidates even where the results of elective process were incomplete and undetermined.

Out of 133 women who vied for parliamentary seats in 2002, only 44 were nominated and only 9 won elections.³³ The low success rate is seen as a problem requiring a solution.

In the 2007 election, sixteen women were elected as MPs out of a total of 210. Another six were nominated to parliament by their respective political parties, making a total of 22, and thereby raising the size of female representation to 9.5%. A cabinet constituted thereafter in 2008 saw women hold seven ministerial and six assistant ministerial posts

³²Mwangi, S. (2008), *Gender Policy in Kenya and the Impact on Women's Involvement in Politics*, in Nena Thundu Anna Marie Kiaga and Susan Mwangi (eds), *Assessing Gender Policies in the East African Region*. DPMF, Nairobi, p. 100.

³³ Ibid, p. 100.

out of 90 positions. The scenario is similar to women representation in local governments.³⁴

During the March 2013 elections (11th parliament), only 16 women were elected as MPs. None of those who vied for the governor or senator positions won. Suffice it to say that the number of women MPs elected remained the same as in the previous Parliament, despite the exponential increase of constituencies from 210 to 290 countrywide. Factoring in the new constitutional provisions for the post of woman representative from every county, the number of elected women in the current parliament is 63 and three nominated members, bringing the total to 65 out of 349 members.

However, article 81(b) of the new constitution states that no more than two-thirds of the members of elective public bodies shall be of the same gender. The last tenth Parliament dominated by men just like the previous parliaments, failed to pass enough laws to see the constitutional requirements come to force.³⁵

The rule was meant to increase women's participation in politics. And based on this rule, at least 117 MPs should be female now that males are still likely to dominate. These percentages are much below the recommended threshold of 30 per cent under the new constitution. One indicator of gender inequality is the small number of women in decision making positions and other national governance structures.

Looking at the numbers of women who have been elected to parliament since independence, one can rightly conclude that in Kenya, politics has for long been considered a go no zone for women. To maintain the status quo, the society has often discouraged politically ambitious women from aspiring for leadership position through arguments like politics is too violent for women, women are too vulnerable, women hate one another, society does not respect women or women have more demanding domestic

³⁴ Women Shadow Parliament, (2008), *The Elusive Quest for Women Empowerment in Electoral Politics. A Synopsis of the 2007 Electoral Year*, Nairobi. The Women Shadow Parliament, Kenya.

³⁵ Daily nation, Thursday 22, Sep 2013, p. 14.

duties³⁶. Such exclusivities are popularized by male politicians who fear facing women opponents as well as women who have themselves become victims of a socialization process that condemns them to the private sphere. Women hold the winning vote in any democratic political contest, but their participation in politics is restricted to the narrow space of singing, dancing and voting.³⁷

According to Nzomo, in Africa moral and physical courage are often conveniently confused. Heroism is presumed to be a male quality. Great leadership is usually exemplified as a product of long manly life³⁸. There has been the notion that women are generally apathetic and demonstrate little or no interest in political leadership. However, this notion has been challenged on the basis of the number of men and women who participate in voting. If women had no interest in leadership, they could not be voting in greater numbers than men.³⁹ The current state of affairs is associated with socialization process where women are not prepared for what Nzomo calls “cut throat politics” and as a result they do not display the same kind of aggressiveness and patronage displayed by male candidates.⁴⁰

There is an assumption that women’s judgement knowledge, wisdom experience and stamina when confronted with a crisis are inferior to men and that the society does not trust abilities of women.⁴¹ The society treats women as incapable of effective decision making and of being the ‘weaker sex’. Further, women intellectual and decision making capacities are usually taken to be naïve simpletons. In extreme cases, women are expected to adhere to what men think, say and decide.

³⁶Kabira, et, al (1998). *Reclaiming Women Space in Politics*. The Collaboration Centre for Gender and Development, Nairobi, p. 38.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 39.

³⁸ Nzomo, M. (1987). “ *Women, Democracy and Development in Africa in Theory and Practice in Africa* By Oyugi (eds), Heinemann ,Kenya Ltd Nairobi, P. 67.

³⁹ Wachege, P. N. (1992). *African Woman Liberation. A man’s’ Perspective*. Industrial printing works Ltd, Nairobi,p. 6.

⁴⁰ Nzomo, M. (1991), *Women in Politics and Decision Making*, Working paper No 2. Department of Government, University of Nairobi.

⁴¹ Wachege, P. N. (1992), *African Woman Liberation. A man’s’ Perspective*. Industrial printing works Ltd, Nairobi, p. 8.

Wachege observes that “It does not matter whether the woman is a professor and the husband a primary school dropout she is not allowed to think independently, discussion is a taboo and hers is expected to play yes role”. Structural imbalance thus exists that discriminate against women. Cultural stereotyping of female leaders perpetuates inequality.⁴²

While political equality appears to be attainable in Africa, the gender gap still persists. In Kenya, like elsewhere in the world, inequality keeps women at a disadvantage, hindering their participating in decision-making positions in Parliamentary legislation, executive, judiciary and appointed offices. In Africa in general, it is only recently that Ellen Johnson Sirleaf made history as the first woman elected as Liberia’s head of state and the first elected woman president in Africa.⁴³ Sirleaf has since been joined by Joyce Banda, the president of Malawi. This dismal female representation in political decision-making positions is a phenomenon deeply rooted in the classic social stratification of female-male that emphasizes male supremacy. This school of thought holds that women are either incapable or not expected to express their views and opinion in the public sphere. Tamale compares this skewed gender relation metaphor with a female chicken that cannot crow. She contends that a hen that crows is considered an omen of bad tidings that must be expelled through the immediate slaughter of the offending bird.⁴⁴

Comparing that metaphor to the analysis of gender relations in politics, women are not expected to express their views in the public arena. Women who defy this are perceived as infringing on men’s preserve. Such a view assumes that men are the anointed link between the home and public world, and thus are neutral players in the political realm. Against this dictum, policies of affirmative action that advocate for elevation of women into positions of elective leadership are prone to frustrating results, rather than

⁴² Ibid, p. 8.

⁴³ Rarieya , M. (2007). *Women and Politics in Kenya: Why Does Their Participation Matter*, New York, Department of Science and Technology Studies, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, p. 34.

⁴⁴Tamale, S. (1999). *When Hens Begin to Crow*, Fountain Publishers, Kampala, p. 12.

becoming the framework for gaining the critical mass of women in decision-making that they are designed to achieve. They end up becoming tools for political maneuvering than genuine commitments to women's right.⁴⁵

Political parties recognize the need for women representation, but have in the past either failed to reserve seats for women participation or for those who have reserved quota, they have failed to fill this quota despite the fact that their constitutions stipulate so.⁴⁶ Due to the marginalization of women in politics, decisions that inform or shape policy formulation and implementation emanates from men. It also depicts the gender voting biases within Kenyan communities and confirms the existing mistrust of women contestants particularly because they are the majority voters.⁴⁷ Realization of women exclusion has contributed significantly to the entrenchment of oppressive patriarchy in society. The current constitution advocates for affirmative action to elevate women's representation in the National Assembly and county assemblies.⁴⁸

In a country where 50% or more of the population is women and only 9.8% sit in parliament, there is an urgent need to increase their number. Men and women are equal, but different. It is, therefore, not uncommon for men not to culturally articulate issues that directly affect women. An increase in the number of women in parliament would thus translate into increased legislative input by women. But for this to be effective there is a need for a conducive legislative environment for women to contribute to the enactment of gender sensitive legislations.⁴⁹ Women entry into politics means that they

⁴⁵ Ibid, p, 14.

⁴⁶ Women Shadow Parliament, (2008).*The Elusive Quest for Women Empowerment in Electoral Politics. A Synopsis of the 2007 Electoral Year*, Nairobi, the Women Shadow Parliament, Kenya.

⁴⁷Karuru, N. (2001). *Factors Influencing Women Political Participation in Kibera Division, Nairobi*, MA Thesis, Institute of African Studies Nairobi University, p.8.

⁴⁸ Musyoka, K. (2011).*The Relationship Between Increased Number of Women in Parliament and Enactment of Gender Sensitive Legislation in 10th Parliament Kenya*. MA thesis, Institute of Anthropology, Gender and African studies, University of Nairobi, p.23.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 23.

have to participate in activities and institutions designed and populated by men. Essentially, this means that women have to play a role unnatural to them.⁵⁰

1.6.3 Political socialization in Kenya

Political socialization is the process by which political culture is transmitted from one generation to another in a given society. It occurs at both the individual and community level, and it extends beyond the acquisition of political culture to encompass the learning of more sophisticated political ideas and orientations. Political socialization is a lifelong process and a variety of individuals and institutions contribute to its shaping. For example, individuals are politically socialized by such groups as their family, peers, and social class. Furthermore, they are socialized by existing laws, media, religion, education, their own gender, and more. Basically, the process is never ending and the factors which shape it are all encompassing.

Those groups and institutions which contribute to the process of political socialization are known as the agents of socialization. These sources affect the development of political values and attitudes differently, but they all contribute to the individual's understanding of and orientations toward politics.

Eshiwani argues that in Kenya the teaching material and teacher are gender biased. Books used in schools portray men as intelligent and adventurous, seeking employment in new fields, whereas women are depicted as passive, admiring and suited for traditional roles.⁵¹ The textbooks are gender biased and the curriculum in general is heavily biased toward men's interest.⁵² Such arguments were helpful as they provided important background information on the possible reasons why women, as a social group, perform dismally in the public spheres, politics included.

⁵⁰ O-MakDwallo, A. (2010). Gender politics: participation of Kenyan women, MA project paper. Institute African studies, p. 8.

⁵¹ Eshiwani, G. S. (1991). *The Education of Women in Kenya 1975-1984*. Seminar paper, Bureau of Educational Research, Nairobi: Kenyatta University, p. 4.

⁵² Nzomo, M. (1987). " *Women, Democracy and Development in Africa in Theory and Practice in Africa* By Oyugi (eds), Heinemann ,Kenya Ltd Nairobi, p. 12.

The implication here is that schools socialize children into acquiring one set of values to the virtual exclusion of the other. The result is that girls are not filled with bread winning roles and the value of competitiveness in leadership and public life in general. Voting confirms such a political socialization, an identity acquired through family, school, churches and through the daily experience or struggle for survival in a market economy. A young girl is told a public life is a man's world. This kind of socialization limits girls from succeeding in business and career development.

Girls are taught to learn to sit at a corner and be quiet, harbouring only one expectation from life, to get married and stay married. Indeed for many supposedly modern emancipated women today, marriage is still the only yard stick to measure success. "It's a man's world" a statement structured to teach girls to conform to the standards set by men and enforced by women.⁵³ There are institutionalized beliefs that women are weak leaders and which act as barriers to the election of women as political leaders. The society has internalized these notions to an extent of socializing women in schools to believe so.

The studies reviewed generally establish that women in the world, in Africa and in Kenya particularly have performed dismally in the field of politics. Most of the studies on the are macro in nature and generalizations are cross cultural yet specific traditional systems of authority form the basis reaction to either accept or reject change. This study adopts a micro –perspective in order to bridge the gap left by the studies reviewed such as the generalizations across the cultures and to examine the specific socio-economic issues that affect women participation in politics. Interestingly, no study has been carried out to investigate the reasons for the dismal performance of women in elective politics in Nyamira County. It is against this background that this study was conceived, to divert from a macro- approach to the study of women to micro- approach, so as to understand the factors that particularly affect women participation in the county.

⁵³ Wachege, P. N. (1992). *African Woman Liberation: A man's' Perspective*, Industrial Printing Works Ltd, Nairobi, p. 10.

1.7. Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by two theories; the feminist theory and the theory of change and continuity.

1.7.1 The feminist theory

The feminist theory recognizes the pervasive influence of gender divisions on social life and tries to understand women's oppression and the structures in society that espouse this oppression and subordination. The feminist perspectives, which look at the many similarities between the genders, conclude that women and men have equal potential for individual development. Differences in the realization of that potential, therefore, must result from externally imposed constraints and from the influence of social institutions and values.⁵⁴

According to the feminist theory, the discrepancies in the decision making in societies emerge from a social framework that espouses inequality. The premise of the feminist school of thought is that in a majority of social settings, patriarchy is an overriding scenario whereby males are the predominant wilders of wealth and power which determines the direction of societal operations⁵⁵. Thus they consciously, or unconsciously, engage in behaviours that maintain this control.

Hiberman contends that "ultimate elimination of male dominance demands a massive restructuring of social values that should include a reconsideration of the relation between the sexes". She and many feminists hold the view that male dominance will not be eliminated until gender roles are no longer defined by stereotypical expectations based on sex and power motives.⁵⁶ According to Malamuth, a system that discourages competition and instead encourages sharing of resources and cooperation will aid in such a

⁵⁴ *Onsongo, J. (2004). Women's Participation in University Management in Kenya, Gender Issues Research Report Series - no. 22, Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA) Ethiopia, p. 7.*

⁵⁵ Ruth, S. (1998). *Issues in Feminism: An Introduction to Women Studies*, Mountain View CA Mayfield. P. 43

⁵⁶ Helberman, E. (1976), *Rape "The Ultimate Violation of the Self"*. American journal of psychiatry.

restructuring. Miller has used feminist theory to explain that power struggle is inherent in the manner in which sexes are socialized. Women are taught to be passive and submissive, while men are instructed to be active and dominant. Tenderness, sensitivity and empathy are encouraged in women, but discouraged in men. Because of this, she argues, men are socialized to devalue women and develop masculine self concepts. She goes on to contend that men develop hostility towards women and become violent from domination.⁵⁷ According to Malamuth, it is this power structure which maintains a hierarchical structure, where violence towards women is justified.⁵⁸

Critical to feminist theory are the concepts of Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD), and Gender and Development (GAD) which have evolved over the past five decades, in that order regarding treatment of women in the development discourse. WID appeared in the 1970s when women in aid agencies argued that development efforts excluded women. In the mid 1970's the GAD paradigm emerged from the analytical work of feminist scholars. The scholars argued that unequal power relations between men and women prevented women from benefiting from the increasingly expanding scope to access development opportunities, with greater emphasis on the view that economic growth models had little relevance to the women lot given their subordinate position strongly entrenched in the social relations between men and women.⁵⁹

During the 1975 UN Women's Conference the GAD was conceptualized on this occasion. The empirical evidence emerging from analysis of cross country experiences pointed to persistence of women in the lower cadre of development, regardless of the

⁵⁷ Miller, B. (1999), *Political Leadership and Progress of Women*, Lexington university of Kentucky press, p.23.

