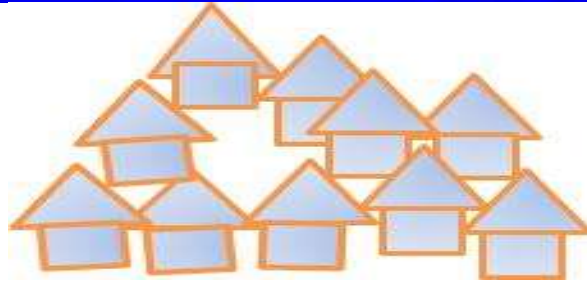
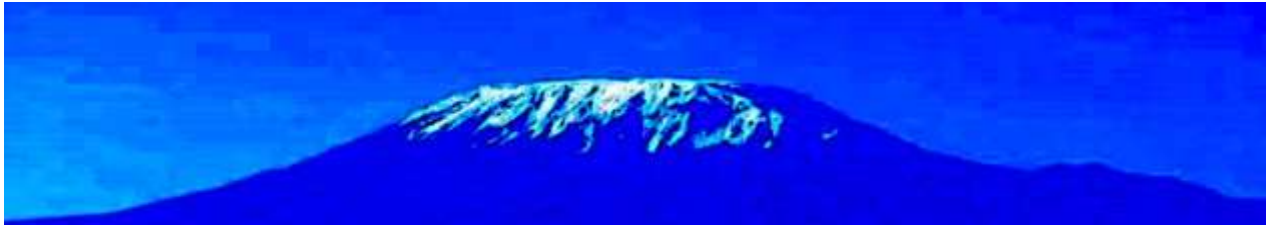


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The Role of Women Special Seats Councilors in Implementing Community Development Interventions in Kahama Municipality, Shinyanga, Tanzania.

Mary Muhoha¹

Abstract

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The participation of women in politics, development activities, and decision-making is crucial for increased investments in education, health, and infrastructure, as well as higher economic growth and poverty reduction. This paper examines the contribution of Women Special Seats Councillors (WSSCs) in implementing community development interventions in Kahama Municipality, Shinyanga, Tanzania. The study used qualitative research methods, including Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and document reviews. The findings show that WSSCs collaborate with ward councillors to develop comprehensive development plans that address specific needs. It is recommended that the government, WSSCs, and community members strengthen their participation in community development initiatives through the establishment of a Community-Oriented Stakeholders Model (COSTAM). This model promotes joint involvement throughout the project life cycle and empowers stakeholders, particularly women, through capacity building opportunities. These processes ensure that projects are relevant, sustainable, and responsive to community needs in Tanzania.

¹Corresponding Mail: twicem2005@yahoo.co.uk, the Open University of Tanzania

1.0. Introduction

Women around the world have been working towards achieving equal opportunities in politics and representation. However, they face significant challenges due to societal beliefs (UNDP, 2021; Kimaryo & Mbilinyi, 2020). According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) report in January 2023, women's representation across parliaments in the world is 26.4%, with significant regional variations (IPU, 2023). The Nordic countries have the highest proportion of women in parliament, with an average of 44.5%, while the Middle East and North Africa region has the lowest proportion, with an average of 16.5% (IPU, 2023). Only 23 out of 193 countries have a female head of state or government, highlighting the severe underrepresentation of women in political institutions and decision-making processes worldwide (IPU, 2023, UNDP, 2021).

In Africa, women's participation in politics and decision-making remains low, leading some countries to implement gender quotas and special seats for women in legislative bodies to increase their representation (African Union, UN Women & UNDP, 2019; Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021; United Nations Development Programme, 2019a, UNDP 2019b). However, despite these efforts, women's representation in African politics remains low.

In Tanzania, women make up more than half of the population, but their representation in politics and decision-making processes is low (UN Women, 2021; NBS, 2019). Although the Tanzanian government introduced a policy of gender quota in 1985, mandating that women should occupy at least 30% of all political positions, and amended the Local Government Act in 2015 to create special seats for women in local councils, women still only occupy 28% of the seats in local councils (UNDP, 2018; NBS, 2019). Yet, women's contribution is crucial for promoting economic growth and social welfare in the country (Luhanga, 2018; UN Women, 2013). Various studies have shown that women's participation can lead to increased investments in education, health, and infrastructure, resulting in higher economic growth and poverty reduction. Therefore, promoting women's participation in politics is important not only for achieving SDG 5 (Gender Equality) but also for achieving other sustainable development goals, including SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).

