

**THE BATON OF FEMALES' COLLECTIVE STRUGGLE: VOICES OF NOMINATED FEMALE MEMBERS OF THE COUNTY ASSEMBLY ON COLLABORATION AND NETWORKING WITH FEMALES FROM THE FORMER CENTRAL KENYA PROVINCE**

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**Accepted: July 23, 2023**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Females from most societies are marginalized and have limited access to conventional avenues of power. Globally, regionally and locally, the feminist movements have struggled to create space for females in public life, including the political arena. The greatest achievement of the feminist movement struggle was the introduction of the electoral gender quotas. By 2022, about 50% of the countries of the world (Maillé, p. 123) had adopted some form of gender electoral quotas. In Kenya, a strong feminist constitutional movement saw affirmative action entrenched in Kenya's 2010 Constitution. Its implementation resulted in an increased descriptive representation of females in the 47 County Assemblies. This paper aims at contributing to African feminist epistemology. It presents the voices of nominated female Members of the County Assembly (FMCAs) in Kenya on their experiences in networking and collaboration with female leaders of organizations/groups, from Central Kenya counties, which is critical for collective agenda setting to influence county assembly policies to address female concerns. This is a response to a concern raised by Nzomo, who notes that "the predominant discourse among gender researchers focusing on Kenya women's political participation, is still preoccupied with the issue of Access and Presence; of obstacles and strategies of attaining the ("critical mass"); of women in political leadership, and less attention on "the question of Agenda setting and Accountability" (2013). Secondary data was collected through a review of existing literature while the primary data was collected through in-depth interviews and panel discussions with nominated female members of the county assembly (FMCAs) from Central Kenya Counties. 25 nominated FMCAs took part in the study. Interviews were recorded verbatim and excerpts directly transcribed from the recordings. Findings show a disconnect of the collective struggle due to lack of resources, intimidation by elected male colleagues, ignorance on the role of nominated and elected MCAs, among the electorate and social distance with the female fraternity. It recommends the allocation of resources, the establishment of a platform for engagement, awareness creation among the electorate, capacity building for FMCAs and the flow of information between FMCAs and the female fraternity.*

**Key words:** *Affirmative Action, Collective Agency, Females, Gender Quotas, Feminist Movement*

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**CITATION:** Kanyi, M. W., Nyamongo, G. B., Baraza, N. M., & Mbithi, M. L. (2023). The baton of females' collective struggle: voices of nominated female members of the county assembly on collaboration and networking with females from the former Central Kenya Province. *Reviewed Journal of Social Science & Humanities*, 4 (1), 373 – 397.

## INTRODUCTION

This article explores females' collective struggle, in the form of a feminist movement with the aim of overcoming political exclusion and whether the beneficiaries of this struggle took up the baton from their predecessors. This exclusion has its basis in the genetic composition of males and females as it is the bedrock for the sociocultural construction of gender and gender roles. All human beings are born into this gendered world that ascribes specific roles to males and females giving rise to men and women. The differentiated sex and gender roles mean that men and women have different life experiences, knowledge, perspectives and priorities. For most of human *his-story*, most societies have assigned leadership roles to males and reproductive roles to females. This is the source of the widespread structural marginalization of females in policy and decision-making institutions and processes. Females have struggled for decades to create a space in the political arena but it was not until the twentieth century that this struggle bore fruits reaching the global level. The adoption of gender quotas for descriptive political participation, in political institutions, across states has been a major milestone in this struggle.

