



WOMEN POLITICAL LEADERS' PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL DECISION-MAKING STRUCTURES IN TANZANIA

Makalanga, L. B.¹, Kilonzo, R. G.², and Nguyahambi, A. M.³

¹*Institute of Development Studies, University of Dodoma, P. O. Box 395, Dodoma –Tanzania.*

²*Department of Sociology and Anthropology, College of Humanities and social Sciences, University of Dodoma, P.O. Box 395, Dodoma –Tanzania.*

³*Department of Political Sciences and Public Administration, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Dodoma, P.O. Box 395, Dodoma –Tanzania.*

¹*lily.bogohe@udom.ac.tz*

ABSTRACT

Purpose: This paper envisioned examining the participation of women political leaders in the local decision-making organs in Tanzania. Specifically, the study aimed to examine the number of women represented in the study local government structures (LGSs), the motives behind women participating in the LGSs and the duration of service in the study LGSs.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The study used a cross-sectional descriptive research design. A cluster sampling technique was used to obtain the study villages and *Mitaa*. Both quantitative and qualitative research approaches with different data collection methods were used. To collect quantitative data, questionnaires were administered to 390 household heads both men and women in the study villages/*Mitaa*, while qualitative data were gathered using an interview guide, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and non-participant observation checklist. Quantitative data collected were analyzed and presented in tables and figures while the qualitative ones were thematically analyzed.

Findings: The study revealed that the number of women's participation in various local committees in the study of local government structures has increased by 50% (Dodoma City) and 30% (Bahi District). However, motives for women leaders' participation are constrained by limited continuity of tenure in the political office. Therefore, suitable interventions are recommended to address the existing capacity gaps.

Research Limitation: The study targeted to involve an equal number of men and women household heads in each study village and *Mitaa*, however in some villages it happened to have less number of women than men household heads.

Practical implication: This study recommends that more spaces should be given to women to participate in local decision-making structures and hold seats to enhance gender equality in politics.

Originality/Value: This study focuses on the gender parity framework in local politics. It brings an understanding to the various government departments, ministries responsible for women and other stakeholders regarding the opportunities available for women to participate in local politics.

Keywords: *Decision-making. local. participation. political leaders. women.*



INTRODUCTION

Participation of women in local decision-making structures has widely been stated to be useful in ensuring reasonable societies and inclusive governance necessarily required to ensure improved living standards, improved community services and equal opportunities in decision-making organs (Ihemeje, 2013:60). Globally there are different leadership spaces available to women in the local politics including the involvement in decisions that affects the needs and interests of the public ((ESCAP, 2019:2). For example in Norway, women local leaders prejudiced choices for the increase in the budget allocation for community services (Hassan & Silong, 2007:364)). In South Africa and Rwanda, indication shows that local leaders influenced changes in laws related to asserting ownership for women (Mushi, 2010:11). In Uganda and Zimbabwe, decisions of women resulted in the allocation of funds in the local committees (Stiftung & Foundation, 2016:6). In Ghana, women's decisions improved loans repayment and recovery for women (United Nations (UN), 2008:10). But in Tanzania, there is incomplete information concerning how women can work out their leadership power in local-decision making bodies for the welfare of the community (Meena, 2015:5). The emphasis in Tanzania has been to implement different strategies for women to participate in local politics (Meena, Rusimbi, & Israel, 2017:7) while disregarding how they can use the opportunities available in the local committee to bring changes in the community.

This paper examines the participation of women political leaders in local government structures with a particular focus on village/*mtaa* committee members, ward councillors and district councillors. The focus on lower levels of LGAs is premised on understanding that lower levels of LGAs are embryonic centres for decision-making (Shivji & Peter, 2003:5), hence it offers an important democratic space in the decentralized framework (Conyers, 2007:2). In the same understanding, democratic representation starts from the village/*mitaa* and ward levels, onwards to the district and national levels (PO-RALG, 2013:8). The proximity of the local government structures to the people is useful for them to access political, economic and social services (Clark and Stewart, 1998 cited in Gaventa, 2002: 30; Larson & Ribot, 2004: 5; Samoff, 1989: 2). This is attained through the involvement of either community members in local meetings or decisions made by political representatives in the local committees who are straight selected by direct election from their local constituencies. Consequently, the paper gives light on the ways women can exercise their leadership power through local government structures. The indicators of women's participation in local politics are measured by examining their number in the local committee, their motives to hold positions and their duration of service in local government structures.