⁵⁸ Malamuti, N. (1996). *The Confluence Model of Sexual Aggression: Feminist and Evolutionary Perspective in D. Buss and N. Malamuti (eds) Sex Power and Conflict: Evolutionary and Feminist Perspective*, New York oxford university press, p. 88.

⁵⁹ Young, K. (2002). *WID, WAD, WAD in V. Desai and R. B. Potter, (eds) ,The Companion to Development Studies*, London Arnold, p.19.

massive attempt to change the situation. This led scholars to come up with the view that development models would be more useful, if they integrated the perspectives of women. These arguments have since become the prime movers of programmes and policy directions for promotion of women in political and mainstream decision making organs of societies.⁶⁰

Feminists' especially radical feminists have a very negative view of men and a very positive view of women. They argue that relationships between men and women are likely to be based upon various types of domination and oppression possibly involving violence. Critics of feminist theory argue that these opinions about females and males and about relationships between them cannot be proved. Liberal feminists argue that male-female relationships can be fulfilling for all concerned.⁶¹

Despite the criticism, the feminist theory was useful in identifying the socio-economic challenges that face women in Nyamira since its basic premise is that male dominance derives from the social, economic and political arrangements specific in particular societies.

1.7.2. The theory of change and continuity

The central argument in this theory is that situations change over time, while at the same time people's attitudes and responses also change. Merton argues that adaptations take the form of conformity and innovation⁶². The theory views both society and man as constantly changing rather than being static. The developing society normally is interested in behaving, thinking, to coping and acting like the advanced society in all spheres of life; namely, politically economically, socially and technologically. It, therefore, espouses that society is ready to change provided that there are some initiating

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 20,

⁶¹ Walby, Sylvia, (1986). *Patriarchy at Work, Patriarchal and Capitalist Relations in Empowerment of Women*, Policy Press Cambridge, England.

⁶² Merton, R. K., (1968), *Social theory and social structure*, New York, The free press, p. 194.

or engineering forces from individuals, the government or groups like social activists and civil society. Merton's theory further suggest that for a developing society to succeed in its struggle to join developed society, it must further invest in various innovations which help to introduce new ideas and best ways of doing things .Failure to be innovative will lead to continuity of the status quo.⁶³

This theory was useful to the study as it is concerned with political changes in women representation. The theory was used to explore the response of the people towards legislations that have been passed in an attempt to advance women participation in politics and what explains the continuity of the dismal performance of women in elective politics.

1.8 Research hypotheses

- i. Traditional socio-cultural factors determine the participation of women in competitive elective politics.
- ii. Education levels influence the degree of women's participation in competitive elective politics.
- iii. Economic factors determine women's participation in competitive elective politics.

METHODOLOGY

1.9 Introduction

This section deals with methodological issues. It gives an overview of the study in relation to administrative and political units, population size, sampling techniques that were used, methods of data collection and the study sample.

1.9.1 Site description

The study was based in Nyamira County in Nyanza province. Nyamira County is one of the two counties that form the larger Gusii land. Nyamira county has an area of 912.5 Km² divided into five administrative divisions. Borabu, Ekerenyo, Manga, Nyamira and

⁶³ Ibid, p.195.

Rigoma. The county is divided into four consistencies. Borabu, North Murirango, West Mugirango and Kitutu Masaba.⁶⁴

1.9.2 Population

According to the 2009 National Census, the population of Nyamira county is 598, 252 persons of which the male population was reported as 287,048 while female population stood at 311,204. The reported number of household stood at 131,039. The population density is 665 persons per square kilometre and 46.6% of the County population live below the poverty line.⁶⁵

1.9.3 Study population

The study population was of adults who were eligible voters by the virtue of having attained 18 years at the time of the 2013 general elections or any other election held in the country before. The sample population constituted 15 respondents from each of the four constituencies in the county. A total sample of 60 respondents responded to the questionnaire.

1.9.4 Sampling technique

The study used three methods of sampling techniques; stratified, purposive and snowball sampling techniques. First, the constituencies formed the stratas, from each of the four stratas (constituencies), fifteen respondents were selected to respond to specific questions in the questionnaires. Due to the vast nature of the county fifteen respondents were found convenient to the researcher and representative enough. To identify the actual respondents purposive and snowball sampling techniques was employed. In doing this, certain considerations were taken into account. Purposive and snowball sampling are non- parametric sampling technique.⁶⁶ In this kind of technique the rule of equal chance of selection is not adhered to. This is especially the case when the category of

⁶⁴ Republic of Kenya, (2010b). *The Population and Housing Census*, Vol. 1 B Nairobi, Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, p.133.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 133.

⁶⁶ Babie, E. (1995), *The Practice of Social Research*, Belmont, Wodswotrth Publishing Company, P. 44.

respondents that a researcher wants to study is not well spread in the whole population.⁶⁷ The researcher, therefore, purposely decides whom to include in the study and whom not to exclude.

The limitation of non-parametric techniques is that the sample selected is not representative of the whole population and as such one cannot generalize.⁶⁸ Nevertheless on certain occasion, like in this study, they are the feasible sampling techniques and as such are the ones to be used.

Snowball sampling is the use of respondents to identify others with the characteristic that the researcher is interested in. In other words, after interviewing one respondent the researcher asks the respondent to identify other people who can provide useful information to the researcher.⁶⁹ Considering the nature of the respondents that the researcher was interested in this sampling technique was useful.

Respondents were selected from each of the four constituencies. Selection was on the basis that one was above 18 years and eligible to vote, those who once held political office, current office bearers, those that had participated in an election, but lost or had campaigned for candidates were selected purposely. The identified respondents were requested to identify others.

1.9.5 Methods of Data Collection

For the purpose of obtaining a comprehensive historical picture of the challenges that have faced women in political participation in Nyamira, this study applied qualitative method of data collection. The study used both secondary and primary sources of data collection. Secondary sources, such as books, articles in journals and reports were used. The Libraries visited for secondary sources included, Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library,

⁶⁷ Moore, S. (1991). *Statistics, Concepts and controversies*, WH and Company, New York, p. 56

⁶⁸ Kline, D. (eds) (1980). *Research Methods For Educational Planning*. Volume (iii) Cambridge, Massachusetts: Centre for Studies in Education, Harvard University, p. 20.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 21.

the Institute of Gender Studies and Development Library, Institute of Development Studies Library and the E-Learning Resource Centre of Nairobi University, The Kenya National Library at Upper Hill and the Kenya National Archives. Primary information was collected using researcher designed questionnaires and in depth interviews with the respondents. Questions pertaining to socio-economic characteristic and factors explaining participation of women in competitive political leadership were asked. Most of these questions were open ended so that the respondents could give additional information.

One focus group discussion was held in each of the four constituencies with the aid of a focused group guide. This was vital because it enabled the researcher to compare the outcome of the discussions with responses given in questionnaires.

Finally, key informant interviews were used to collect information from professionals who have worked closely with women, opinion leaders, local administrative officers, NGOs officials and unsuccessful female aspirants for both civic and parliamentary representation. Key informants were selected purposively and were interviewed with the aid of a key informant guide.

CHAPTER TWO
WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN KENYAN POLITICS: A HISTORICAL
PERSPECTIVE

2.0 Introduction

This chapter traces the history of women participation in politics in Kenya from the pre-colonial period through the colonial to post-colonial period. It aims at establishing how women's participation has evolved during the three different periods in Kenya and the circumstances under which they participated. The chapter also documents the efforts made by women in attempt to bridge the gender disparity in parliamentary representation.

2.1 Pre-colonial era

Although the involvement of women in politics using the western based political structures started with colonialism, studies indicate that women were involved in politics in one form or the other during the pre-colonial era. Before the British colonized Kenya in 1895, Kenyan communities were governed by councils of elders, consisting mainly of elderly men in the community. The role of women and girls was to farm the family land, harvest, care for the children, maintain the homestead, and tend to their husbands. Girls were socialized to be home makers and cultivators. Women were economically empowered as they sold their farm produce in the markets. However, in some communities, decisions affecting the community were left to the council of elders and the men in the community.⁷⁰

Africa had many institutions in which women exercised their authority and political power. Societies where women held political roles have been documented in all parts of Africa, but there was a tremendous variation from society to society. In some, women held the highest positions, such as the paramount chiefs, for example, among the Mande in Sierra Leone, while in others their roles were more limited. For example, among the Igbo, women took up political roles that emerged directly from their roles as women,

⁷⁰O-MakDwallo, A. (2010). *Gender Politics: Participation of Kenyan Women*, MA project paper, Institute African Studies, University of Nairobi, p.8.

whereas among the Lovedu of the Transvaal, women were the sole monarchs in the 19th century.⁷¹

Adelaide Hill at the 1961 annual UNESCO Conference reaffirmed the participation of the African woman in the political sphere. She states that,

Although the world was a narrow one, her authority and status within that world was unquestioned. Among such widely separated people as the Tuaregs of the Sahara desert, the Somalis of the United Republic of Somali, the Mande of Sierra Leone, the Sogon of Sudan and the Igbo of Nigeria, there is ample evidence that the position of women in the society was one of influence.⁷²

O'Barr further emphasizes this argument when he states that prior to the systematic penetration of the European colonial system, African women had a much broader role in decision making than they did under colonialism. The hunting and gathering societies in southern Africa were characterized by relative political equality between women and men. There was no continuous leadership and each gender had its own sphere of activity over which its leadership exercised control.⁷³

Among the agricultural societies of most black Africa, where the majority of African women lived, women derived their political power from the role they played in production. Whether the society was matrilineal or patrilineal, women usually had political control over some areas of activity, such as farming, marketing, trading or household and family affairs. They also had political institutions to influence the affairs

⁷¹ Hafkin, N. and Bay , E (eds) (1976). *Women in Africa :Studies in Social and Economic Change*, Stamford, California, p. 28

⁷² Hill, A. (1961). in Datta S. (1979). *The Civil and Political Participation of Nairobi Female Elites in Kenya*, Phd thesis, University of Nairobi, p. 13.

⁷³O'Barr, J. (1984). *African Women in Politics* in Hay M. J. and Sticher (eds), *African Women South of Sahara* Longman in U.S.A,

of men and were not subjected to general control by men such that they were autonomous in their own areas of responsibility.⁷⁴

Check Anta Diop also has the view that women's place in traditional African society was recognized and gives an example of Egypt where women participated in running public affairs within the framework of a feminine assembly sitting separately but having the same prerogatives as the male assembly. Diop writes:

These factors remained unchanged until colonial conquest...Black Africa had its own specific bicameralism determined by sex. Far from interfering with national life by putting men against women, it guarantees the flowering of both.⁷⁵

Okonjo argues that many early scholars of the traditional political systems produced a distorted picture of these systems creating an impression that the African man was oppressive and that the African woman was deprived. Giving a case study of the pre-colonial Igbo community of the Nigeria, Okonjo states that traditional societies had political systems in which major interested groups were defined and represented by sex.⁷⁶

In both systems, the units were small and political authority was widely dispersed along the following lines; between the sexes, among the age genders, among secret and title societies and among oracles, diviners and other professional group. Each sex generally managed its own affairs and had its own kinship institutions, age grades and secret and title societies.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Hafkin, N. and Bay , E (eds) (1976). *Women in Africa : Studies in Social and Economic Change*, Stamford California, p. 29.

⁷⁵ Diop, A. (1978). *Black Africa: Basic for Federal State , Westport, Connect Cut*, Africa World Press Edition, Lawrence hill company, p. 33.

⁷⁶Okonjo, K. (1978). *The Dual Sex Political System on Operation: Igbo Women and Community Politics in Mid Western Nigeria*, in *Hafkins and Bays (eds) Women in Africa Studies in Social and Economic Change* Stanford, University Press Stanford California , pp.45-46.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p.47.

These systems served the communities well until the advent of colonialism. Under colonialism, women in these communities suffered the greatest loss of power, and their invisibility in the present day politics is a legacy of the colonial past. The British colonialists introduced sexist Victorian values into all aspects of the life (religious, economic and political) of the colonized. Such Victorian values extolled the ideology that a woman's place is in the home and saw women's minds as not strong enough for masculine subjects of science, business and politics⁷⁸. Hence, the colonial government chose to fill the newly created posts of chiefs and administrators with men, thus men could now boast of some measure of power.