The study aimed to investigate whether the implementation of gender quotas in the Kenyan County Assemblies resulted in the continuation of a collective female struggle characterized by advocacy for a common women's agenda. It is premised on the fact that although females have made tremendous gains globally, regionally and locally, through their collective action, the struggle is not yet over as females are yet to realize the objective of their representation. In Kenya, the females' struggle for gender quota was realized through the entrenchment of the affirmative action principle, popularly referred to as the two-thirds gender rule, in Kenya's Constitution (2010) (Article 27(8); 177:1(b)), among others. The rationale for focusing on the County Assemblies is that the constitutional gender quota, for females' prescriptive representation in the County Assembly (COK 177:1(b)), was realized through the nomination of female MCAs to ensure compliance with the affirmative action principle. The purpose of the affirmative action principle is to ensure a critical mass representation of either gender in the Kenyan County Assemblies. The study was carried out in the former Central Province of Kenya which is comprised of five counties namely Murang'a, Kiambu, Kirinyaga, Nyandarua, and Nyeri. The region is home to key female leaders among them, female freedom fighters during the struggle for independence as well as post-independent female leaders, such as the Laureate Nobel Prize winner, Prof Wangari Maathai the first African woman and only the 12<sup>th</sup> woman overall to win the Peace Prize (Chirindo, 2016 p 443) and gender and females' empowerment advocate, Prof Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira, in Kenya. One of the authors, Mary Wambui Kanyi, also vied for the Member of County Assembly (MCA) for Magutu Ward, Nyeri County, in the 2013 General elections in Kenya. The five counties have a total of 170 wards translating to 170 Members of the County Assembly (MCAs) elected ward representatives through universal suffrage in the 2017 General Elections. Of the 170 elected Ward Representatives, through universal suffrage, in the 2017 General Elections, only 7 (4.1%) were females. To comply with the constitutional affirmative action quota (COK 177:1 (b)) a total of 80 female MCAs representing persons with disability and ethnic minorities No 9 and 71 for gender top, was nominated (NDI & FIDA, p. 56). This study sought to explore whether females' collective struggle persisted through the voices of the nominated female FMCAs on their experiences and perceptions of females' collective agency through networking and collaboration to promote females' agenda in their respective County Assemblies as well as challenges and recommendations on how this can be improved.

Secondary data was collected through a review of both published and unpublished online journal articles as well as other publications. Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews and panel discussions with nominated female members of the county assembly (FMCAs) from the target county assemblies. A total of 25 nominated female MCAs took part in the study, 12 participated in the face-to-face in-depth interviews while 13 took part in the face-to-face panel discussions.

This article is divided into three parts. Part one is an introduction, research objectives and statement of the problem of the study. Part two is the Literature review and study Methodology; Part three presents the study findings and the last part focuses on the conclusion, recommendations and suggestions for future research.

### **Research Objectives**

The overall objective of this study was to explore whether, with the realization of females' prescriptive representation, the females' collective agency persisted in the counties of the former Central Province in Kenya namely, Kiambu, Kirinyaga, Murang'a, Nyandarua and Nyeri.

The **Specific objectives** of this study were to:

- Establish whether there was collaboration and networking between the nominated female Members of the County Assembly (FMCA) between 2017-2022, and female leaders of organizations/groups, in setting a females' agenda to address females concerns, from the former Central Kenya Counties, namely Kiambu, Murang'a, Kirinyaga, Nyandarua and Nyeri, in their respective counties.
- Determine the challenges that hamper networking and collaboration between the nominated female members of the county assembly and the female leaders of organizations/groups from their respective counties in the former Central Province Kenya Counties during the 2017–2022 term.
- Identify strategies for enhancing networking and collaboration between the nominated female members of the county assembly and the female fraternity from their respective counties, in the future