THEORIES UNDERPINNING THE STUDY

Liberal Feminist Theory

This paper was guided by Liberal Feminist Theory (LFT). The theory provides a suitable framework for analyzing the participation of women political leaders in local decision-making organs. The theory is useful because it brings an understanding of women's participation in local government structure as a tool for achieving gender equality in local politics (see Meena, 2015:3;

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Meena, Rusimbi, & Israel, 2017:13). According to Bimer and Mihrete, (2018: 60) in their study on Liberal feminism: *Assessing its compatibility and applicability in Ethiopia context*, showed that gender equality is enhanced through the implementation of the affirmative action policy. Their study insisted on the government applying the policy in political, social and economic opportunities to bridge the gender gap that exists in society. The greatest feature of capitalizing on LFT is the role of the government in providing equal rights to everyone to participate in political sphere especially in local politics and provide changes to barriers that hinder women participation. Amongst the role of LFT for the paper, as stressed by United Nations, (2014: 15), Brenya, Mensah, & Nyarko, (2018:18) and Arinder, (n.d:7), is its ability to provide awareness to public and private entities on the ways women exercise their leadership power in politics. This will help to remove the systems of exclusion and oppression in all spheres of life for women (Kishwar, 1986:1691). However, the user of the LFT failed to bring an understanding on how women political leaders in local government structures can use the available opportunities to participate in decision-making organs. Thus, participation of women in local decision-making organs have not been given any emphasis.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

To get timely data, the study used a cross-sectional descriptive research design and used both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. This research design was relevant to the study because cross-sectional descriptive research design can describe a person, event or group of people (De Vaus, 2001:176). It is useful when measuring the perceptions, attitudes and preferences of people about a particular phenomenon. The study intended to obtain information from this design and was considered useful because of its significance in the exploration of the features of women local leaders and the opportunities used to represent their constituencies (Kothari. 2004: 37). Hence, the research design covered a large population at one point (Kumar, 2005:93; Cohen, *et al.*, 2007:205).

Study Area

This study was conducted in Dodoma City and Bahi District Councils in Dodoma Region. The councils represent other councils in Tanzania which have local committees comprised of men and women. On the one hand, the two councils have an amount of self-governing bodies that discuss the welfare of the community members through their representatives in the local decision-making organs. The representatives include women local leaders, who are either chosen or come through affirmative action procedures. On the other hand, the two councils vary in some features like the location of the local establishments. For example, Bahi District Council is a rural local authority comprising the smallest unit of the village (popularly known as “*vitongoji*”), villages, wards, and small towns (township authorities) while Dodoma City is an urban local authority comprising a street (commonly known as “*Mtaa*”) and Ward. Additionally, Dodoma City is the national capital

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of Tanzania from where all government functions are operating. The study villages and *mitaa* were purposively selected based on the ones that had women political leaders in their respective areas.

Targeted Population, Sampling Technique and Sample Size

The targeted population of this study was made from household heads in the study area. The sample size was drawn from the population by using Yamane formula (1967). In addition to the main sample, purposive sampling was used to select women local leaders in the study wards, villages and *Mtaa* and other district officials in the study districts. Both probability and non-probability sampling methods were employed to obtain a sample of respondents. The probability sampling method was selected because it avoids bias and helps to generalize the information collected from sample respondents. In addition, purposive sampling has also been used as a sampling technique to include District Executive Directors, Members of Parliament (MPs) and District Commissioners (DCs) in the study Districts. The rationale for using this method is to ensure in-depth information relating to woman's participation in local decision-making organs.

Data Collection Methods and Analysis

This study collected both primary and secondary information using a variety of data collection methods. To ensure the reliability of the data collected, the non-participant observation checklist, interview guide, and FGDs checklists were triangulated from the information collected from the questionnaire survey. The information from the in-depth interview was authenticated by the data collected from the household survey in the study villages and *Mitaa* to enhance validity. To ensure the consistency of the findings, the researcher asked similar questions across the study area. Additionally, the researcher pre-tested the developed questionnaires to enhance validity (Kothari, 2004:87). To observe research ethics, the study used different procedures including the researcher requesting agreement from the managerial authority and informed agreements by respondents in the study area.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main focus of this paper was to investigate the participation of women local leaders in selected Villages and *Mitaa* in Dodoma City and Bahi District Councils in Dodoma Region of Tanzania by concentrating on the number of women in local government committees, their motives to hold positions and their period of service as presented in the following sections.