Other authors however offer a different view of the situation of women in the pre-colonial period. Kanogo observes that other than their belonging to the same gender, women are characterized by diverse differences of race, class and social status, among others. Significantly and regardless of the social status, race or class women are in a general term a marginalized category in any society. In pre-colonial Africa, they only differed slightly in terms of access to the reproductive resources and the dominant mode of distribution of resources.⁷⁹

Even though Kenyan women had certain powers in the pre-colonial times, Kenyan traditional culture was predominantly patrilineal and patriarchal. In this environment, men were the predominant force.⁸⁰ In this regard it can be argued that to a certain extent numerous social expectations placed women in subordinate, overworked and peripheral positions in the pre-colonial period. The colonial system only exploited the disparity more effectively and consolidated women's low social status and, consequently, marginalized them in politics. This intense marginalization of women by the colonial government had a profound effect on their position in politics. In general, women were

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 46.

⁷⁹Kanogo, T. (2005). *African Womanhood in Colonial Kenya: 1900-50*, East Africa Educational Publishers, Nairobi, p.1,

⁸⁰ Odinga, O. (1967). *Not Yet Uhuru, An Autobiography*, East African Educational Publishers Ltd, Nairobi, p. 68.

ignored and deprived of their powers. All the colonial officials shared a basic belief that the role of women was that of the household, helpmate to men and that women were outside the proper reality of politics.⁸¹

2.2 Colonial era

The imposition of colonial rule in Kenya destabilized the whole society economically, socially, and politically. Certain aspects of the colonial intrusion had adverse implication for women as a social category. Some of these constraints were reinforced by the dominant patriarchal system.⁸² The colonial government in Kenya reinforced traditional patriarchal leadership forms and styles. In terms of leadership, nearly all the top colonial administrators were male. Their habits and lifestyles also duplicated and reinforced the traditional British family structure where women existed as appendages of the male bread winners and were popularized as social butterflies whose responsibility was to stand behind their spouses and provide obligatory moral support.⁸³

In order to understand the position of Kenyan women in the modern political and economic dispensation, it is necessary to make clear the structures they operated in before the colonial period and during the colonial era. For example, Midamba argues that the status of Kenyan women deteriorated during the colonial rule. This deterioration was particularly noticeable because in the pre-colonial era, 'although women were to some extent subordinate to men under the African customary law, in many respects the roles of men and women were complementary in nature'.⁸⁴

⁸¹ O'Barr, J. (1984). *African Women in Politics in Hay M. J. and Sticher (eds), African Women South of Sahara*, Longman in U.S.A, p. 142.

⁸² Kanogo, T. (1992) "Women Movement and Vision : What Lesson From the Past ". A paper presented at an AAWORD seminar on women's movement in Kenya Milimani hotel, Nairobi.

⁸³ Masinjira, M. (1998). *Patriarchy and Women's Participation in Politics in Kenya*, in Kabira, W. and masinjira (eds), *Towards Gender Responsive Politics*, Fredrian Ebert Foundation and the Collaborative Centre for Gender and Development in Kenya, p.10.

⁸⁴ Midamba, H. (1995). *African Market, Women and Economic Power: The Role of Women in African Economic Development*, Greenwood Press, Westport, P. 23.

When the British took over control of the country, they also emphasized male dominance by transferring men's supervisory rights over land to individual legal ownership.⁸⁵ As a result of this individual land ownership, women would be denied access to land, something that was new and foreign.⁸⁶ This situation exerted a negative impact on the status of women in property ownership. Besides losing land ownership and control to men, (initially to colonial settlers and later to African men), the status of Kenya women was significantly affected by the coming of colonialists. According to Onsongo colonial laws disrupted and displaced women's gender roles. This was done through introduction of cash crops, formal education and the monetary economy. While some men secured employment either in large cash crop farms or as clerks in government offices, many women remained in rural areas producing subsistence food.⁸⁷

Formal education was also mostly available to men, which meant that the majority of women remained illiterate and, therefore, could not participate in modern economic transactions⁸⁸. Women's work (which was mainly domestic) was classified as non-work since it did not fit into the colonial system's economic criteria.⁸⁹ Moreover, due to migrant labour that led to movement of men to urban areas, rural families became increasingly female-headed, driving many of them to serious poverty levels they had not experienced before.⁹⁰ It is also documented that colonial state policies limited and controlled women's ability to migrate and work in urban areas. Although writing almost twenty years after independence. Obbo notes that, females who migrated to urban areas alone, i.e. not as wives, were always viewed as problematic by both urban authorities and

⁸⁵ Elkins, Caroline, (2005). *Britain's Gulag*, Jonathan Cape, London, P. 88

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 89.

⁸⁷ Onsongo, J. (2004). *Women's Participation in University Management in Kenya*, Gender Issues ,Research report series - no. 22, Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA) Ethiopia, p. 9.

⁸⁸ Odinga, O.(1967). *Not Yet Uhuru, An Autobiography*, East African Educational Publishers Ltd,Nairobi, P.67.

⁸⁹ Op.cit, p.10.

⁹⁰ Midamba, H. (1995). *African Market, Women and Economic Power: The Role of Women in African Economic Development*, Greenwood Press, Westport, P. 24

migrant men. Women's migration was seen as a cause of marital instability and a disruption of traditional values.⁹¹

In the early stages of colonial rule, the government worked to restrict the movement of women, especially unmarried ones. The aim was to keep women in the villages so that men could be encouraged to return to the rural home. This arrangement would guarantee a regular supply of labour both in rural and urban areas. This new division of labour seems to have created male bread winners with women dependent on them, a situation that created a sense of powerlessness among women, which continues to affect their participation in public decision making.⁹²

Colonialists also introduced formal education, which had a different impact on men and women. Most tribal elders viewed girls' education with suspicion. These elders felt that both the colonial and missionary presence 'interrupted a sheltered, isolated, and idyllic life in the villages'.⁹³ The movement of girls from villages to boarding or mission schools was initially seen as a way of 'spoiling' the good village girls. There was fear that the daughters would no longer make good wives. The concern was that education would turn girls into prostitutes. However, the 'freedom' that came along with colonial education had its contradictions, especially for women. The syllabus that the girls were exposed to in schools was designed to cultivate their domestic skills for their expected roles as wives and mothers.⁹⁴ While some girls got jobs as nurses and teachers, missions hoped that this would be for about two to three years only before marriage. In the mission centres, as in

⁹¹Obbo, Christine, (1980). *African Women: Their Struggle for Economic Independence*, Zed Press, London, P.18.

⁹² Kamau, N. (2008). *The Value Proposition to Women Leadership: Perspectives of Kenyan Women Parliamentary and Civic Leaders 2003 -200.* In Nyokabi Kamau (eds) *Perspectives of Gender Discourse: Enhancing Women Political Participation*, No 6, pp 7-35, Nairobi Heirian Boll Foundation, p. 18.

⁹³Kanogo, T. (2005). *African Womanhood in Colonial Kenya: 1900-50*, East Africa Educational Publishers, Nairobi, p. 7.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 7.

the village, women were not expected to combine marriage and careers.⁹⁵ These contradictions have continued to affect women's careers and indeed how workplaces and politics are structured.⁹⁶ As educated persons, Kenyan women are still expected to retain their traditional roles of being mothers and submissive wives, while at the same time opening up new normative spaces for themselves.⁹⁷ Unfortunately, workplace and political norms in Kenya do not allow for combining of domestic and public roles, therefore, creating conflicts for professional women who try to balance the dual careers.⁹⁸ These norms create conflicts for women who venture into politics, both in the ways they are perceived and also in discharging their duties in a male-dominated parliament.

2.3 Post- independence women leadership in Kenya

The lack of recognition for women, however, was not confined to the colonial period, but also persisted even after independence. Despite their contribution to the independence struggle, women still lack adequate recognition in the political arena. Shevedova attributes the lack of recognition of women in politics to the fact that men dominate the political arena, formulate the rules of the political game and define the standards for evaluation. In addition political life is organized according to male norms and values and, in some cases male life styles.⁹⁹

In Kenya, for instance, there was no single woman elected or nominated in the first parliament of 1963-1969. It is only in 1969 that the first woman Member of Parliament, Grace Onyango, was elected while another woman was nominated. Since then a number of women have attempted to enter the political scene by contesting and being elected to

⁹⁵ Ibid p. 8.

⁹⁶ Maathai, Wangari, (2008). *Unbowed: One Woman's Story*, Arrow Books, London, P.45

⁹⁷ Ibid.p.45.

⁹⁸ Onsongo, J. (2004). *Women's Participation in University Management in Kenya: Gender Issues, Research Report Series - no. 22*, Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA) Ethiopia, p. 11.

⁹⁹ Shvedova, N. (1998). *Obstacles to Womens Participation in Parliament: Women in Parliament Beyond Numbers* , International Forum for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Stockholm Sweden, p. 19.

either parliamentary or civic seats.¹⁰⁰ However, the number is still low in relation to the Kenyan parliament, despite the fact that women constitute the majority of the population and voters.

The table below shows how inequality between men and women has been reflected in the independent Kenyan parliament, from the first parliament to the current one.

Parliament	Period	Total no. of constituencies	No. of women elected	Available no. of slots for nomination	No. of women nominated
1 st Parliament	1963-1969	158	0	12	0
2 nd Parliament	1969-1974	158	1	12	1
3 rd Parliament	1974-1979	158	4	12	2
4 th Parliament	1979-1983	158	5	12	1
5 th Parliament	1983-1988	158	2	12	1
6 th Parliament	1888-1992	188	2	12	0
7 th Parliament	1992-1997	188	6	12	1
8 th Parliament	1997-2002	210	4	12	5
9 th Parliament	2002-2007	210	10	12	8
10 th Parliament	2007-2012	210	16	12	6
11 th Parliament	2013-2017	290	16	12	3

Source: Nyokabi, Kamau, (2010), *Women and Political Leadership in Kenya, Ten Case Studies*, Heinrich Boll Foundation, P. 3 and current parliament records.

The domination of parliamentary seats by men as shown above implies that major political views and decisions that inform or shape policy formulation and implementation emanate from men because it is the same parliament that legislates laws that affect both men and women. It also depicts the gender voting biases within Kenyan communities and confirms the existing mistrust of women contestants particularly because women are the majority voters.

¹⁰⁰ Mwangi, S. (2008). *Gender Policy in Kenya and the Impact on Women's Involvement in Politics*, in NenaThundu, Anna Marie Kiaga and Susan Mwangi (eds), *Assessing Gender Policies in the East African Region*. DPMF, Nairobi, P.100.

The scenario may, however, be explained by the fact that not many women present themselves for parliamentary elections probably due to their feeling of inadequacy deeply rooted in socialization. The trend, however, shows a positive change in regard to the number of both elected and nominated women in parliament albeit at a minimal rate. Such evidence is supported with Mitullah, who observes that the ruling class has been and continuous to be dominated by the men who make most decisions. This factor reaffirms the perception that development strategies still provide marginal consideration for women because they are not involved in their formulation.¹⁰¹

At independence the government's sessional paper, *African socialism and its application to planning in Kenya*, clearly indicated that political participation by men and women should be on equal terms, including standing for elective office as guaranteed in Kenya's constitution. However, it was soon obvious that just as women's contribution had been ignored during the colonial era, independence would not remarkably change their status. The government failed to involve them on equal basis with men in the country's economic, political and social institutions.

The early years of independence, up to 1971, indicated no major landmarks of women's involvement in politics. Under the colonial administration, women had held one or two specially elected seats, but when the opposition introduced a motion to preserve this practice in 1963, it was defeated in the National Assembly. Out of the 12 special seats filled by appointments in 1965, none was allocated to a woman. In fact, the first woman was elected to parliament in 1969, nearly ten years after independence.

The years 1970s up to the early 1980^s saw more women serving in parliament with five elected women and two nominated, but the total number of women politicians was insignificant since they were a mere 3:18 per cent as compared to men at 96:82 per cent up to 1983. In 1983 there were only two elected female members of parliament compared to 198 male members, meaning that in 32 years of independence, Kenya had only a total

¹⁰¹ Mitullah W. (1995). *Women and Democracy in Africa. The Kenya Experience*, paper presented at Regional Symposium on Women and Democracy in Africa, October 1994, Windhoek Namibia.

of ten women elected into parliament. The number was quite insignificant given the fact that women constitute 51 percent of the total Kenyan population.¹⁰²

In anticipation of the December 1992 multiparty general elections following repeal of section 2A of the Kenyan Constitution, which had reverted Kenya to the so-called single-party democracy a decade before, several organizations were set up with the full backing of the international and local community to sensitize women and men alike and to encourage women to take up the challenge of elected positions. The repeal of Section 2A of the constitution considerably strengthened the women's movement because the freedom that characterized democratic rule enabled women to challenge the social values and structures which undermined their role in the society. The majority of women were forced to re-examine themselves and assess their role in the emerging and evolving milieu with ongoing power relation.¹⁰³

It was strongly felt that women's political under-representation was a major contributor to their marginal status in all aspects of life in Kenya, and that only direct involvement in politics could create avenues for their advancement. It was contended that the democratization process was incomplete if women did not actively participate in the quest for political leadership. A larger number of women than ever before in the history of Kenya decided to try their hands at both parliamentary and civic seats. Nineteen women were nominated to vie for parliamentary seats and about 120 others for civic posts.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Mwangi, S. (2008). *Gender Policy in Kenya and the Impact on Women's Involvement in Politics*, in Nena Thundu, Anna Marie Kiaga and Susan Mwangi (eds), *Assessing Gender Policies in the East African Region*. DPMF, Nairobi, p. 99.

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 431.

¹⁰⁴ Yambo, D., (1994). *Women, Media, and Democracy*, MPublishing, University of Michigan Library, Michigan. URL: <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.4761530.0008.012>.