### **Purpose of Study/Statement of the Problem**

Human societies have been characterized by a hierarchical distribution of roles (Yolles & Fink, p. 16) resulting in unequal power relations between males and females and marginalization of the latter in decision-making institutions and processes. It was strong women's movements at global, regional and local levels that played a critical role in creating political space for females' descriptive representation in politics. The women's movement also remains the best means of giving women visibility and voice (Nzomo, 2011, p. 4). According to Scherpereel (2016), the 1980s was a period, characterized by "active women's movements, international pressures, and propitious institutional arrangements...(that) promoted rapid representational gains in many states (Scherpereel et al., 2016, p. 2). A major milestone in the feminist movement's efforts to address the marginalization of females in decision-making institutions, particularly in the political arena, was the introduction of electoral gender quotas. The Electoral gender quotas were first adopted in the 1970s by individual political parties in Western Europe (Forman-Rabinovici, 2021, p.2) and spread all over the world, especially after the UN World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 (Dahlerup et al., 2017, p. 307). The purpose of the electoral gender quotas was/is to increase the number of females elected to political office (Krook, 2009, p. 783). They are generally classified into three broad categories; reserved seats, party-level quotas, and legislative quotas (Forman-Rabinovici, 2021, p. 2). Reserved seats set aside a certain number of seats in parliament for women. They establish group-specific avenues of representation and circumvent the existing party and electoral systems. That is, instead of being elected by regular procedures, women are either appointed or nominated. Crocker notes that the regional and global developments of the mid-1990s, particularly the pre- and post-Beijing processes, were crucial in stimulating debate over gender quotas, which intensified from a mere ideological aspiration to a real phenomenon. Through socialization, women had the opportunity to discuss their experiences with gender quotas at regional and global conferences and adopt key resolutions that pressured national governments to modify policy and behaviour in favor of women (Crocker, 2011, p 10). The concept of electoral gender quotas spread quickly across various countries due to globalization, (and) diffusion of global norms through the free flow of information across national borders, encouraging and supporting transnational non-governmental organizations, communication, and gaining endorsements for

international treaties and conventions, as well as target(ed) development aid invested in strengthening women's empowerment (Drude & Dahlerup, 2015, p. 7). According to Kook (2009), half of the countries in the world (have) some type of gender quota in use in public elections (Dahlerup, 2006a; Kook, 2009). In Kenya, several decades of females' collective struggle for representation in the political arena, saw the entrenchment of the gender quota, popularly referred to as the two-thirds gender rule, in the Constitution (CoK 97:1(b), 98 and 177:1(b)). The Constitutional gender quota was first implemented in the first General Elections, held in 2013, under Kenya's Constitution (2010). It has been implemented in all subsequent elections. The implementation of the Constitutional affirmative action quota in the 2013 and 2017 elections under the Constitution of Kenya 2010, saw a phenomenal increase of females in both the national and the devolved Government's legislative arms. This numerical increase of females in the political arena attracted a lot of excitement among various stakeholders among them, scholars and development partners. However, most existing studies have focused on the descriptive or numerical representation of females as Nzomo notes, "The predominant discourse among gender/feminist researchers focusing on Kenya women's political participation, is still preoccupied with the issue of *Access and Presence*; of obstacles and strategies of attaining the *optimal numbers* ("critical mass"): of women in political leadership, and less on the question of *Agenda setting* and *Accountability* (Nzomo, 2011 p. 4). Considering that females' collective action or movement played a critical role in the agenda-setting and advocacy for the gender quota in the constitutional review process, we explore whether this collective struggle has persisted. The study sought to capture the experiences of nominated female members of the county assembly (FMCAs), who were the direct beneficiaries of the electoral gender quota during the period 2017 to 2022, on their networking and collaboration with female fraternity from their respective counties, which is fundamental in collective agenda setting. We present their experiences and perceptions on collaborating and networking with the female leaders of groups/organizations involved in promoting females' empowerment, in the central Kenya Counties. The study was conducted in the five Counties of the former Central Province of Kenya, comprised of Kiambu, Kirinyaga, Murang'a, Nyandarua and Nyeri.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Genetic Origins of Females' Exclusion in the Political Arena

Human beings, like other species in the animal kingdom, are predominantly biologically born male or female with pronounced biological and physiological differences between the two sexes. However, as Ainsworth (2015) argues, some people straddle the boundary — their sex chromosomes say one thing, but their gonads (ovaries or testes) or sexual anatomy say another. These kinds of conditions — known as intersex conditions, or differences or disorders of sex development (DSDs) — a few ovarian genes, causes XX people to develop an ovotestis — a gonad with areas of both ovarian and testicular development which may be brought about by Gene mutations affecting gonad development resulting in a person with XY chromosomes developing typically female characteristics, whereas alterations in hormone signaling can cause XX individuals to develop along male lines (p3). Historically the genetic differences between males and females formed the bedrock for the socio-cultural construction of gender.