The proportion of Women in the study Village/*Mtaa* Committee

Results in Figure 1 show that the involvement of women in the lowest level of the local decision-making committee was observed as an opportunity for women. This was designated by investigating their composition in the study of local committees. The lawful obligation in Tanzania is that the proportion of women representatives in the local committee at the village level should



be at least 25% of the members in the village council, about one-third in the *mtaa* as well as in the District Council (Shivji & Peter, 2003:56). The findings showed that the number of women in the *mtaa* composition was more than half (62%) in Dodoma City Council while in Bahi District Council were more than one third (38.3%) in the village council. This indicates that the interests and needs of women in the community are highly represented by women representatives in the local council committee meetings. This means that the speeches for gender equality have full-grown stronger. This is similar to what, Dada, Ashworth, Bewa, & Dhatt, (2021:2) ; García-Moreno & Amin, (2016:396) explained that in Tanzania women's representation in the local committees is targeted to attain 50:50 by 2030 Amongst of the stresses of 2030 programme is to endorse the application of SDGs in achieving gender parity and women and girls empowerment (Fisher & Reed, 2018: 7; UN Women, 2018: 11). These results are similar to what Power & Shoot, (2012:10) observed an increase of women representation to some African countries in parliament from 9.8% in 1995 to 43.27% (Namibia), 43.03% (Senegal) and 41.2% (Mozambique) in 2020.

At the same time, the proportion reached in the urban local committees verifies the influences of Liberal Feminist Theory that, women should access and use the available opportunities in local politics as men local leaders do (Tong, 2012:6). Contrariwise, the proportion attained by women in the village council committee attained the 30% but not the 50% benchmarks as stipulated by the African Union Protocols (Meena, 2015:5). The reason to this was well illustrated by one Ward Councilor (a woman) at Kigwe Ward that because of the cultural norms and religious values impose restrictions on women participation in political leadership. The current achievements of women's representation in Bahi District have been partly attributed to the implementation of affirmative action policy in Tanzania (Mshana *et al.*, 2022:5).

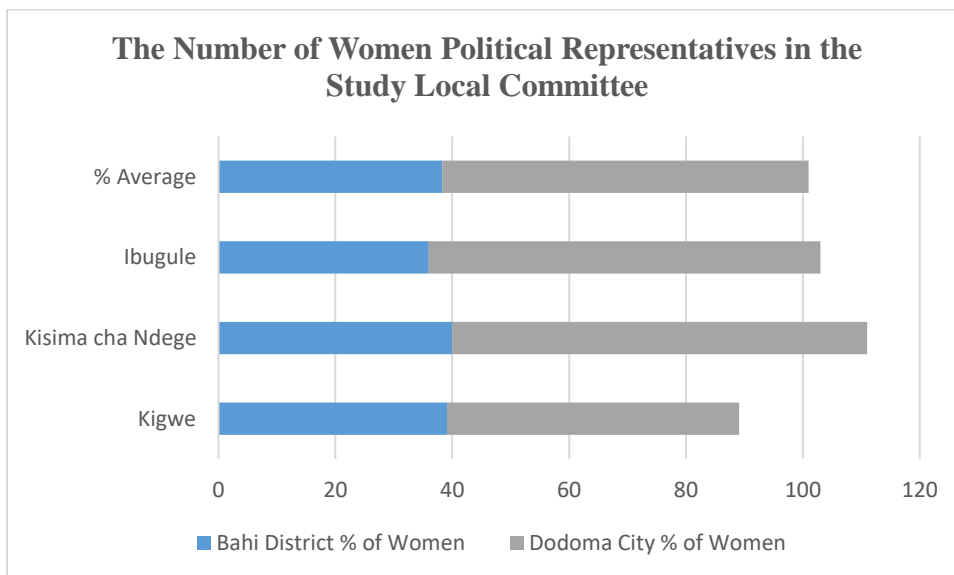


Figure 1: The Number of Women Political Representatives in the Study Local Committee
 Source: Field Data (2020)