This female resurgence as seen through the media had its repercussions. Some of the campaigns of the women who remained in the limelight drew such mammoth crowds that for the first time male competitors felt threatened. Perhaps out of sheer panic—election campaigns are known for the dirt they dig up—male competitors tried to counter the effects of the powerful women's campaigns in some very humiliating ways. For a good part of the campaign period, the media reported some of the most unlikely election tales. Married women candidates were accused of neglecting their families for personal gains. Widows were accused of having been the cause of their husbands' deaths. Divorced women were accused of having loose morals.¹⁰⁵

Whereas many of the male candidates concentrated on such petty issues as the appearance and marital status of female candidates, female candidates focused attention on issues which, for over thirty years of independence, had not been adequately addressed. The issues included the lack of clean water for all, inadequate health facilities, the lowering education standard, and the deteriorating agricultural sector. They contended that such conditions could persist because male parliamentarians, who had dominated the political scene for just as long, were failing to prioritize these issues since they did not affect them directly.¹⁰⁶

As the election date neared and the campaigns intensified, so did the campaign violence against women. In its normal exercise of news reporting, the media related instances where some female candidates' speeches were preceded by the official introduction of their spouses to dispel rumours that they were unmarried women. Being unmarried adversely affected the winning chances of women candidates, but not those of male candidates.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Even long-abandoned cultural practices were used against women candidates. One case in point was when a current Honourable Member of Parliament had to publicly (sarcastically) declare during one of her campaign meetings that she was ready at that very moment to be circumcised if that was the last qualification she needed to get to parliament, female circumcision having been eradicated in her constituency, or so she claimed. In a final attempt to scare women from finishing their campaigns, there were reports of actual violence against, and even rape of, women candidate supporters and relatives.¹⁰⁷

In spite of all the trials and tribulations, the 1992 election results were much better for women than anticipated. Even though only six women won parliamentary seats and about 50 others civic posts, the excitement lay in the fact that for the first time, there was a greater number of elected women in parliament than in all previous years.¹⁰⁸

Out of the six, only one was offered a cabinet post and another was appointed an assistant minister. The number of women in parliament in the 1992-1997 assembly encouraged large numbers of women to register to contest parliamentary and local council posts in the 1997 polls. Several women's groups and NGOs held numerous civic and voter workshops to educate women on their rights, both as contestants and voters.¹⁰⁹

But the political tide was not in their favour. Charity Ngilu lost her presidential bid. World famous environmentalist, Wangari Maathai, also lost both the presidential and parliamentary race. Kenya's first and only woman cabinet member, Nyiva Mwenda, lost her bid for parliament at the party nomination stage. The outcome of the polls meant five years of under-representation; thus issues affecting women would receive little attention

¹⁰⁷ African Woman and Child Feature Service, *The Status of the Kenyan Woman*, issue no 37, June 2013, AWC, Nairobi.

¹⁰⁸ Wiper Audrey (1971). *Equal Rights for Women in Kenya*, Journal of Morden African studies, vol. 9 no.3, pp. 427-429.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 429.

from the government. This was justified by the fact that president Moi was yet to implement the Beijing Platform for Action.

By 1993, the deep-lying discontent among women regarding their inadequate representation in politics was being evident. The discontent manifested in the women's movement which was divided into two, namely; a core of militants actively crusading for equal rights and speaking publicly on the issues affecting women. They lead organizations aimed at protecting women's status and though few in numbers, they were the harbinger of future change. The second group, which was the majority, had little or no interest in activism concerned with implementation of their political, legal and social rights and asserted themselves in more practical ways. Both types of action combined to produce progress.¹¹⁰

Since 1969, when Kenya had its first woman parliamentarian, the Ninth parliament had the highest ever achieved level of representation by women in Kenya's history, with 18 women out of 222 members in parliament and holding 8 percent of the parliamentary seats, up from 5.6 percent in 2002. Six women were appointed to the government team, three ministers and three assistant ministers. Women were appointed as health minister, water resource minister and minister of state in the office of the President. But it should be noted that this was not through affirmative action as there was no policy regarding the number of positions preserved for either gender.¹¹¹

Despite the rise in numbers, it fell drastically short of the United Nations target of achieving 30 per cent of representation of women in politics by 2005. Highlights of the African Regional Congress of Women in politics of 1995 concluded that such statistics, in Kenya as well as Africa, are indicative to the "limited decision making roles given to

¹¹⁰ Nzomo., (2013). *Women in Political Leadership in Kenya: Access, Agenda Setting & Accountability*, Institute of Diplomacy and International Studies University of Nairobi, Heinrich Boll Stiftung East and horn of Africa.

¹¹¹ Were, M., and Jane K.(2003). *Gender Mainstreaming in Macroeconomic Policies and Poverty Reduction Strategy in Kenya*. Kenya Institute for Policy and Research Analysis, Nairobi.p.17.

women in this region, as well as the need to support girls' education and women's more active participation in politics. It is, therefore, of paramount importance to analyze the political scene for gender imbalances, identifying the problems that hinder women's participation in politics, and offer recommendations to help alleviate the challenges of women in the fight against these problems that will enable them ascend to power and articulate their grievances since there is no shortcut.¹¹²

Women have not yet met two strategic objectives; those of ensuring their equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision making, and increasing their capacity to participate in decision making and leadership. Going by the statistics of the 2002-2003 parliamentary years, women parliamentarians have found it hard to fulfil the above objectives. Out of the 17 percent of MPs who brought motions to the house, 18 percent were males as compared to 5.6 percent women. In terms of contribution to motions in parliament, out of 90.8 percent MPs who contributed, 94.4 percent of women MPs contributed to motions as compared to 90.5 percent of males. This shows that the level of the women's contribution surpassed that of their male counterparts. In terms of points of order's raised by MPs, female MPs were almost on the same level with their male counterparts with 61.7 percent and 69.7 percent, respectively. Despite their critically limited number in parliament, women parliamentarians have matched their male counterparts in activities in the house.¹¹³

This success could also be attributed to women lobby groups' frantic efforts. In early November 2002, a loose coalition of women NGOs, including those affiliated to Women's Political Caucus, as well as individual activists and professionals, formed a forum, initially labeled Women for NARC and later, the NARC Women Congress, to employ every available means to ensure that NARC won the 2002 elections. This group produced and disseminated presidential and party campaign materials, organized and

¹¹² Ibid, p. 18.

¹¹³ Mwangi, S. (2008). *Gender Policy in Kenya and the Impact on Women's Involvement in Politics*, in Nena Thundu, Anna marie Kiaga and Susan Mwangi (eds) *Assessing Gender Policies in the East African Region*. DPMF, Nairobi. p. 99.

conducted training for election party agents, participated in the presidential campaign and monitored the election polls.¹¹⁴

They required a guarantee from the male dominated NARC that, if the party won the elections, it would incorporate women as equal partners in the post-election power sharing and would complete and engender the new constitution and the governance process generally. Ultimately, there were no guarantees, save for those contained in NARC's election agenda document. The post-election power sharing arrangement envisaged did not happen and the only gain for women was the nomination of five women out of the seven NARC nominees.¹¹⁵

Given the gains in the 2002 elections, the new decision making structures were a mixed bag of gains and losses for women. For example, comparatively, women's presence in the cabinet improved from zero in 1974 and thereafter, to one assistant Ministry of Culture and Social Services, except for the period 1994-1997 when Kenya had one full woman cabinet minister. For the first time in 40 years, women secured six ministerial positions.

In sum, although the female gender sector has been active and sometimes an effective lobbyist in engendering democratic change in Kenya since the beginning of the political transition in 1992, women lost a strategic political moment in 2002 and did not become major political players, with the capacity to negotiate effectively to the pre- and post-election negotiating table for key political positions and strategic policy decisions regarding Kenya's future. Hence, during the party nominations and in the post-election power-sharing arrangements, women felt betrayed and politically marginalized by men once again.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 106.

¹¹⁵ Nzomo, Maria, (2003), *The 2002 General Elections in Kenya; Women's Performance and Prospects in Parliamentary Politics*, Wajibu: A journal of Social & Religious Concern, volume 18 no. 1, 2003, p. 8.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. p. 8.

It is their lack of common women's political voice for most of 2002 that reduced their chances of better performance at the 2002 polls and subsequent political developments. This demonstrated the persistent inadequate learning from past setbacks and lack of consolidation of gains built on the past achievements. This could be attributed to the fact that women's movement reconstitutes itself each year before a general election leading to the conclusion that many Kenyan women and men activists and politicians, who suddenly appear during such times, are no more than political opportunists.¹¹⁷

The active participation of women in parliament has proved that they are politically empowered and are able to participate on an equal basis with their male counterparts in the political process. They are also able to use their empowered status to solve problems they face as a community. Reports on women MP's performance in parliament indicates that those who have been in parliament have had a positive impact. The adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action in November 1996 moved by Charity Ngilu (the Minister for Health then) made her the first Kenyan woman to successfully move a woman- friendly motion. This committed the government to the translation, interpretation, simplification and clarification of the resolution in the Platform of Action to grassroots women through seminars, workshops, and others to explain it as well as allocate funds to enhance women's welfare. Other motions moved by women include the Affirmative Action Motion of 1997, the Equality Act Motion of 1999 and Sexual Offences Bill of 2005.¹¹⁸

Indeed despite their critically limited number in parliament, women parliamentarians have matched their male counterparts in activities in the house. It, therefore, calls one to wonder why, if the ability is the same, few females make it to the august house.

2.4 Pioneer women in Kenyan politics

Kenya's women presence in politics and participation in leadership has a long history dating from pre-colonial period through colonial to post- colonial period. In 1901-1909, Wangu wa Makeri, the first woman chief, defied patriarchal structures of culture and

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 10.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 12.

tradition to rise and become a formidable leader, who is said to have brought development and peace among her community.¹¹⁹ Many “unsung heroines” accomplished similar casts, women like Meketalili wa Menza, a Giriama woman who played a key role in leading the resistance against the British in the colonial period (1912-1914), urging the Giriama not to cooperate with attempts to recruit their men into labour. A key part of her successful campaign was that she marshalled other women to work together with her. Moraa Moka Ngiti, a female freedom fighter from Nyanza (Kisii); Field Marshall Muthoni, a freedom fighter from Central; Eiokalaine O-M’barugu, an Assistant Chief in pre-independent Kenya in Eastern; Jemima Gecaga, the first woman to be nominated in the Legislative Council (Legco), Priscilla Ingasiani Abwao, the woman who attended the Legco in Lancaster House, among others.

Other women, like Phoebe Asiyo, Grace Ogot, Wambui Otieno, Professor Wangari Maathai, Martha Karua, and others like them, sought to represent the interests of their people. They provided sound leadership during key stages of Kenya’s political journey from the post-independence era to the agitation for multi-party democracy and beyond. They managed to do this despite the prevailing patriarchal nature of politics in Kenya, which is characterized by marginalization, exclusion of women and constricted involvement often defined by gender roles. There was an expectation that the next generation of women leaders was bound for greater things, but the subsequent elections exposed the serious and continuing gap of female representation in the political class.

2.5 Women in current parliament

The 2013 general elections was a replica of global statistics that indicate less than 16 per cent of the world’s parliamentarians are women. If it were not for affirmative action on gender as enshrined in the laws of the land, Kenya would be faring badly indeed at the five per cent mark. When the final election results were announced, only 16 women had been elected as MPs. None of those that vied for the governor or senator positions won.

¹¹⁹ Mary W. Wanyoike, (2002). *Makers of Kenya’s History: Wangu wa Makeri*, East Africa Educational Publishers Ltd, Nairobi, p. 23.

Suffice it to say that the number of women MPs elected remained the same as in the previous Parliament, despite the exponential increase of the number of constituencies from 210 to 290 countrywide. In the 2007 elections, 16 women were elected to Parliament while another six were nominated. In the current parliament (11th parliament), the number of women rose to 67 in the National Assembly, after the election of 47 women representatives and another four were nominated by political parties.¹²⁰

Political representation of Kenyan women currently stands at 15 per cent versus Rwanda's 56 per cent, South Africa's 42 per cent, Tanzania's 36 per cent and Uganda's 35 per cent. This is an improvement from the previous 9.8 per cent representation in the 10th Parliament and the numbers have been greatly boosted by the 47 women representatives¹²¹. Although this is the highest number of female representatives Kenya has ever had in the area of political leadership, it is still a rather poor showing in this day and age, where women's political participation has generally improved around the world. Some have argued that it is unfair for women to have special electoral posts, but despite these affirmative action measures, the guaranteed 47 seats are still far below the 117 needed to satisfy the one third-gender rule. This dismal performance in the electoral process is notwithstanding the massive amounts of funding that have gone into capacity building, gender mainstreaming, gender activism, mobilizing and other NGO related buzz words that imply a lot of work is being done at the grassroots level to get women participating in politics in a meaningful way.

Women have been ignored in the top ranks of leadership, to the point that their contributions to the advancement of this nation remain forgotten. A myriad of excuses have been presented to explain the lack of participation from lack of resources, to the social construct skewed to the advantage of men, poor literacy levels, tribal/geographical and ethnic issues, and retrogressive cultural practices. Though these excuses are in fact

¹²⁰ John Ndeta H., *Kenya Has Only Five Per Cent Women In House*, The Star Daily newspaper, Thursday March 14th 2013, p. 4.

¹²¹Ibid, p. 4.

valid, the point remains that previously some women managed to break through and participate in the political arena.

Women seem to be valuable politically only as voters. They are often depicted as Wanjiku, a poor village woman bearing a basket while dressed in a patched skirt with a scarf tied around her head and her hand stretched out, hoping that the big man will pay attention to her needs and not just wait for every election cycle to court her attention.