And as Ahl and Nelson (2010) argue, sex and gender are not synonyms (Ahl & Nelson, p. 5). All humans are born into this gendered world that ascribes specific roles to males and females giving rise to men and women. The differentiated sex and gender roles mean that men and women have different life experiences, knowledge, perspectives and priorities. For most human *his-story*, most societies have assigned leadership roles to males and reproductive roles to females. This is the source of the widespread structural marginalization of females in policy and decision-making institutions and processes. Thus, the marginalization of females has its origin in the sociocultural construction of this gendered world. As a result, the policies/programmes, including resource allocation, emanating from such institutions did not adequately address the practical and strategic sex and gender needs of females. Its

result is the unequal power relations between males and females, feminization of poverty and overall underdevelopment among others. This has necessitated the mainstreaming of females into leadership and decision-making institutions and processes at different levels. The purpose of bringing females onto the decision-making table was to ensure that their “difference” from males, including their world view, experiences, knowledge, perspectives and priorities, also inform development policies, programmes and other decisions to ensure they address females’ practical and strategic sex and gender needs. This being a power issue, females could not get it on a silver platter. They have, therefore, struggled for decades to get a space in the decision-making institutions such as parliament and devolved government institutions of governance. The following section contextualizes this struggle within the social science theoretical perspectives.

### **Theoretical Background**

This paper employs three theoretical perspectives. The Social movement theory, the Social Movement and Organization Theory and the feminist movement theory. They are briefly discussed below.

#### **Social movement theory**

The Social Movement theory which. Wikipedia encyclopedia defines as a loosely organized effort by a large group of people to achieve a particular goal, typically a social or political one. This may be to carry out a social change or to resist or undo one. It is a type of group action and may involve individuals, organizations, or both. Social movements have been described as “organizational structures and strategies that may empower oppressed populations to mount effective challenges and resist the more powerful and advantaged elites” (Glasberg & Shannon, 2010, p. 150). They represent a method of social change from the bottom within nations. Morris (2021), argues that social movements have likely existed for as long as oppressive human societies have, but only in the past few centuries has their praxis—meaning, the melding of theory and practice that they involve—developed into a craft, to be learned and honed. The praxis has always been and is still being developed by the marginalized and has of necessity to be nimbler than the scholarship, which all too often serves the powerful. Key tactics have been applied, refined and shared across continents, including the boycott, which comes from the Irish struggle against British colonialism; the hunger strike, which has deep historical roots in India and Ireland and was widely used by women suffragettes in the U.K.; and nonviolent direct action, devised by Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa and India. They led to the overthrow of many unjust systems, including the global colonial order, even as collective behavior theorists continued to see social movements as irrational, spontaneous and undemocratic. His conclusion is that wherever injustice exists, struggles will arise to abolish it. Communities will continue to organize these weapons of the oppressed and will become more effective freedom fighters through trial and error. Scholars face the challenge of keeping pace with these movements as they develop. But they must do more: they need to run faster, to illuminate the paths that movements should traverse in their journeys to liberate humanity (Morris, 2021).

#### **Social Movement and Organization Theory**

This paper uses the social movement and organization theory, as depicted by Taylor 1989, in his paper on Social Movement Continuity: The Women's Movement in Abeyance research, focusing on what happened to the organizations and networks of women who participated in the suffrage campaign focusing on the abeyance processes in social movements and by specifying features of social movement abeyance organizations. The term "abeyance" depicts a holding process by which movements sustain themselves in non-receptive political environments and provide continuity from one stage of mobilization to another (Taylor, 1989, p. 761) found with the vote won in the 1920s, the women's movement was left with no unifying goal. Moreover, tactical and ideological differences divided militant from moderate suffragists and those who saw winning the vote as a means from those who viewed it as an end.