The Government of Tanzania has implemented strategies and interventions to increase women's participation in politics (United Nations Development Programme, 2021). Notable achievements have been made in implementing the Beijing Platform for Actions (2005) and the Women and Gender Development Policy, which promote women's economic, social, and political empowerment (UN Women, 2021). Despite these efforts, the role of women special seat councillors in advancing community development initiatives at the local level is not well documented (Makalanga, 2022; Lange, 2008; Brown & Green, 2015; Dungumaro & Amos, 2019; Lugendo, 2019; Masanyiwa, 2014). While some studies provide insights into the role of women special seat councillors in other countries, there is a need for more research on the topic within the Tanzanian context. Therefore, this study was conducted to fill this knowledge gap by establishing the contribution of women special seat councillors in the implementation of community development interventions in Kahama Municipality, Shinyanga, Tanzania. The study aimed at evaluating the contribution of Women Special Seats Councilors (WSSCs) in community development interventions and their involvement in the planning and decision-making processes of such initiatives in Kahama Municipality.

1.1. Theoretical Framework

Studies on women's contribution in the Implementation of Community Development Initiatives have indicated that women's participation in various community development intervention have a positive impact on development outcomes, including improvement of their socio welfare at family

levels, gender equality, economic growth and sustainable development (Kjellström & Thorp, 2008, Masanyiwa, 2014, Lugendo, 2019, Makalanga, 2022). Nevertheless, little empirical research has been done to explore their contribution in the implementation of community development initiatives in Tanzania. Current literature shows that women performance in socio-economic development is crucial as it promotes community development projects and thus sustainable development (UNDP, 2018). According to Kimaryo, & Mbilinyi, (2020) and UN Women, (2021), increase of women's representation in local governance and decision-making processes, can also promote gender equality and empower women to play a more significant role in promoting development in their communities (Ledwith, 2011).

This paper is guided by the Empowerment Theory which is a socio-political concept that emphasizes giving individuals the knowledge, resources, and opportunities to exercise control over their own lives and participate actively in decision-making processes to achieve personal and collective goals. The Empowerment Theory intends to emphasize the processes through which individuals and communities gain power and control over their lives (Datta & Roy, 2018). The argument in this theory is that, empowering women is vital for achieving gender equality and inclusive development. In the case of women special seat councillors, their political status can serve as a source of empowerment and enable them to advocate for the needs and priorities of their communities (Molyneux, 1985; Kabeer, 1999). Furthermore, the Empowerment Theory assumes that agency, power, participation, critical consciousness, collective action, and sustainable change are essential indicators that promote community empowerment and their overall well-being (Brager, et al., (2015), Kimaryo, & Mbilinyi (2020). Thus, the Empowerment Theory is highly relevant in assessing the role of women special seat councillors in advancing community development initiatives as it emphasizes the importance of empowering individuals and communities to take control over their lives and work towards achieving their goals. Meanwhile, they can help to increase the agency and power of women in their communities by promoting their participation in decision-making processes, raise their critical consciousness and advocating for their rights. It is from this theory that contribution of Women Special Seats Councillors in the implementation of community development initiatives in were studied.

2.0. Methodology

2.1. Description of the Study Area

This study was conducted in Kahama Municipal Council in Shinyanga Region, Tanzania. The area was purposively selected due to its fast population growth and high socio-economic growth compared to other districts in the region (URT, 2012). Additionally, no research has been conducted in the area to assess the contribution of women special seat councilors in the implementation of community development interventions. This area was therefore selected because it provided an opportunity for diversification of socio-economic activities led by community members, and to evaluate the involvement of women special councilors in implementing these activities. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2019), 33% of local government councils in Tanzania had at least one-woman special seat councilor. In Kahama Municipality, there are seven women special seat councilors out of 20 ward councilors, making this study particularly valuable for gaining insights in this area.

2.2. Research Design, Data Collection and Analysis

This study applied a qualitative research design. Data was collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and a review of relevant documents pertaining to women's involvement in community development initiatives in the study areas. FGDs were conducted to gather the experiences and perspectives of participants. Two (2) FGDs were held in the Municipal council, with up to twelve (12). KIIs were conducted with individuals who were believed to possess a deep understanding and knowledge on the contributions of Women

Special Seats Councillors in community development interventions. The participants included seven (7) Women Special Seats Councillors (WSSCs), two (2) Village Executive Officers (VEOs), two (2) Ward Executive Officers, two (2) Community Development Officers (CDOs), two (2) Ward Councillors, and one District Community Development Officer (DCDO). The data was analysed using content analysis technique. The data from the FGDs and KIs were interpreted and organized into different themes. These themes were then analysed based on the objective of the study.