Article 81(b) of the new constitution states that no more than two-thirds of the members of elective public bodies shall be of the same gender. The rule was meant to increase women's participation in politics and based on this rule, at least 117 MPs should be female now that males are still likely to dominate¹²². It is evident that the number of women in the 11th Parliament went up, not because they were elected, but because of the affirmative action in the new constitution that provide for the county women representatives. Although this seems to be the highest ever number of women in the Parliament, it is worrisome that there is no single woman who was elected to the Senate. The constitution however provides for nomination of up to 16 women to the senate based on political party strength. The position of governor is purely elective and just like the senate, Kenyans did not entrust any of the women aspirants to manage the newly created 47 counties.¹²³

In the 10th parliament, there were 22 women MPs out of the 224 members. One-step more into the past indicates that the ninth Parliament had far less representation at 18. These percentages are much below the recommended threshold of 30 per cent under the new constitution. One indicator of gender inequality is the small number of women in

¹²² Republic of Kenya, (2010). *The constitution 2010*, Government Printer, Nairobi.

¹²³ Ibid.

decision-making positions and other national governance structures.¹²⁴ This begs the question: when will Kenya ever implement her gender policies?

The 16 women who were elected to Parliament in the 2013 general polls include: Peris Tobiko, Alice Ng'ang'a, Grace Kipchoim, Rachael Nyamai, Millie Odhiambo, Mary Emaase, Regina Ndambuki, Jessica Kuko, Esther Gathogo, Mary Wambui, Naomi Shaban, Joyce Laboso, Esther Murugi, Cecily Mbarire, Alice Wahome and Hellen Sambili¹²⁵. None of them comes from Nyamira county and the larger Gusii land. It is incumbent for them to lead from the front in defending women rights at the policy and governance levels including fighting for the realization of the constitutional provisions on the two thirds rule.

2.6 Women participation in Nyamira parliamentary politics

Although in limited numbers, women in Nyamira have made efforts to capture parliamentary posts in the four constituencies that make the county, but over time their efforts have not born fruits. The furthest a woman from the county has climbed on Kenya's political ladder is when Mrs. Catherine Nyamoto was nominated to parliament by KANU after the 1992 elections, after she lost in her bid for the west Mugirango parliamentary elections. Catherine Moraa Nyamoto, a seasoned politician, administrator and human rights crusader has since then been one of the female parliamentary candidates for west Mugirango constituency one of the four constituencies that make Nyamira county. Nyamoto has been in the forefront crusading for the rights of women. She has served as the chairperson of the Federation of Women's Groups. She has also served as the Director of the Women Political Alliance of Kenya and the Women League of Voters and has served as the treasurer of the MYWO. In her campaigns, she has been

¹²⁴ John Ndeti H., *Kenya Has Only Five Per Cent Women In House*, The star Daily Newspaper, Thursday March 14th 2013 p. 4.

¹²⁵ The star daily newspaper, Thursday March 14th 2013 p. 4.

calling for the women to take advantage of their numbers in voting in one of their own to parliament, a call that has not yielded since independence in Nyamira County.¹²⁶

Nyarinda Moikobu, a former teacher and curriculum developer with the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) has also contested the North Mugirango constituency parliamentary post since 1992. North Mugirango is also one of the constituencies that make Nyamira county. Other female candidates who have contested for the North Mugirango parliamentary post include the current chair of MYWO Nyamira branch Mary Orwenyo, Nyaanga Rebecca Elaine and Orwaru Callen Kwamoka.¹²⁷

In Kitutu Masaba constituency, Abigail Nyanduko Matini, has contested for the parliamentary post in all the general elections since the re-introduction of multi-party elections in 1992. Others who have been in the race include, Joyce Nyakwara and Gesairo Alfridah.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that prior to the systematic penetration of colonialism, women were in one way or the other involved in political affairs in most African societies. The status of Kenyan women deteriorated during the colonial rule. This deterioration was particularly noticeable because in the pre-colonial era, although women were to some extent subordinate to men under the African customary law, in many respects the roles of men and women were complementary in nature

When the British took over control of the country, they also emphasized male dominance by transferring men's supervisory rights over land to individual legal ownership, as a result of this individual land ownership, women were denied access to land, something

¹²⁶ African Woman and Child Feature Service, *The Status of the Kenyan Woman*, issue no 37, June 2013, AWC, Nairobi.

¹²⁷ African Woman and Child Feature Service, *The Status of the Kenyan Woman*, issue no 37, June 2013, AWC, Nairobi.

that was new and foreign. This situation exerted a negative impact on the status of women that could affect the Kenyan woman in years to come.

The chapter has indicated that during the colonial period, women made a significant role in Kenya's struggle for Independence. But they were represented in very limited numbers as elected members of parliament in the post colonial governments. From the time of independence in 1963 to 1969, no women were elected to parliament. Between 1969 and 1974, women constituted less than one percent of the elected members of parliament. The highest number of women who served in parliament was reached in 1979, when there were five elected and one appointed female member. In 1983, only two women were elected and one was appointed; the same was true from 1988 to 1992, when women represented only three percent of all parliamentarians. In the 1990s, amid Kenya's 'Second Liberation', the women in Kenya realized that they had an important role to play if full democratic ideals were to be realized. This bold move would be more center-stage and would receive its due recognition after the repeal of section 2A of the constitution that galvanized and mobilized the women of Kenya from the village to the national level, to chart out a national women's agenda under the clarion call of unity in diversity and the commitment to take every opportunity to use women's collective voice to ensure democratic transformation and removal of women's marginalization in Kenyan's governance dispensation. The chapter concludes that although women have made some progress especially since 1992 in their quest for gender equity in parliamentary representation, such achievements are a drop in ocean compared with the enormous efforts made by women as individuals and groups to empower themselves and to sensitize both men and women on the importance of gender equity.

CHAPTER THREE

ADVOCACY AGENTS ENHANCING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

3.0 Introduction

This chapter seeks to trace the historical evolution, the role and scope of advocacy agents in promoting women's participation in the political scene in the world with specific reference to Kenya. The chapter also attempts to establish how the women's organizations have affected women's participation in legislative politics and their impact on changing gender relations and transforming the Kenya's political scenario. The chapter is divided into three sections; global organization, the Kenyan government efforts in promoting women participation and the grassroots women political organization in Kenya.

3.1 Global perspective

Global advances have been made towards the recognition of the principle of women's political, economic and social equality. Four world conferences on women convened by the United Nations in the last quarter of the 20th century have been instrumental in elevating the cause of gender equality to the very centre of the global agenda. The conferences have united the international community behind a set of common objectives with an effective plan of action for the advancement of women everywhere, in all spheres of public and private life. The four conferences include; the 1975, Mexico City conference, the 1980, review conference in Copenhagen, the 1985 conference held in Nairobi to review and appraise the achievements of the women's decade (the Nairobi conference is also known as the birth of feminism), and the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995.¹²⁸

While the efforts of the previous two decades, starting with the Mexico City Conference in 1975, has helped to improve women's conditions and access to resources, they have not been able to change the basic structure of inequality in the relationship between men

¹²⁸ World Conferences on Women, published by the United Nations Department of Public Information DPI/2035/May 2000, p. 1.

and women. Decisions that affected all people's lives are still being made mostly by men. Ways have to be sought to empower women so that they could bring their own priorities and values as equal partners with men in decision-making processes at all levels. It was in Beijing that a new chapter in the struggle for gender equality can truly be said to have begun.¹²⁹ The Mexico conference, therefore, laid the foundation and set the pace for the global activities that were undertaken during the women's decade.

The struggle for gender equality was still in its early stages at the inception of the United Nations in 1945. Of the original 51 Member States, only 30 allowed women equal voting rights with men or permitted them to hold public office. Nevertheless, the drafters of the United Nation Charter had the foresight to deliberately refer to the "equal rights of men and women" as they declared the Organization's "faith in fundamental human rights" and the "dignity and worth of the human person". No previous international legal document had so forcefully affirmed the equality of all human beings, or specifically targeted sex as a basis for discrimination. At that moment, it became clear that women's rights would be central to the work that lay ahead.¹³⁰

During the first three decades, the work of the United Nations on behalf of women focused primarily on the codification of women's legal and civil rights, and the gathering of data on the status of women around the world. With time, however, it became increasingly apparent that laws alone were not enough to ensure the equal rights of women.

The struggle for equality entered a second stage with the convening of four world conferences by the United Nations to develop strategies and plans of action for the advancement of women. The efforts undertaken have gone through several phases and transformations, from regarding women almost exclusively in terms of their development needs, to recognizing their essential contributions to the entire development process, to

¹²⁹Ibid p. 1.

¹³⁰ World Conferences on Women, Published by the United Nations Department of Public Information DPI/2035/May 2000 p.2.

seeking their empowerment and the promotion of their right to full participation at all levels of human activity.¹³¹

3.2 Kenyan government efforts to promote women's political participation

Kenya inherited the colonial legacy of male dominance, which used male hierarchies for direct and indirect forms of colonial rule while female hierarchies were atrophied or actually suppressed. Colonialism did not improve the condition of African women as it is often claimed, but was patriarchal and therefore gender biased. It boosted the hegemony of men while extreme domestication was imposed on women. The official attitude towards African women was unfavorable and quite often abusive.¹³²

At independence, the Kenyan government assumed that the activities of formal women's organizations would support the state in nation building and their autonomy was attacked. Thus the subsequent policies and national plans catered for all people irrespective of gender. In 1964 the National Community Development Policy emphasized self-help and women's participation was undetermined. Sessional paper No. 10 of 1965 did not mention women in its contents. The First Developmental Plan also made no specific mention of women. However, the 1972 ILO report on "Employment, Income and Equity" made the Kenya government clarify its position on the women question and stated that it "is not aware of overt discrimination against women in the country".¹³³

Before 1975, Kenya's development policies were gender insensitive. After the declaration of the Women's Decade, the government responded to the Mexico World Plan of action for the establishment of national machinery, by creating, the Women's Bureau to accelerate the achievement of equal opportunity of women (through the Cabinet Memorandum 78(b) of 1975). From early 2003, it was located in the new Ministry of Gender, Sports, Culture and Social Services¹³⁴, currently it has been proposed

¹³¹ Ibid, p. 2.

¹³² Ndeba, M. (1999). *The Women's Self Help Groups in Kenya, 1945-1965*, p. 22.

¹³³ Nzomo, M., (1989). *Impact of Eomen's Decade on Policies Programmes and Empowerment of Women in Kenya. Issue : a journal of opinion*, vol 17 no.2

¹³⁴ Ibid

that its transformation into a full-fledged department for effectiveness as an instrument for gender mainstreaming and for working with internal conventions.

The Third National Development Plan was the ‘women’s plan’ and referred directly to women and set a new trend in Kenya’s development planning with its bias towards activities to promote women’s integration in development. The subsequent plans merely re-emphasized the trend and in 1977, the Fourth Development Plan gave women a definite though not clearly specified importance as a target group of the development policies.¹³⁵

In 1985, Kenya hosted the end of UN Decade Women Conference in Nairobi. Subsequently, several important international conventions were ratified by Kenya confirming the rights of women, their participation and due place in socio-economic and political arena, and the need for guaranteeing their safety and protection¹³⁶. Among these were; the 1985 Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for Women, the Beijing Platform for actions of September 1985, and the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) signed in 1984, the Millennium Development Goals and the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights.¹³⁷

In Kenya, international laws do not affect the laws of the country unless specific legislations are passed by parliament to that effect, hence the obligations of the convention can only be implemented through legislative, judicial and administrative measures which require time to be incorporated into domestic law and policy. Such international laws advocate for the observation of women rights and their well-being. An example of such law is the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action, whose Article states:

¹³⁵ Feldman, Rayah, (1984). *Women’s Groups and Women’s Subordination; An analysis of the Policies Towards Rural Women in Kenya, Review of African Political Economy* (special issue) vol 27, p.71.

¹³⁶ Government of Kenya, (2000). consideration of reports submitted by states parties under article 18 of CEDAW, third and fourth periodic reports of state parties. Kenya, New York, United nations.

¹³⁷ Op.cit p. 71.

Human rights of women and the girl-child are inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal rights. The full and the equal participation of women in political, civic, economic, social and cultural life, at the national, regional and international levels, and the eradication of all forms of the discrimination on grounds of sex are priority objectives of the international community. Gender Based Violence and all forms of sexual harassment and exploitation, including those resulting from cultural prejudice and international trafficking, are incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person, and must be eliminated. The World Conference on Human Rights urges governments, institutions, intergovernmental and Non-governmental Organizations to intensify their efforts for the protection and promotion of human rights of women and the girl-child.

Despite commitments to such declarations, it took the Kenyan government time to take action, meaning that for years, women, whether rural or urban, remained marginalized and disadvantaged with no legal reprieve. The most important first step towards the effective protection of women's rights is to recognize their violations. In 1998 the government tabled the Draft National Policy on Gender and Development, which was subsequently approved to provide a framework for domesticating the international instruments into the reality of the domestic context. The policy outlined strategies for removing gender inequalities and analyzed the social, cultural, economic and political factors that were influencing control over and access to development resources.¹³⁸

Through the National Gender and Development Policy, the Government of Kenya recognized that development policies did not affect men and women uniformly and was determined to address any existing imbalances through policy formulation and implementation. Nonetheless, it was recognized that women did not constitute a homogenous group. Some categories were often deprived of their basic rights (rural and refugee women, for example) and others were particularly susceptible to human rights violence (for example, imprisoned women and prostitutes), but still others are often more advantaged than most men.