As a result, the major social movement organizations of the suffrage movement evolved in two opposing directions. The militant branch of the movement, the National Woman's Party (NWP), launched a relentless campaign to pass an Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the constitution. The NWP was never a mass organization but saw itself as a feminist vanguard or elite (Lunar-dini, 1986). Hoping to enlist the support of former suffragists, NWP leader Alice Paul instead alienated both socialists and moderate feminists by her dictatorial style and the decision to focus on the ERA. The vast majority of suffragists feared that the ERA would eliminate the protective labor legislation that women reformers had earlier struggled to achieve (Balsler, 1987). The mainstream branch of the movement, the National American Woman Suffrage Association, formed the nonpartisan League of Women Voters. It spearheaded the opposition to the ERA, educated women for their new citizenship responsibilities, and advocated a broad range of reforms. Other activists in the suffrage campaign channeled their efforts into new or growing organizations that did not have an explicitly feminist agenda but promoted a vast range of specific causes that, in part, grew out of the expanded role options available to women (Cott, 1987). Thus, even though the women's movement was rapidly fragmenting, feminist activism continued throughout the 1920s and 1930s. But in the face of increasing hostility between the two camps of the suffrage movement, cooperation developed on only a few issues.

In addition to goal attainment and internal conflict, a third factor contributed to the dissipation of the mass base of the women's movement. Ironically, the role expansion for which the movement had fought fractured the bonds on which the solidarity of the movement had been built. As women's lives grew increasingly diverse, the definition of what would benefit women grew less clear. As a result, the NWP—which alone continued to claim the title "feminist"—had become increasingly isolated from the mainstream of American women and even from women's organizations. With the demise of the large mass-based organizations that propelled the suffrage movement, the more radical feminists sought out the NWP. When the NWP captured the feminist agenda, however, the broad program of emancipation narrowed to limited goals and tactics pursued by an elite group of women (Cott, 1987). This spelled the final demise of feminism as a mass movement (Taylor, 1989, p. 763/4). However, a successful struggle movement continues evolving for as previous goals are realized new ones are set, for as Kabira notes, the nature of a just struggle – it is self-propelling and self-perpetuating (Kabira, 2012, p. 7).

### **The feminist movement**

According to Catherine (2009), the goal of the *feminist movement* is the elimination of the social, political, economic, and cultural oppression of women, although the emphasis placed on these different elements has varied during the history of the movement. While there has been *feminist* activism in other countries, the Western *feminist movement* (was traditionally) taken to define the boundaries of the *theories* and goals (Catherine, 2009, p. 25).

In Kenya a strong feminist movement was involved in pursuing an electoral gender quota from 1992. In her book, a time of harvest, Kabira notes that the story of women and the constitution is the story of women's struggle towards a new constitutional dispensation. It is a journey of thousands, of millions of Kenyan women. It is our collective story. The women's story (Kabira, 2012, p. 3) which was realized with the entrenchment of the two-thirds gender rule in Kenya's constitution 2010 which states that the State shall take legislative and other measures to implement the principle that not more than two thirds of the members of elective or appointive bodies shall be of the same gender (CoK 2010, Article 27:8). The question this paper seeks to explore is: was the entrenchment of the electoral gender quota in the constitution an end or a means to an end? The answer to this question would determine the closure or continuation end of females' collective struggle under the institutions of Governance established under the Constitution of Kenya 2010. This paper builds on literature on social movement continuity, with a special focus on the feminist constitutional movement in Kenya, once the common agenda of the struggle was realized. The key unifying agenda, among females in Kenya, was inclusion in decision-making institutions and processes through the legislation of the affirmative action principle. This explained why Kenyan females, to date,

are preoccupied with the debate on the realization of the electoral gender quota in the national parliament and little attention is paid to the County Assemblies where the same have been realized. This is the gap that this paper seeks to address. The question we are asking is whether the struggle for the electoral gender quotas, in the County Assembly, was an end to itself or the collective struggle have continued under the new structure of the County Assembly in an effort liberate every female from the yoke of poverty, ignorance and sex and gender-based violence among other ills. For as Clement and O'Hara notes, empowerment is a process whereby “individuals and organized groups are able to imagine their world differently and to realize that vision by changing the relations of power that have been keeping them in poverty (Clement & O'Hara, 2018, p. 113).

### **Females' Collective Agency**

In this research, we use 'agency' as defined by Kabeer (1999) as the positive power which refers to people's capacity to define their own life choices and to pursue their own goals, even in the face of opposition, dissent and resistance from others (p. 4). Agency is the ability to identify goals or make choices and then act upon them. Women can exercise agency in many different ways: as individuals and collectively within the family, and through their participation in markets, politics, and other formal and informal networks. Agency can take several forms; for example, “bargaining and negotiation, deception and manipulation, subversion and resistance as well as more intangible, cognitive processes of reflection and analysis” (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438).