3.0. Results and Discussions

This study aimed to assess the contribution of women special seat councillors in advancing community development initiatives in Kahama Municipality, Tanzania. The objective was to understand the extent to which these councillors had contributed to the advancement of community development initiatives in their roles as elected representatives.

3.1 Development Projects implemented by WSSCs in 2018 to 2023

This sub-section examines the community development initiatives implemented in Kahama Municipality from 2018 to 2023, focusing on the role of women special seat councillors. Table 1 presents the findings, which highlight various projects in sectors such as health, education, electricity, infrastructure, water, and nutrition. The women special seat councillors played a crucial role in driving these initiatives and ensuring inclusivity in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and awareness campaigns for the development projects. Community participation in project selection varied, with some projects involving active input from the community, while others were implemented without community involvement. Active community engagement resulted in more inclusive and community-driven initiatives, promoting ownership, relevance, and sustainability.

Table 1. Engagement of WSSCs in various Community Development Interventions

S/N	Name of the Projects	Role of Women Special Seat Councillors				Collaborative Partners
		Planning <i>(Approval of projects and Budgeting)</i>	Implementation	M&E <i>(Inspection and visits)</i>	Awareness Raising Campaign	
1	Health	Active Engagement	Partial Engagement	Active	Active Engagement	VEO, WEO, CDOs, Ward Councillors, Community members
2	Education	Active Engagement	Partial Engagement	Active Engagement	Active Engagement	VEO, WEO, CDO, Ward Councillors, Community members
3	Electricity	Active Engagement	Partial Engagement	Active Engagement	Active Engagement	VEO, WEO, CDO, Ward Councillors, Community members
4	Nutrition	Active Engagement	Partial Engagement	Active Engagement	Active Engagement	VEO, WEO, CDO, Ward Councillors, Community members

5	Infrastructure	Active Engagement	Partial Engagement	Active Engagement	Active Engagement	VEO, WEO, CDO, Ward Councillors, Community members
6	Water	Active Engagement	Partial Engagement	Active Engagement	Active Engagement	VEO, WEO, CDO, Ward Councillors, Community members

Additionally, the findings revealed that women special seat councillors actively collaborated with ward councillors to develop comprehensive development plans tailored to the specific needs of their respective wards. This collaborative approach ensured inclusivity and participatory decision-making. However, according to Table 1, it is evident that the WSSCs participate in the implementation of the six selected development projects in the study area.

3.2 Collaborative Planning of Women Special Seat Councillors and Stakeholders

In terms of collaborative planning, the study area also revealed significant contributions made by WSSCs in driving these initiatives and ensuring an inclusive and responsive approach to the municipality's development agenda. One key informant interviewee stated;

“The implementation of various projects has been a priority in Kahama Municipality over the past five years. We have successfully constructed the Nyasubi Health Centre, built classrooms for secondary and primary schools, and established feeding centres. Additionally, road construction and the improvement of infrastructure have been key focus areas, along with initiatives in water supply, electricity, agriculture, and market construction”.

Another added by emphasizing that:

“We have expanded the water pipeline network in Kahama Municipality, ensuring that communities in Isagehe, Busoka, and Ngongwa Wards now have access to clean water. Additionally, we have constructed health centers in Nyasubi and Mhongolo, addressing the healthcare needs of the local population. Our efforts also include the construction of secondary schools, primary schools, government offices, and the provision of essential infrastructure to support community development”.

During the interviews with the Special Seat Councillors, the study revealed the significant role and responsibility they have in supervising the implementation of development projects in their respective areas for the betterment of the citizens. The special seat councillors actively engaged in the execution of these projects, making personal contributions and promoting citizen participation. One Councillor expressed their dedication, stating:

“..... as a councillor, I have actively contributed to the development of Kahama Municipality. My involvement includes supporting the construction of important facilities such as the Mother and Child Building in the municipality, as well as the establishment of nutrition markets in Majengo Ward. I have also played a role in advocating for road improvements, installation of street lights, and the construction of large water tanks in Ngogwa Ward to enhance water availability”.