¹³⁸ Kenya, women's bureau, (2000). Strategic plan for accelerating implementation of the Beijing platform for action. National perspective (2001-2006). prepared by women's bureau, Nairobi,

3.3 Women political organization in Kenya

Women's movement and organizations presents the historical journey of Kenyan women towards leadership and fair representation in social-economic and political sphere. The movements have a humble beginning from self-help groups during pre-independent period. The landmark was the formation of Maendeleo ya Wanawake (MYWO) organization in 1952, which is still a powerful grassroots' women's organization across the country. In the following years, women's movements in Kenya expanded and specifically focused on enhancing women's participation in leadership in appointive and elective bodies. Of great concern was the creation of institutional frameworks for mainstreaming gender through policies and legislation and ensuring the issues were taken on board the new constitution that was being negotiated from 1992-2010.

Kenyan women have been at the forefront in championing the discourse and strategies that support women's rights and gender equality—reinforced ostensibly by the hosting of the 3rd World Conference of Women in Nairobi in 1985. Sadly, this pioneer spirit has not only failed in achieving effective political participation or the taking up of leadership positions in Kenya itself, but women have also only served to nurture and observe the growth and success of women's movements in neighbouring Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania which now lead global statistics on women's representation in elective politics at 56.3, 31 and 30 per cent, respectively.¹³⁹

Globally, strong women's movements play a critical role in creating political space for female participation in politics and in supporting engendered social change. The women's movement also remains the best means of giving women visibility and voice. The Kenya women's movement has played a key role as a change agent in respect to the advancement of women's rights, gender equality, social justice and engendering

¹³⁹ Kassilly, B. J. N & Onkware, K. (2010). *Struggles and Success in Engendering the African Public Sphere: Kenyan Women in Politics*, Kenya Scholars and Studies Association (KESSA), Kenya Studies Review. 74.

governance in general. However, its impact has varied over time and in different contexts.

The period prior to 1992 was one of total co-optation and silencing of women's political voices by the Kenyan state that was intolerant of civil society organizing, unless such a group condoned and promoted the oppressive political status quo. Capacity to organize and engage politically was thus lacking, the only three national women's organizations functioning at the time namely, Maendeleo ya Wanawake (MYWO), National Council of Women of Kenya (NCWK) and the Nairobi Business and Professional Women's Organization (NBPWO)- operated strictly on government's terms. They had to be non-political and non-partisan in all their actions and deeds and had to limit their women's agenda strictly to social welfare, promoting the role of women as home makers and mobilizing and organizing women at grassroots level into women's groups to support agendas of male political elites.¹⁴⁰

Between 1963 to 1992, there was little change in women's status and State support for women's empowerment initiatives was minimal, at best. The government co-opted or controlled women's organizations. For instance, there was merger of MYWO with the ruling and only political party-KANU in 1987.

The period since 1992 has been dubbed the "Second Liberation" political phase for Kenya, as it marked the return to political pluralism in the country and the beginning of the opening up of political space for exercising basic and universally accepted democratic freedoms¹⁴¹. The opening up of political space facilitated women's political engagement/activism and created a pathway for revitalization of the women's movement, as manifested in the emergence and mushrooming of new women's NGOs, with radical feminist agendas for transformative change in gender power relations. New and old women leaderships and perspectives converged to strategically utilize this political

¹⁴⁰ Nzomo, M., (2013). *Women in Political Leadership in Kenya: Access, Agenda Setting and Accountability*, Institute of Diplomacy and International Studies University of Nairobi, Heinrich Boll Stiftung, East and Horn of Africa, P. 3.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. p. 5.

moment and to develop a women specific- democratic agenda with specific Action Plans and targets.

The journey formerly began in February 1992 when women were brought together by the National Council of Women of Kenya and Africa Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) for a National Women's Convention. It was the year of elections and women felt that this was the year of reckoning. They needed to organize themselves. The agenda was how to access political power. Women declared the parties of their choice; they said time had come for women to be involved in politics.¹⁴²

The Convention that brought over 2,000 Kenya women representatives from across the whole country demanded that the democratization be engendered; an overhaul of legal policy framework, to remove all forms of discrimination against women's access to decision-making positions, employment, politics and other sectors. Consequently, women's representatives put aside their differences and united around the motto: "Unity in Diversity for Women's empowerment", as a strategy for effective collective action towards lobbying the State to facilitate the engendering process.

The next twenty years saw a focused Women's Movement mobilised around key issues and building a network of many different organizations and retaining the spirit of the 1992 National Convention in many ways.

The major organizations among the Women's Movement included, The Federation of Women Lawyers, (FIDA- Kenya), established in 1985, to facilitate women's legal rights, education and engage in public interest litigation to challenge discrimination and legal bias against women e.g. , in July 2011, FIDA-K together with several other women NGOs, went to court to challenge and uphold as unconstitutional the appointment of

¹⁴² Kabira, M. , *The Historical Journey of Women's Leadership in Kenya*, Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies (JETERAPS) 3(6): 842-849 © Scholarlink Research Institute Journals, 2012 (ISSN: 2141-6990)

judges to the Supreme Court, due to the failure by the appointing authority to comply with the “no more than two thirds of either gender principle” of AA, as provided in the Kenyan Constitution.¹⁴³

The Association of African Women for Research and Development, (AAWORD)-Kenya formed in 1989, as a chapter of the Continental AAWORD), that was instrumental in facilitating the development of feminist research and analysis to guide policy and action. The League of Kenya Women Voters (LWVK) formed in 1992 to facilitate women’s access to political power through voter education. The National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW), formed in 1992 to facilitate Capacity building training of women candidates and election monitoring. The Kenya Woman’s Political Caucus (KWPC) formed in April 1997 and Women’s Political Alliance of Kenya (WPAK) to strengthen mechanisms for collaboration, mobilization and collective action among women’s organizations. A significant agenda setting contribution by the Caucus was the launching of the Women's Political Manifesto for the 2002 General Elections, which defined women’s own platform for political participation, and served as a women’s agenda accountability tool for political aspirants and political parties.¹⁴⁴

The Women’s Shadow Parliament – Kenya (WSP-K) that focused on engendering parliamentary standing orders and other House Rules, sponsoring women friendly and gender related Bills; establishing a parliamentary gender desk and developing gender materials for engendering parliamentary debates motions tabled in parliament. The Collaborative Centre for Gender and Development (CCGD) instrumental in engendering the national budgets. The Association of Media Women of Kenya (AMWK), for engendering the Media and giving women leader’s voice and media visibility. The Coalition on Violence Against Women – Kenya, COVAW (K), formed in 1995, an

¹⁴³ Nzomo, M., (2013). *Women in Political Leadership in Kenya: Access, Agenda Setting and Accountability*, Institute of Diplomacy and International Studies University of Nairobi, Heinrich Boll Stiftung, East and Horn of Africa, P. 3.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 4

advocacy against women and gender based violence, the right to self-defense and the right to State protection for women. The 2012 National Women's Charter- an access, agenda setting and accountability tool for realizing woman's constitutional gains, The National Committee on the status of women (NCSW), Women's voters' league, Mothers in Action ,National Committee for the Advancement of Women among others and The Center for Multi-Party Democracy (CMD), a woman's programme to facilitate in engendering political parties.¹⁴⁵

The objectives of these organizations were relatively similar: to mobilize and create solidarity with all women to enable them to discuss common issues of concern; build Kenya women's solidarity and common purpose in the democratization process; provide both moral and financial support to women candidates in the next and future elections; advocate, create awareness and spearhead activities aimed at eliminating all forms of violence against women; and agitate for the improvement of the status of women in all spheres, political, social and economic. They held meetings, workshops and seminars in various places to tackle issues affecting women.¹⁴⁶

Their activities culminated in the National Women's Convention on the 22nd of February 1992, a landmark in the history of women's struggle. The convention formulated a plan of action to establish candidate support, funds and training programmes for women from all levels in the civic elections; hold conventions at all levels and finally to establish dialogue between women groups and political parties to sensitize them on women's needs.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Mwangi, S. (2008). *Gender Policy in Kenya and the Impact on Women's Involvement in Politics*, in Nena Thundu, Anna Marie Kiaga and Susan Mwangi (eds), *Assessing Gender Policies in the East African Region*. DPMF, Nairobi, p.101.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, p.101.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p.102.

It is, perhaps this unity of purpose that culminated in the historic electoral record of six women winning parliamentary seats in the 1992 General Elections. Similarly, this collective women choice for the first time persuaded the Kenyan society that any form of violence against women was a gross violation of the basic human rights. Similarly, it was perhaps the formation in 1998 of one coordinating network for women NGOs, Women Political Caucus-to serve as a uniting factor that contributed to the temporary strengthening of the organization and delivery capacity of the women's movement.

Many years of hard campaign and activism by Kenyan women for equal participation in political process was dampened when President Daniel arap Moi failed to appoint a woman to a full ministerial post in his new 25-member cabinet. Even the post of Minister for Women and Youth Affairs went to a man. Mwerere wa Mwachai, the only woman to win a seat on the ruling Kenya African National Union (KANU) ticket at the December 29 1997 polls became an assistant minister in the same ministry. The absence of a woman minister meant that no woman sat in the governments' cabinet, since only full ministers were accorded that privilege.¹⁴⁸

Kenyan women failed to make an impact during the polls and out of 50 contestants, only four women made it to parliament. Beth Mugo, one of the successful legislators, was incensed and commented, "from the composition of parliament, it looks as if there are no women in the country. Kenyan women are respected in the international arena and it is very embarrassing that that they are hardly represented in their own parliament".¹⁴⁹

Some blamed the 26 political parties whose structures seemed to impede women's participation in politics. "The few women who managed to go through the election process lacked adequate support by their parties and on the other hand, they were intimidated and subjected to violence".¹⁵⁰ Political equity, also blamed the dismissal of

¹⁴⁸ Achieng, J.,(1998). *Kenyan Politics Leave Women More Marginalized*, Inter Press Third World News Agency, (IPS), Nairobi, PACH article 25818. P. 3.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid p. 5.

¹⁵⁰ Op.cit , p. 103.

performance of women on the lack of political sensitization among women to vote for more women representatives. Others thought women's performance was undermined by poll irregularities, for instance, Betty Tett, who lost in a Nairobi constituency.¹⁵¹

Some analysts predicted that the small number of women in parliament meant that pressing issues pertaining to women's rights could be delayed and the Beijing Platform for Action would never be implemented by a male-dominated government, since it acted as a pointer to equality between men and women. Given that as at 1998 no law explicitly defined the rights and status of women in Kenya, this performance was widely blamed on the poor representation of women in parliament to articulate such rights. To correct the disparity, Beth Mugo appealed to Kenya's major political parties to nominate only women to parliament to give a "semblance" of "gender equality". Under Kenya's constitution, the major parties—KANU, the Democratic Party (DP), Forum for Restoration of Democracy (FORD-KENYA) and the newly registered SAFINA party—would share out 12 slots for nominations. Out of the 12, the ruling KANU would take half of the seats.¹⁵²

Despite women's involvement in all political parties in Kenya, their political performance remained dismissal. In the 1997 elections, they comprised of only 5.7 percent of electoral candidates and 3.6 percent of the national assembly. Though the number of elected women MPs went down in 1997, there was an increase in women running for political office with greater political visibility, two of them vying for the presidency, with one becoming a major presidential contender. But according to the Human Development Report of Kenya 2001, the 1997 elections made Kenya one of the countries with the lowest level of achievement in gender equality and women's empowerment. The number of elected women MPs rose to nine in 2002. With eight of them winning under the widely

¹⁵¹ Mwangi, S. (2008). *Gender Policy in Kenya and the Impact on Women's Involvement in Politics*, in Nena Thundu, Anna Marie Kiaga and Susan Mwangi (eds), *Assessing Gender Policies in the East African Region*. DPMF, Nairobi, p.101.

¹⁵² Achieng, J., (1998). Kenyan Politics Leave Women More Marginalized, Inter Press Third World News Agency, (IPS), Nairobi, PACH article 25818. P. 4.

popular party (NARC) ticket, certainly contributed to the relatively higher number of elected women MPs than earlier predicted.

3.3.1 Grassroot women organizations in Nyamira

It is important to note that, the framework of the operation of most of the women's organizations starts from the grassroot level up to the national level. The Women Organizations discussed above have their branch offices in the grassroot to mobilize the grassroot women to create solidarity with all the women for the common purpose of creating gender awareness and spearheading activities aimed at the elimination of all forms of discrimination on grassroot women and agitate for the improvement of their status in all spheres of life.