The idea of self-efficacy is also linked to agency. Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to do something. A female has to first be aware of her capacity to decide actions and then believe she is able to carry them out for her to act. Even when enough resources are available, a female may not be able (or willing) to leverage these resources to fulfil her aspirations unless she has self-efficacy, a form of critical consciousness.

The concept of critical consciousness was first formulated by the Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire in relation to the social oppression of illiterate peasants. It involves a form of self-awareness whereby people become aware of their position/status and try to change that reality. There are different levels of critical consciousness, with a high level allowing one “to become aware of their ability to make choices to change their lives (critical reflection), including by taking action against oppressive social and political structures (critical action)” (quoted in Clement & O'Hara, 2018, p. 112). One can spiral up and down different levels of critical consciousness.

Critical consciousness was later rephrased by feminist scholarship as consciousness-raising and has been instrumental in revealing how certain forms of agency may be immediate, and observable, but not durable. They may “not lead at the end to social change and to collective action that would allow women to challenge oppressive economic, social and political structures” (Clement & O'Hara 2018, p. 121). For example, a woman may realize her daughter needs to be given land to prosper as an adult and may convince her husband to include his daughter in his will, but the same woman may not realize that it is state policies that need to change to give all women greater access to land. To make any form of agency relevant to social change and transformation, women must be able and willing to critically reflect on gender inequalities and their structural causes (Cornwall 2016; Hanmer & Klugman 2016; Kabeer, 2005). Through the process of conscious raising, females have over the years identified their marginalization in the political arena as a major hindrance to their empowerment. To address this, they mobilized themselves into local, regional and global movements and using different strategies lobbied and negotiated for space in the political arena. This was realized through the adoption of electoral gender quotas which have been adopted and implemented by various countries, including Kenya. This paper explores whether, once the political space has been created, females' collective agency persists through females' movements to promote females' empowerment in other aspects of life. Thus, the continuation of the collective struggle through the networking and collaboration between the female MCAs and the female leaders of groups/organizations promoting females' empowerment in their respective counties.

## **Feminist movement Struggle for Space in the Political Arena**

Despite the widespread movement towards democratization in most countries, women are largely underrepresented at most levels of government, especially in ministerial and other executive bodies, and have made little progress in attaining political power in legislative bodies or in achieving the target endorsed by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of having 30 per cent women in positions at decision-making levels by 1995. Globally, only 10 per cent of the members of legislative bodies and a lower percentage of ministerial positions are now held by women. Indeed, some countries, including those that are undergoing fundamental political, economic and social changes, have seen a significant decrease in the number of women represented in legislative bodies. Although women make up at least half of the electorate in almost all countries and have attained the right to vote and hold office in almost all United Nations member states, women continue to be seriously underrepresented as candidates for public office. The traditional working patterns of many political parties and government structures continue to be barriers to women's participation in public life. Women may be discouraged from seeking political office by discriminatory attitudes and practices, family and child-care responsibilities, and the high cost of seeking and holding public office. Women in politics and decision-making positions in governments and legislative bodies contribute to redefining political priorities, placing new items on the political agenda that reflect and address women's gender-specific concerns, values and experiences, and providing new perspectives on mainstream political issues (United Nations, n.d.)

It is for this reason that females collectively embarked on a journey to create their space in the political arena. As Nzomo (2011) argues, 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 (p. 4). Throughout the written *herstory*, females, through their collective struggle have made major milestones in their emancipation at global, regional and local levels. The following are some examples of females' collective struggle at local, regional and global levels.

The following section highlights females' struggle, for representation in the political arena, at the global level and in selected countries among them Ireland, Nigeria, South Africa, Rwanda and Kenya.