The number of women in urban local committees was higher than that in rural ones. The reason was given by one of the District officials that, women face minimal competition against men in contesting for local positions. This is because women in urban areas are more exposed to different advertised programmes, access different social media and improved economic conditions which have influenced their participation in leadership positions than women in rural areas (Williams, Devika, & Aandahl, 2015:1116; Patterson, 2016:5). Hence, urban women have confidence and capacity to contest elections than their rural women counterparts (Matland, 2005:16). This conforms to what was observed in United Kingdom (Borisyyuk & Thrasher, 2007:185), Finland (Holli, 2012:350) and Canada (Turcotte & Rothwell, 2005:2) where the number of women in urban local committee was larger than that in rural local committees.

Representation of Women in the District Council Committees

The findings in Table.2 revealed that the full council committee in Bahi District comprised nine (9) women councillors accounting for 29%, and one of them was an elected councillor while in Dodoma City's full Council 18 out of 57 councillors were women. This suggests that the recommended 30% benchmark of women's representation in local government bodies was nearly attained in both districts' local committees.

Compared to lower local government structures in the study villages and *Mitaa*, the study attained less number of women representatives at the district levels. This indicates that women had more use of the available opportunities at the lower levels of government positions than at higher council levels. This can be mostly caused by women's daily responsibilities that go hand in hand with their roles in the household's surroundings (Jurczyk, Jentsch, Sailer, & Schier, 2019:1733). This qualified that women's participation in local leadership positions in the lower government structures is easier than that at the higher government levels (Meena, 2015: 4). Other researchers conclude that women use more leadership opportunities within their family environment. This is because they work as local leaders while fulfilling their gender roles of women being closer to their children, husbands and relatives than the responsibilities far away from the family that require them to travel and leave their children for some times (Connell, 2003:3; Clayton, Josefsson & Wang, 2017:277)

With regards to the study district council committees, the study found three standing committees across the study district councils (Table 1). On the one hand, the findings observed the number of women representatives in the council committee attained one-third of the recommended threshold. On the other hand, only Education, Health and Water committee reached a fraction above the optional target of one-third representation of women. This indicates that women's matters and worries related to their gender needs in society were probable to be given urgencies in the council committee. A strong emphasis for women leaders is to see the needs of the society such as social services for women and other members of the community are planned and adequately delivered. Ihemeje, (2013:62), opined that the participation of women local leaders in decision-making organs has a great contribution as they influence decisions for community services in their localities. Therefore, it was expected that the presence of women in the district standing

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committees would defend the budget and decisions of community services to reach women and other members of society. This state is related to women’s ability for classifying wants, and important issues and receiving them into local government programmes which can only be improved by women being in the district committees (Roseline Iruoma Ojinta, 2018:211).

Table 1: Women Representatives in the Study District Council Committees

Bahi District				Dodoma City			
Council Committee	Men	Women	% of Women	Council Committee	Men	Women	% of Women
Planning, Finance and Administration	7	2	22	Finance and Administration	9	3	25
Construction, Economics and Environment	11	3	21	Urban Planning and Environment	16	9	36
Education, Health and Water	9	4	44	Economics, Education and Health	17	7	29
Council management for AIDS	5	2	22	Council Management for AIDS	5	3	37.5

Source: Field Data (2020)

Women's Motives to hold Political Positions

This study found various reasons that pushed women to participate in local political leadership in the study area (Table 2). The study revealed that women participate in local politics because of their desire to help the community with various needs (39.2%) in Bahi District and 38.4% in Dodoma City. They wanted to have the opportunity to manage decisions, especially for the problems that arise in their wards (23%) in Bahi District and need to hold power as women in Dodoma City (17.8%). In the interview with women, councillors showed that they can become leaders in their localities. They emphasized that they wish men and the whole society, in general, to realize that they can lead and also manage different efforts to bring about community development. They thought that they could use their power as local leaders to manage laws and procedures to eliminate gender discrimination against women in society.