Organizations that have specifically worked to promote the women agenda in Nyamira include, Stema Women Development Group (SWDG) which is one of the grassroots women organization committed to the creation of a society that is free from all forms of discrimination against women in Nyamira. SWDG is connected with other like-minded players to foster a just society that is free from all forms of discrimination against women. SWDG orients its programmes towards social welfare of all the women and provides a prominent voice for grassroots women.¹⁵³

Another women advocacy agency that works in Nyamira is the Foundation of Women's Rights in Kenya. The Foundation has been implementing projects both in Nyamira and Kisii County, with the support from USAID aimed at advancing the grassroots women's agenda in the national reform processes. The foundation's aim is to mainstream women's rights in governance and political processes by building the capacity of grassroots women to engage in the national reform processes particularly the constitutional reform process and the truth justice and reconciliation process, to engage their political leaders to

¹⁵³ African Woman and Child Feature Service, *The Status of the Kenyan Woman*, issue no 37, June 2013, AWC, Nairobi.

enhance accountability and to lobby and advocate for the women's agenda in all governance processes. The Foundation of Women's Rights in Kenya's goal is to strengthen the role of grassroots women in the governance process by creating opportunities for engagement between grassroots women's group, political leaders, leaders at the county level, constitutional commissions, among other stakeholders. This Foundation has enabled women in Nyamira to come together to engage in advocacy at the local level, network and find avenues to directly participate in decision making, planning, and implementation of issues that affect them. This local based organizations in liaison with the national organizations through the local branch offices have been in the fore front in spearheading the gender agenda in Nyamira County.¹⁵⁴

3.4 Conclusion

Advocacy agents have indeed played a very critical role in the promotion of women participation in politics. Such agents as discussed carry out political education, mobilization and representation of diverse interests to both women and other stakeholders. The women organizations present an alternative avenue for women to demand their inclusion in the political process directly from the ruling elites. Involvement of women in politics both at the national and the grassroots level is determined by women's organizations at various levels. The women's capabilities are influenced by the organizations. A critical look at the role such advocacy agents have played in promoting women participation leads one to rightfully conclude that enhanced women's participation in parliamentary politics in Kenya is a direct function of the extent to which such agents and women's organizations promote women candidates. Indeed there is a clear link between the women's involvement in women organizations and their participation in politics at the parliamentary level. A number of such organizations have been highlighted, their aims and the gains they have been able to make over time.

¹⁵⁴ African Woman and Child Feature Service, *The Status of the Kenyan Woman*, issue no 37, June 2013, AWC, Nairobi.

CHAPTER FOUR
IMPEDIMENTS TO WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN PARLIAMENTARY
ELECTIVE POLITICS IN NYAMIRA COUNTY

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the study findings. The main objective of the study was to find out the challenges that have hindered women’s political participation in elective parliamentary politics in Kenya from the lens of Nyamira County. The respondents were asked to respond to a set of open ended questions, which elicited various answers that were grouped thematically as; traditional attitudes and stereotyping, low education levels, lack of women empowerment, religious factors and lack of political will.

4.1 Impediments to women participation in elective parliamentary politics in Nyamira County

Since independence women have been under-represented in the political arena in Nyamira County, such under-representation has been fuelled by certain social-cultural, economic and political factors discussed below.

4.1.1 Social-cultural impediments

Findings of this study point to the fact that there are certain traditions (beliefs) and modern misconceptions, which have been acting as obstacles to women’s involvement in political leadership. Attitudinal, cultural and structural impediments have been ostracizing women especially in their quest for upward political mobility. These impediments have been emanating out of the community’s cultural background, which has been patriarchal in nature and hence encompass numerous gender stereotypes. These would also explain why, despite the electorate in Kenya being more female than male, women from Nyamira have not elected one of their own to parliament to reflect the dominance.

The respondents suggested that women were sidelined from elective political posts because of lack of a level playing ground between men and women. Affirmative action was out-rightly shunned save for the special post of the woman representative which men are not allowed to contest for. A few of the respondents however, said that men and women were given equal chances to vie for political posts because there was no law barring women from politics and all were free to assert their political ambitions.

Nevertheless, study findings strongly reveal the existence of certain obstacles to women's involvement in political leadership. Qualitative data shows that women were reluctant to join active politics for the fear of being ridiculed, abused and intimidated by men whom have been taking women as inferior. Thus, women felt insecure during political campaigns because they feared being molested and even ambushed and raped by supporters of their counterparts. As a result, potential women candidates withdrew from contesting for elective politics for fear of political molestation, threats and violence which have been a characteristic of Kenyan political scenario. Pertinent to note is the psychological impact politics has had on women. Women who were harassed withdrew from competitive politics and never made a comeback as long as their experiences were still fresh in their minds. Potential women candidates felt discouraged by the political style of their male counterparts who concentrated on abusing women politicians and labeled them as people who could not lead and whose place is in the kitchen.

Asked how he would judge the comments made by men about women aspirants in the county, one key informant said;

Most men have been having and still have a low opinion on women here; they still live in the patriarchal system that perceives women as secondary citizens whose place is only in the home and not in the public sphere. They often ask questions which lack merit, such as one's marital status and family affairs, questions which lack social balance.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ Oral interview, John Bikondo Onchana, March 20th 2014

Several misconceptions in the general populace were identified as obstacles to the involvement of women in politics. Respondents asserted that men harboured the belief that women were a weaker sex and could not lead and were created to be ruled by men. This assertion placed women at a disadvantaged position while contesting for political posts. Other respondents argued that many people still consider women as ignorant and objects of marriage that should be owned and controlled by men.

To assess the influence of patriarchal structure of society especially interns of the values attached to women in political leadership in Nyamira County, the respondents were asked to generalize as either favourable or unfavourable the comments that were made about women aspirants for political positions in the county. The majority of the respondents especially men did not support a female candidate for a political office and thus made unfavourable comments. The unfavourable statements were generally grounded in the patriarchal orientation of control and power structure. Some said that women were practically unfit for parliamentary positions. Others said that women were easily influenced by their husbands and that women were not educated enough and they were jealous and easily driven by emotions in their judgments. Women were weak and that they could not be trusted for critical matters.

Confirming the view that the classical patriarchal gender relations were still strongly embedded in the minds and lives of the people of Nyamira County some women interviewed were satisfied with their subordinate position. Some women have been socialized to contend the patriarchal structure that sentences them to subordination. One key male informant said;

Women have been the source of every undoing because they have little trust on the leadership abilities of their own gender; they prefer to vote for men for they associate masculinity with leadership qualities. They are

part of the perpetuation of the male chauvinism in politics, given the fact that they form the majority of voters”.¹⁵⁶

Some respondents metaphorically compared the relationship between men and women with the relationship between the head and the neck (men as the head and women as the neck). Thus, women as the neck were not supposed to overtake the men (head). Many respondents were tracing these assertions to the biblical teachings. This analogy subjected women to a lesser position compared to men. In effect women succumbed to male domination and hence derive consolation from such misconception that women were made to be contented with a lower social class as compared to men. Asked, what were the main factors that have hindered women from effectively participating in politics in Nyamira, one respondent asserted,

We still live in a patriarchal society where women are hardly regarded as fit for leadership positions and therefore there is need to engage in campaigns to sensitize voters to embrace women as leaders and a lot of lobbying for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women to help them realize their full potential as leaders.¹⁵⁷

To be able to sell political ideas and convince the electorate, time is an important factor. However, respondents argued that women lacked enough time for campaigning due to household chores and family commitments.

Most women were totally controlled by men (their spouses) and by the family as daughters and daughters-in-law, as you know in Kisii community marriage is a highly respected institution. Many husbands were hindrances to the success of their wives in politics because they did not give them freedom to move and meet people at convenient times and places for fear that their wives will become unfaithful. While men coerced their wives and friends to vote for them, women were disadvantaged because they could not force their spouses and friends to vote for them. In many instances friends discouraged such women's husbands from

¹⁵⁶ Oral interview, Rose Moraa, kebirigo, March 27th 2014.

¹⁵⁷ Oral interview, Vane Moraa, 21st March 2014

allowing their wives to join politics and warned them that they will lose the wives if they joined politics.¹⁵⁸

Women's dual roles in work and the family put them at a disadvantage in running for political office. As long as women hold the primary responsibility of family care, it is difficult for them to meet the time and energy requirements of political office.

Agreeing that women were not given time by their spouses to move around to meet their possible voters to explain their agenda, Mochibi states;

Most women here lost during the elections mainly because they were not visible, there was need to provide women aspirants with an opportunity to meet with their voters and present their agenda. In this way, women aspirants would have been in a better position to fight it out with the male candidates.¹⁵⁹

Supporting the argument, that woman were not given enough time by their spouses to carry political campaigns, Christine argued;

Women in this constituency, in Kenya at large and many other countries have been oppressed through retrogressive cultural practices. Some cultures did not allow women to talk in public forums and in important meetings. How do you expect women to be involved in leadership if you do not give them a chance to try?

She continued,

I urge the government and their agents, political parties, CBOs and media to sensitize the public through continuous civic education on the need to change their attitudes towards women who come out to vie for political positions; female leadership and women participation at all levels.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Oral interview, Peter Miranyi, Magombo market, 26th March 2014.

¹⁵⁹ Oral interview, Boaz Mong'are, Nyabite, 27th March 2014.

¹⁶⁰ Oral interview Christine Nyabwari, Nyamira, 27th March 2014.

4.1.2 Educational impediments

Education is important in making choices and informed decisions. With the complexity of political and social issues, education remains a key illuminator to a proper understanding of such issues. All the respondents agreed that the level of women's education was quite low and that the low level of education among women hindered them from vying for elective political office. With the majority of the voting population rated as being lowly educated and uneducated, such electorate could be easily cheated and lured by the 'well' educated males to vote for them and reject their very own. Agreeing that education levels for women in Nyamira were generally low and that most women were ignorant of the political process, one respondent was quick to give suggestions on what ought to have been done to reverse the situation;

There was need to review the education curriculum both for primary and secondary schools to sensitize learners on the importance of women leadership and participation in society for sustainable development.¹⁶¹

Other respondents were of the view that aggressive civic education by various non-governmental organizations should be carried out to convince the women to participate in elections as their democratic right in the voting exercise and elect one of their own into political office.

4.1.3 Economic impediments

Economic disparities, which favour men, were also identified as inhibiting factors. The imbalance between the extensive work women do and the limited rewards, meant poverty for women, thus, they could not influence the masses for political clout. Respondents argued that political campaigns were really very expensive, and only the rich are able to afford them. Mokuu suggested,

Politics in this country has been and still is very expensive; this affects women from venturing into the political process since most of them are

¹⁶¹ Oral interview, Rizipah Nyabuti, Ting'a ,28th, March 2014.

poor, how could have women gotten to parliament if they did not have the money to oil their campaign machinery?¹⁶²

Respondents asserted that women have been locked out because of their economic status.

In a political culture where rigging and buying of votes is the order of the day, (bribery) women have always found themselves at a disadvantaged situation. Men have the money while women do not have.¹⁶³

For this situation, key respondents blamed the property ownership structure in the society for women's inability to have access to "money" to do competitive politics under the prevailing circumstances.

Responding to whether women and men have been having equal chances of getting elected into parliament, a number of respondents argued that not even men had equal chances because what matters is what they give the people during the campaigns in form of handouts. One respondent said,

oyogotosera buya nere tokobekera (that whoever gives us more money during the campaigns will get our votes ,man or woman).¹⁶⁴

Thus, campaign financing is one of the areas where Kenyan women were at a structural disadvantage, relative to men. Political campaigns are notoriously expensive and Kenyan women, who as a group have lower incomes than men and fewer economic resources, were not likely to have the financial resources necessary to mount expensive political campaigns.

¹⁶² Oral interview, Mokua , Nyaikuro ,28th March 2014.

¹⁶³ Focused group discussion Oral interview, Kebirigo Market,30th March 2014.

¹⁶⁴ Oral interview, Charity, Bonyunyu,21st March 2014.

Generally, therefore, politics in Nyamira county and Kenya in general has been diluted by wealth without which one cannot go far. This is one barrier to women's participation that must be overcome. Due to poverty, women have been vulnerable and have been lured with petty bribes to vote for the most financially generous contestants. One respondent who had one time contested for the position of a councilor (defunct in the new constitution) observed;

For a very long time women have been bribed by simple things like lesos, a packet of maize flour and worse still salt. You cannot blame this woman because she is the one who carries the burden of the family.¹⁶⁵

While agreeing that women lacked the financial muscle to run political campaigns, some respondents were of the opinion that winning an election may not entirely depend on the resource power, but some policies and networking with the like minded groups.

4.1.4 Political parties

As noted earlier, electoral politics in Gusiiland since independence have been dominated by the Kenya African National Union (KANU) until 2002 when Ford People came into the scene and Orange Democratic Movement in 2007, other parties such as Ford Kenya, Democratic Party of Kenya and Social Democratic party have also campaigned in Gusiiland occasionally capturing one or two parliamentary seats.

Being successful in politics requires, among other things having the support of party leaders. If these leaders do not encourage women to run for office, there is little likelihood of women's success as politicians. In Nyamira just like in other most Kenyan communities' women have been regarded as belonging to the kitchen. This kind of socialization has been making it hard for many men to fathom the idea that they could share the same platform with a woman.

¹⁶⁵ Oral interview, Marigwa, Kebirigo market, 22nd March 2014.

These parties have always been run by a number of 'big' men who not only could never imagine being led by a woman but, often based their political clout on the mobilization of women groups to their own support.

The non-democratization of these political parties' and lack of practical policies to address gender issues was identified as one of the factors that have inhibited women's upward mobility in political leadership.

Political parties reforms have ensured that half of all nominations by political parties be given to women, but there is no political will to implement them as seen in the nominations of MPs in the past general elections. The law may be there, but there is no clause to ensure implementation or penalties for failure to do so.

All the political parties that had campaigned in Nyamira were led and dominated by males at the county level. The misconception that men have on women leadership abilities is manifested in these party leaders who prefer men to hold key party positions, and prefer to nominate male candidates whom they believe will be in a position to compete 'effectively' with the other party candidates. They have had little trust or no trust at all on the abilities of women. Thus, political parties and their leadership styles were found to have hindered women's active involvement in competitive politics in Nyamira.

One male key informant and a two time parliamentary contestant from north Mugirango constituency, while disputing the issue of male patronage argued that;

Women have gained a lot in the new constitution especially on land ownership and inheritance rights besides mandatory leadership slots. I urge women to work tirelessly for what they want because nothing can be achieved without hard work.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Oral interview, Jonh Bikondo, Nyaramba 22nd March 2014.