Another Councillor added:

“.....As councillor, we are actively engaged in planning phase and not in implementation of community development activities. This is due to the fact that, some of the projects are technical. Therefore, we have been involved in promoting the establishment of women’s groups and in Awareness Raising Campaigns”.

The statement above indicates that there have been significant contributions made by both development project implementers and women special seat councillors in Kahama Municipality from 2018 to 2023. The implementation of various projects in sectors such as health, education, infrastructure, and social services demonstrates a proactive approach to addressing the needs of the community (UN Women, 2015; Agarwal, 1997; Cornwall, 2003).

Furthermore, the findings from this study reinforce the importance of sustained efforts in community development, particularly through collaborative partnerships between development project implementers, special seat councillors, and other stakeholders in all phases of project planning and management (Chambers, 1997; Cornwall & Pratt, 2012).

Varied Participation of WSSCs based on the importance of the Agenda

The findings indicate that the level of participation among women special seat councillors varies depending on the importance of the agenda being discussed. Some councillors actively contribute and engage in decision-making processes, while others participate less frequently. This fluctuation in participation is contingent upon the significance of the issue under consideration. As mentioned by a Special Seat Councillor during the interviews;

“The level of participation among women special seat councillors varies based on the importance of the agenda at hand. Some of us actively contribute and engage in decision-making, while others participate less frequently, depending on the significance of the issue being discussed” (Special Seat Councillor).

This finding highlights the importance of providing equal opportunities and encouragement for all women special seat councillors to actively participate in decision-making processes, regardless of the perceived importance of the agenda. This approach ensures a more inclusive and equitable approach to community development.

This finding also aligns with the theory of intersectionality, which emphasizes that various factors such as gender, socio-economic status, and identity intersect to shape individuals' experiences and opportunities (Crenshaw, 1989). In the case of women special seat councillors, their level of participation may be influenced by multiple factors, including the perceived importance of the agenda and power dynamics within decision-making spaces.

A previous study by Kabeer (1999) also suggests that contextual factors, such as the level of support and encouragement, can influence women's participation in decision-making. When women are provided with equal opportunities and empowered to contribute to decision-making processes regardless of agenda importance, it can enhance the inclusivity and effectiveness of community development initiatives (Brager, *et al.*, 2015).

Meanwhile, the implication of this finding is the need for targeted interventions and strategies to promote equal participation among women special seat councillors in decision-making processes. Therefore, it calls for the creation of an enabling environment where all councillors, regardless of agenda importance, are encouraged and supported to actively engage in discussions and decision-making. This can be achieved through capacity-building programs, mentorship, and the fostering of a culture of inclusivity and respect within governance structures.

3.3 Contributions of WSSCs in Project Approval and Budgeting

The data underscores the invaluable contributions made by women special seat councillors in the project approval and budgeting processes. Their input is crucial in shaping decision-making and allocating resources for community development activities. As one Councillor aptly expressed during the focus group discussions;

“As women special seat councillors, we provide valuable input during project approval and budgeting processes. Our thoughts and ideas help shape the decision-making and resource allocation for community development activities, ensuring a more inclusive approach” (Special Seat Councillor).

This finding highlights the importance of including women special seat councillors in the decision-making process to ensure diverse perspectives and ideas are incorporated. It emphasizes the valuable contributions of these councillors in shaping community development initiatives and meeting the needs of all stakeholders.

The finding also aligns with the principles of gender-responsive budgeting and participatory decision-making. It emphasizes the significance of including women's perspectives in resource allocation and decision-making, which is crucial for promoting gender equality and achieving sustainable development goals.

This finding is consistent with previous studies by Elson (1991), Goetz & Sen Gupta (1996), and Ng'wanakilala (2016) that have demonstrated the positive impact of women's participation in budgeting and decision-making. Women bring unique insights, priorities, and considerations that can lead to more equitable and effective allocation of resources. Gender-responsive budgeting recognizes the importance of considering the different needs and priorities of women and men in resource allocation. By actively involving women special seat councillors in project approval and budgeting processes, there is a greater likelihood of addressing gender-specific concerns and promoting gender equality in the distribution of resources (Duflo, 2012; Ravindran & Kelkar-Khambete, 2015).

3.4 Equal Participation of WSSCs in Council Meetings

The data on equal participation of Women Special Seat Councillors (WSSCs) reveals that they enjoy equal participation in council meetings, attending all sessions regardless of their representation being equal to or even exceeding that of ward councillors. This was expressed by a Special Seat Councillor during the Focus Group Discussion saying;

“We are pleased to report that women special seat councillors from special seats have equal participation in council meetings compared to ward councillors. We receive invitations and actively participate in all sessions, regardless of our representation being equal to or even surpassing that of ward councillors” (Special Seat Councillor).