Table 2: Reasons for Women's Participation in Local Politics in Dodoma City and Bahi District

Bahi District			Dodoma City		
Motives	Frequency	%	Motives	Frequency	%
Represent other women's views and interests.	5	23.0	Hold power	3	17.8
Serve people in the community	11	39.2	Serve people in the community	5	38.4
Stop gender discrimination and sexual harassment	7	25	Pressure from the village community and family members	3	23.0
Hold an opportunity	5	17.8	Encouragement from husband	2	15.3

Source: Field Data (2020)

It was also observed that women participate in local leadership because of the influence of their friends and relatives (23.0%). This seemed to be something different in society because, traditionally women have not been given priority to participate in local decision-making organs (Ford & Pande, 2011). However, the findings of this study contradict what Majury *et al.*, (2015:58) commented that women lack influence from community members to participate in the political sphere, especially local politics. More reasons to participate in local politics were reported by one councillor in Bahi District who explained that:

“There was a tendency that male local leaders not talk much about community needs that affect women, such as health services for children, distance to reach the nearby school and security for girl-children. I was motivated to contest so that I could talk about these problems that bother women and girls” (Village Councilor FGD Kigwe Village, 2020).

Another member from Kikuyu Ward shared a similar opinion while emphasizing that her aggressiveness on the water problems in the community is a reason why she had to contest for the ward councillor position to represent her community. Speaking of the water problem, she commented:

“Women and girls suffer a lot to access the nearby water services. Sometimes they have to walk very long distances to find water and this endangers their safety on their way” Member FGD Kikuyu Ward, (2020).

Furthermore, a councillor from Kisima cha Ndege linked her motive for taking part in political leadership with the fact that formerly many decisions were managed by men who had not had the practice of taking care of a family in their localities. In this respect, she referred to the problem of the limited number of health workers in a dispensary like medical doctors and nurses and the affected availability of health service delivery in their areas. In addition, another councillor from Ibugule ward reported that:



“The village leadership was not equal for women, especially in the distribution of community services, decisions relating to sex discrimination, sexual harassments to women like beating wives were not handled well. I thought if I enter into local leadership, I will help make decisions that will not oppress women, FGD Ibugule Ward (2020).

Notwithstanding this, the findings found that there are some women encouraged by their husbands to run for local leadership positions. For example, one member from Kilimani Ward reported that:

“People in my area asked my husband to allow me to run for local leadership in my *Mtaa*. They did that because they knew I could influence certain things to happen” Member FGD Kilimani Ward Committee, (2020).

The impression from the quote above suggests that men are also supportive and they do encourage women to participate in political leadership. Indeed, women leaders need continued encouragement in political processes including financial support during the campaign. In the same vein, another member who participated in the same discussion expressed that:

“My husband is a businessperson and is well known by many people in the area. He advised and encouraged me to become strong in the contesting period. He supported me financially during the campaign so that I could do all the election activities” (Member FGD Kilimani Ward Committee, 2020).

This condition is not common in developing countries, especially in Tanzania (Mshana *et al.*, 2022:2). In many countries, especially in Africa, participation of women in political leadership has been held by both men and women, but more men take a greater role in decision-making bodies (Bjarnegard & Zetterberg, 2016:3). There is a misconception in the society that women are not capable in leadership positions (Rincon, Gonzales, & Barrero, 2017:319). Society realizes that political leaders are only for men, and women are responsible for raising families. Though, the findings of the current study are contrary to the previous studies mentioned above. Men and society, in general, have started to change and realize that women are good leaders in society. Through their daily responsibilities, they can manage and make decisions that will not create discrimination in society but rather it bring impact to the community members. This is similar to what Meena (2017: 16) found in a quote by Hon. MP and Regional Commissioner Stella Manyanya who witnessed her husband to support and inspire to her political career. This experience was commented by Connell (2003:10), who argued that in order to attain gender equality, men and boys should change their attitudes about their relationships with women. Based on this, liberal feminist’s theorists have the opinion that women should be given the same opportunities as men do in participating in decision-making bodies.

Duration of service by women in the Local Leadership

Despite the achievement of the 30% benchmark of women's presence in the surveyed local government committees, about 30% of representatives in the study district councils committees were newly elected councillors. The study revealed that 60.2% of the village council committee

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members were first-time elected, about a third (30.3%) mentioned participating in the local committee for the second time and 9.5% have been elected for the third time. In contrast, about 57.2% of men mentioned holding local leadership for the second time. Likewise, about half (45%) of women in the surveyed *Mitaa* in the urban local authority held local leadership for the third time and closer to one-third (25%) have been in local leadership for the first time. (Figure 2).