4.1.5 Religion

Respondents asserted that the position of many churches is that a member should not be involved in politics because it is a game full of corruption and greediness, which is seen as a sinful act. Many respondents asserted that politics is a dirty game, thus in fear of excommunication from the church many women chose not to go into politics. This was aggravated by a religious misconception that since women were not chosen as apostles in the bible, then Jesus implied that they were not to be leaders. Some respondents were quick to quote bible verses which suggest that women should be submissive to their husbands and not compete with them.

4.1.5 Gender based violence

A culture of electoral violence that tends to be harsher towards female than male candidates was another reason for fewer women in politics in Nyamira. Gender-based violence, meaning any sexual psychological or physical harm or suffering to women including threats of such acts in elections, was also identified as one of the constraints to women's participation in politics in Nyamira. Some of the women who had sought elective posts were insulted because they were single while others were told they could not be leaders since leadership was for men. The language used was extremely derogatory to the extent that some respondents said they will never seek such positions again.

Aware that there were fewer women in parliamentary politics in Nyamira County than men, all the members of a focused group discussion agreed that, gender-based violence has historically and consistently been meted out to women by the community, media and male leaders who seek to discredit women candidates. One female member of the group, who contested for the west Mugirango parliamentary seat in 2007 general elections and lost, argued that;

Many women do not offer their candidature for political positions for fear of intimidation, insults and physical violence, during the 2007 campaigns, people could ask me all sorts of irrelevant questions-about my husband, others thought I was out for a romantic joyride and made

bad comments about me, for them moving around with fellow politicians majority whom are men, they thought I was 'loose'.¹⁶⁷

Asked what ought to have been done to reverse the dismal performance of women in parliamentary leadership in Nyamira county, respondents gave several suggestions. Some respondents asserted that there was need to empower women by educating them about their rights. This could have been done with a view of liberating them from the unnecessary controls from their husbands, in particular and the family in general. Others suggested that there was need for the government, the church, NGO^S and any interested party to conduct civic education geared towards enlightening women on their political obligation and rights. Most importantly, such civic education could have attempted to show women that they had the ability to lead just like the men. Women, therefore, could have been encouraged to respect and support their own in the endeavour for leadership positions.

Others felt that if the law could have been applied indiscriminately in dealing with political violence cases the situation could have been better. This could have assured women of their political security during and after political campaigns. Interviewees applauded the affirmative action provision in the constitution and especially the creation of the post of the county women representative as this will give women an opportunity to prove their capacity in leadership. Some respondents asserted that men should be in the fore-front in the implementation of the one third gender provision in the constitution. Political equality between men and women should not be treated as a women's issue. Attention should be given to men and women and their roles, responsibilities, rights, priorities, needs and potentials.

Key informants felt that a strong focus on men was essential to be able to identify and tackle these systematic causes of political inequality between women and men. Experience has shown that efforts to redress the problems facing women in isolation of

¹⁶⁷ Oral interview ,Gladys Mwebi, Kebirigo, March 28th 2014.

men can result to a backlash. Thus, there is every need to carry men along through the process of political change or any other change. Failure to involve men in the process of change may slow down the process or lead to sabotage from them.

4.2 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the constraints that have hindered women in Nyamira County, from active and effective participation in parliamentary politics. Due to these factors; women have not been able to set the political rules of representation and inclusion in reflection of their specific experience and vision. Thus, male political ideology has continued to define the standards of evaluation of women's political performance and participation.

Just like other African countries and developing countries, Kenya is making strides in promotion of gender sensitive and gender responsive legislations covering key national development sectors like education, industry, employment and political participation. However, given the fact that Kenyan communities and the Gusii in particular have peculiar cultures, practices and customs, the legislations, policies and frameworks can only achieve certain objectives gradually and little can be done to overhaul the set up overnight.

Women, to succeed in competitive politics, must articulate, challenge and seek to influence the social, political and economic environment for the benefit of all women. To improve their electoral performance and political participation, they must consistently participate in political and leadership engagements, and frequently attend social and political gathering where political information is shared. Women must read political literature and media articles extensively, develop fundraising skills, start campaign in sufficient time, consistently participate in the affairs of political parties and lobby within such parties for inclusion. Women in Nyamira must lobby to attain gender equity and policy framework, establish broad networks partnerships and alliances with other women in Kenya and support structures

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

5.1 Conclusion

The study sought to find out the challenges that have hindered women participation in parliamentary elections in Nyamira County between 1992 and 2013. The study adopted the application of qualitative method of data collection. Both secondary and primary sources of data were used. Secondary sources, such as books, articles in journals and reports were used. Primary information was collected using researcher designed questionnaires and in depth interviews with the respondents. The study used three methods of sampling techniques; stratified, purposive and snowball sampling techniques to identify the respondents. The study was based on three hypotheses. The first was that traditional socio-cultural factors determined the participation of women in competitive elective politics. It was assumed that the patriarchal nature of most African societies influenced women participation in parliamentary politics in Nyamira. Such cultural attitudes influenced the decisions that people made whether to support a female candidate or determined if a female come out and contest. The objective associated with this hypothesis was to assess the implication of gender relations, norms, values, ideologies and practices of the people of Nyamira County on women participation in elective politics. In regard to this hypothesis and objective the study has shown that there were certain traditions (beliefs) and misconceptions, which acted as obstacles to women's involvement in political leadership. Attitudinal, cultural and structural impediments which emanated out of the community's cultural background that was patriarchal in nature and thus encompassed numerous gender stereotypes which were found to impede women upward mobility in politics in Nyamira.

The second hypothesis was that education levels influenced the degree of women's participation in competitive elective politics. The assumption was that women lacked the prerequisite education to contest for parliamentary posts. The objective in line with this hypothesis was to assess the influence of education on the participation of women in elective political process in Nyamira County. The study findings have shown that though

women possess the requisite qualifications to contest for parliamentary politics, their numbers were limited and the electorate did not have a wide choice. The findings also indicate that the majority of the voting population especially women was lowly educated or uneducated; such electorates were easily cheated and lured by the ‘well’ educated males to vote for them and rejected their very own.

The third hypothesis was that economic factors determined women’s participation in competitive elective politics in Nyamira County. The assumption was that women lacked the financial requirements to meet the electoral processes. The corresponding hypothesis was to assess the effect of income on women participation in elective politics in Nyamira County. The study findings show an indispensable and tangible relationship between income and how women participated in competitive elective politics. The study found out that politics was very expensive and a huge amount of money was required to carry out campaigns and bribe the voters. This was found to have been a major hindrance to women who ventured into the political process since most of them were poor. Other factors, such as political parties, gender based violence and religion, were also found to have been impediments to women success in parliamentary politics in Nyamira.

The study was guided by two theories; the feminist theory and the theory of change and continuity. The study findings concur with both theories. The feminist theory recognizes the pervasive influence of gender divisions on social life and tries to understand women’s oppression and the structures in society that espouse oppression and subordination. The study found out that such patriarchal attitudes played a major role in impeding women progress in parliamentary politics. The findings also support Merton’s theory of change and continuity that man and society are constantly changing. People’s attitudes change as situations change. This can be seen in this study as some people over time changed their minds and are willing to support female contestants in elections at some point, this is reflected in the increase of the number of women and the changing numbers in different elections.

The study found out that, despite the fact that women in Kenya were slightly more than half (51%) of the population, great disparities existed between women and men in governance. Women were continuously over the years sidelined in politics and in key positions since independence. The patriarchal society in which they operated ensured male domination of political public life. Consequently, women have not had equal opportunities to contribute to society, especially in decision making or leadership. Thus, women were under-represented in high offices of state and positions of decision-making in government. Their marginalization in governance and political positions contributed to the denial of women's rights, their unequal access to resources and to the disempowerment of women, leading to inequitable participation in the development process.

Women have made some progress especially since 1992, in regard to the question of gender equity and political participation. Certainly there is a higher level of awareness of gender issues than was the case some twenty years ago. Certainly there are more gender sensitive women and men than there were back then. It could even be argued that women's presence in the decision-making bodies has significantly improved. But one would hasten to add that such achievements have been but a drop in the ocean compared with the enormous efforts made by women as individuals and in groups during the last two decades to empower themselves and to sensitize both women and men of the merits of gender equity.

The participation of women in competitive politics was highly influenced by the level of their economic ability, which was be traced to the systematic discrimination of women from the main economic system by the colonial government and the independent governments. The kind of professions women were being encouraged to take since the colonial period put them into a disadvantaged position in terms of income and exposure. The kind of politics practiced in Kenya involved huge sums of money. This put the women who aspired to be politicians, in a disadvantaged position compared to their male counterparts. This situation called for policies geared towards the elimination of the

involvement of money in political campaigns. This would have made it possible for women to compete with men on equal footing.

Various systems of customary laws, religious ideologies and cultural stereotyping have been used to treat women as minors, very few women were able to inherit property or had equal access to political offices and positions. Socialization and education processes reinforced this situation by raising women to believe that they were inferior to men. Several attempts have been made to bring women into the main political mainstream, but the policies in place lacked institutional framework and coordination required to effectively provide the required support. In 2010, after the passing of the new constitution it was argued that equitable representation for women could be achieved with the anchoring of gender equity and equality principles in the constitution. Kenya was also a signatory to some important international instruments, which declared the equality between sexes and fundamental human rights. Kenya ratified some of them as earlier indicated. However, this was not the case as it was indicated in the March 2013 elections. Moreover, most women were ignorant of the existence of laws that recognized their rights and could be invoked for their protection.

Indeed, the Kenyan government had put in place a strong foundation for the improvement of status of women and eventual attainment of gender equality. This positive achievement was as a result of various policies and legislation adopted or enacted during the last ten years in particular from 2002 culminating to the promulgation of the new constitution in 2010. Thus, it could be summarized that there was commitment from all the arms of the government for the advancement of women through policies framework.

However, despite the policies and legislations in place, there were many challenges that inhibited their implementations. These challenges included high level of poverty; weak institutional mechanisms for their implementation; negative attitude of men; inadequate human, financial and material resources; gender blind budgeting and the absence of sufficient gender disaggregated data which could be used to design plans and programmes for gender empowerment activities.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Questionnaire

Hallo, Mr. Mrs. /Hon/Dr. /Prof. My name is Maeri Jared. I am a graduate student from the University of Nairobi. I'm here to seek your views on the challenges facing women's participation in competitive elective politics in Nyamira County as part of fulfillment of the requirements for completion of my degree. Your sincere experiences and opinions are of great value to this study. The information you give me is confidential and is not intended to harm you in any way. I am likely to take about 30 minutes of your time, kindly respond to the questions freely during this interview.

Questionnaire No.....date.....Constituency name.....

Personal details

Contacts (optional) Name.....

Tel.....

Age

1. How long have you lived in Nyamira county?

Occupation income

1a) Occupation (1) Formal (2) informal (3) Business (4) Farming (5) other specify.....

2 a) Are you a registered voter?

b) If no, do you know how to go about registering as a voter?

3. If registered which national elections have the participated in?

4. Have you ever been a candidate for any elective post?

5. In case you have not been a candidate for any office, how would you rate the reasons for that?

6) (a) Have you voted for a woman candidate for any political office before?

(b) If no, kindly give the reason for your answer

(c) If yes, which factors did you consider in making that decision?

7. Are you aware that fewer women hold political position than men in this constituency?

8. In your own opinion what are the main factors that have led to this situation?

9. What in your view could have been done to increase the number of women who have held political office in Nyamira?

10. How would you rate the income level of women in this area?

11. How does the income level affect women participation in these political processes?

Education

12. How does a woman's level of education affect her chances in politics?

13. In your view have women been having equal opportunities with men in education?

15. a) What could have been done to improve women opportunities in education?

b) In your view has been education promoting or inhibiting women's participation in competitive politics in this area?

Cultural issues

16. How would you judge the comments made by women in this constituency about women political candidates?

17. What about comments made by men about women in the constituency?

18. In your own opinion, have negative attitudes towards women political candidates changed over time?

19) Why do some women still believe that politics is not for women?

20) Looking at the past elections, were women indifferent and ignorant of political negotiations and procedures? Explain your answer.

APPENDIX II: Key informant interview guide

Gender -----

Religion-----

Marital status-----

Level of education-----

Years lived in Nyamira county-----

1) Do you belong to a political party?

2) Have you ever contested for any political seat?

3) Challenges encountered (probe for attribution to income, education and cultural issues)

4) What changes if effected could have enabled women participate more as contestants

5) What about promoting their participation as voters and in the campaign.

6) General comments on economic and educational attainments of women in this area. (Relate to voting campaigns and contesting).

7) What comments people have been making on women candidates?

8) Have women held high positions in political parties? Explain your answer. How do you think this has been affecting their participation in electoral process?

9) What do you think could have been done to enable women attain higher position in political parties.

10) If women could have held parliamentary seats in the county, do you think it could have affected development in the county? Explain your answer.

11) Looking at the past elections, were women indifferent and ignorant of political negotiations and procedures?

APPENDIX III: Focused group discussion guide

1. What are the challenges that have faced women who have attempted to participate in politics in Nyamira County?
2. How these challenges could have been be addressed?
3. Are there any attitudes /Stereotypes about women, women leaders and women capability in leadership?
4. How women participation in politics could have affected development in the county?
5. What could have been done to ensure that women participated in the past elections as voters, contestants for political seats and in the campaigns?
6. Looking at the past elections, were women candidates given equal chances for nomination in political parties?