This finding emphasizes the importance of gender equality and inclusivity in decision-making processes during council meetings. It recognizes the active involvement and contribution of women special seat councillors, promoting a balanced representation and diverse perspectives that enrich the discussions and outcomes of the council meetings.

The finding of equal participation of Women Special Seat Councillors in council meetings aligns with the principles of gender equality and inclusive governance. It signifies a positive step towards creating an environment where women's voices are heard and valued in decision-making processes. The active involvement of women special seat councillors in council meetings in Kahama Municipality demonstrates a commitment to promoting gender equality and recognizing

the importance of women's contributions in local governance. It sets a positive example for other municipalities and reaffirms the municipality's commitment to inclusivity and diversity.

The findings are consistent with studies by Kabeer (2005) and Tripp (2015) that emphasize the importance of gender-balanced representation in decision-making bodies. These studies recognize that diverse perspectives and experiences, including those of women, are essential for effective and inclusive governance. Equal participation of women special seat councillors ensures that their unique insights and concerns are considered when formulating policies and making decisions that affect the community (Weber, 2010; Were, 2015; Xavier et al., 2017).

The study findings imply that there is a need to sustain and further enhance the equal participation of women special seat councillors in council meetings. This can be achieved through continued support and encouragement, capacity-building initiatives, and the establishment of mechanisms to address any barriers or biases that may hinder their participation (Phoenix et al., 2006).

4.0. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1. Conclusions

Based on the presented findings, it can be concluded that WSSCs play an active role in implementing community development interventions in Kahama Municipality, particularly in the areas of health, water, education, infrastructure, nutrition, and electricity. The findings indicate that WSSCs are actively involved in awareness raising campaigns, planning, and monitoring and evaluation. They work together with ward councillors to create comprehensive development plans that specifically cater to the needs of their respective wards. This collaboration guarantees inclusivity and participatory decision-making, both of which are essential in shaping community development plans and policies. Moreover, their involvement is considered crucial for the successful implementation of all community development initiatives within their communities.

4.2. Recommendations

Based on the study's conclusion, it is recommended that the Government, WSSCs, and community members enhance their participation in community development, particularly in the implementation of development projects. This will help improve the effectiveness and inclusivity of community development initiatives. To achieve this, it is suggested to establish a Community Oriented Stakeholders Model (COSTAM). This model will prioritize and promote the active involvement of stakeholders throughout the project life cycle, including project selection, planning, implementation, and decision-making processes.

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Policy Brief

In Tanzania, women make up more than half of the population, but their representation in politics and decision-making processes is low (UN Women, 2021; NBS, 2019). Although the Tanzanian government introduced a Policy of Gender Quota in 1985, mandating that women should occupy at least 30% of all political positions, and amended the Local Government Act in 2015 to create special seats for women in local councils, women occupy only 28% of the seats in councils across the country (UNDP, 2018; NBS, 2019). Yet, women's contribution is crucial for promoting economic growth and social welfare in the country (Luhanga, 2018; UN Women, 2013). Various studies have shown that women's participation can lead to increased investments in education, health, and infrastructure, resulting in higher economic growth and poverty reduction. As such, promoting women's participation in politics is important not only for achieving SDG 5 (Gender Equality) but also for achieving other sustainable development goals, including SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).

The Government of Tanzania has implemented strategies and interventions to increase women's participation in politics. Notable achievements have been made in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action (2005) and the Women and Gender Development Policy. Despite the efforts, the role of women special seat councillors in advancing community development initiatives at the local level is not well known and documented in Tanzania (Makalanga, 2022; Lange, 2008; Brown & Green, 2015; Dungumaro & Amos, 2019; Lugendo, 2019; Masanyiwa, 2014). All in all, there is a need for potential stakeholders, including policymakers, practitioners, and professionals of community development and WSSCs, to collaborate in establishing an effective mechanism for active stakeholder engagement in project selection, planning, and decision-making processes throughout the project life cycle. The collaboration will enhance effectiveness, inclusivity, and sustainability of community development initiatives that respond to the needs of the community. To achieve this, it is suggested to establish a Community-Oriented Stakeholders Model (COSTAM). The model will prioritize and promote the active involvement of stakeholders throughout the project life cycle.