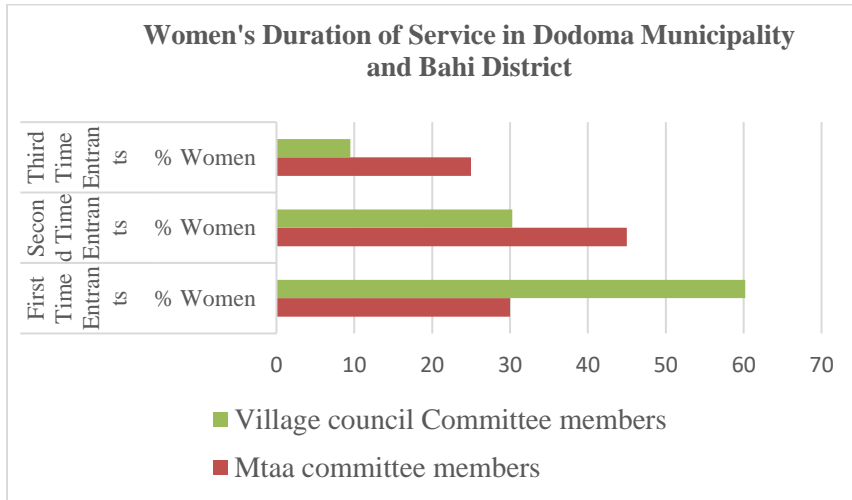


Figure 2: Women's Duration of Service in Dodoma Municipality and Bahi District
 Source: Field Data (2020)

Additionally, in the FGDs, one member (a woman) explained that many women in the study villages ended up holding local leadership only once because they are unable to withstand the challenges encountered during their leadership tenure. It was reported that fewer women village councillors lacked support from their fellow men councillors. This was reported due to a lack of good gender relations between men and women in rural areas. For instance, one of the village Council members (a woman) in Msisi ward said:

"It is not easy for a man to praise a woman that has done well. Most of the time they are just disappointing women leaders that they are not capable" (Village Councillor FGD Msisi Ward, 2020).

Women leaders are supposed to be tough and self-assured about what they are doing and deliver to other women and the entire community. Broadbridge (2008:15); Itakura and Tsui (2004:244); Xu (2009:9), observed that men use their masculinity to defend their interests while oppressing women. Other researchers elsewhere admitted that such a practice also appears in other developing countries, particularly in rural areas (Ampofo *et al.*, 2004:704; Hakura *et al.*, 2016: 6). For example the studies conducted in Tanzania, (Shayo, 2005:7), Nigeria, (Ojinta, 2018:17), and in Nepal (Manandhar, 2021:42), witnessed women local leaders ending up only first round of leadership because they face barriers from the community.



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that women political leaders have been able to take advantage of the various opportunities available to decision-making bodies in local government structures. Through committee meetings, they have been able to push for decisions that enhance the provision of social services including the needs of women. It is therefore recommended that women should continue to be given more opportunities in local decision-making bodies from the national level to local government structures so that they can use their influence to speak out and push for decisions that affect their needs and society as a whole.

It is evident from the study that, there have been numerous reasons that pushed women to participate in elections and hold local leadership positions, including support from their husbands and the community at large. This study concludes that men have changed their attitudes and mindset as were reported to support women to contest for elections. This involves supporting women financially, and socially and accompanying them in elections campaigns. Through this support, women can feel accepted, recognised, valued and encouraged to represent the community in decision-making organs. The study, therefore, recommends that more women should be encouraged to hold political seats in local government structures. This is because women as local leaders work better along with their gender roles in fulfilling their reproductive roles as wives, mothers and community managers. This study further concludes that some women go for one round of service in rural local authorities as village councillors compared to their fellow women in urban ones. This is related to deprived relationships among local leaders in rural areas that are aligned with the cultural practices of men and women in society. Thus the study recommends that more education should be provided to community members from the household level to the national level. The focus should include eliminating male domination in society, discouraging the wrong perception that the girl child is responsible only for domestic and non-productive activities and ensuring that strict laws and guidelines governing women's and girls' rights are properly planned and managed.

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