### **Feminist Movement Struggle at Global Level**

Globally, there have been feminist movements driving various global collective initiatives aimed at addressing females' exclusion in the political arena. Scherpereel (2016), argues that the eighties was a period, characterized by "active women's movements, international pressures, and propitious institutional arrangements (that) promoted rapid representational gains in many states (Scherpereel, 2016, p. 2). This brought about female solidarities across the world, primarily in response to their participation in the UN's International Decade for Women (1975–1985), with its four world conferences and preparatory national and regional meetings. The first World Conference on Women was held in Mexico City in 1975. The conference decided to celebrate the decade 1975-1985 as the Decade for Women. The 1980 Copenhagen Conference was one of several global conferences that followed the 1975 Mexico City Conference. In 1979, the UN adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which is considered women's international bill of rights. They organized international conferences such as the UN Third World Conference on Women which took place between 15 and 26 July 1985 in Nairobi, Kenya followed by the Fourth Conference for Women held in Beijing China (1995). According to Phillips (2012), the fourth and most influential world conference on women delivered was the Beijing Declaration, calling for "women's empowerment and their full participation based on equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power." The idea that women needed not just the equal right to vote and participate in politics, but "full participation based on equality," had been gathering force for a number of years. Activists around the world had long challenged the underrepresentation of



women in legislatures and decision-making assemblies (Phillips, 2012, p. 1). As illustrated by the outcomes of the Nairobi and Beijing World Conferences, existing power relations that prevent women from leading fulfilling lives operate at many levels of society, from the most personal to the highly public. Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) Strategic objective No 7 is on *Women in power and decision-making and seeks the empowerment of women through equal participation in political life* which is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but also a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. (And) without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspectives at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved (BPFA). The greatest achievement in the struggle for females' descriptive representation in the political arena was the introduction of electoral quotas. According to Dahlerup et al (2010), the electoral quotas vary depending on where they are mandated. Legal quotas are mandated in the constitution and/or electoral law and are, consequently, binding for all political parties. Voluntary party quotas are mandated in the party statutes or party programme and are adopted by individual parties for their electoral lists (Dahlerup et al, 2010, p. 408).

Through the free flow of information across national borders, encouraging and supporting transnational NGO communication, and gaining endorsements for international treaties and conventions, as well as targeting development aid invested in strengthening women's empowerment (Drude & Dahlerup, 2015, p. 7), gender quotas were adopted by many countries around the world. Tripp and Kang (2008) argue that in the decade following the Beijing Conference, between 1995 and 2005, more than 55 countries adopted quotas (p. 339). According to Berry and Kamau 2020, more than 120 countries have adopted legislative gender quotas to advance women's political power (Berry et al, 2020, p. 2). Many other countries have discussions underway over whether to implement quotas. Although the global feminist movement constituted the highest level of females' struggle for empowerment including political emancipation, it is worth noting that the diffusion of norms did not occur in a linear from global to lower levels or vice versa but rather the regional, national and local also influenced the global norms and vice versa.

### **Local Feminist movements struggles for females' political representation**

#### **Feminist movement Struggle for political representation in the United States of America**

The earliest documented females' collective struggle for political space, in the United States of America, dates back to the late 1800s when from 1880 to the early 1900s female suffragists. The Women's Suffrage Movement was a social, grass-roots movement (Dolton & Graham (2014) p31) formed by Women's Alliances in different states in the United States such as Washington, Kansas among others with an agenda to battle for the vote as Susan B. Anthony and Ida Harper notes "It must be said to its credit [...] that during its brief existence women received more recognition in general than they ever had had from the old parties" (Stanton et al p. 438). According to Clemens, women's Associations in the United States, 1880s–1920s Social capital has proven exceptionally fruitful as a metaphor (Clemens 1999 p 614) as the female collectives made tremendous achievement of their struggle in 1928 through the repeal of the Representation of the people Act of 1918 and the passage of the Equal Franchise Act whose objective was to assimilate the franchise of men and women in respect to parliamentary and local government elections (Equal Franchise Act 1928 chapter 1:1). This legislation granted equal voting rights for all men and women aged over 21 years.

#### **Feminist movement Struggle for political representation in Sweden**

In Sweden, decades of sustained females' struggle, through the women's movement, realized tremendous gains through changes in the electoral laws to accommodate gender quotas, in the 1990s. The 1990s witnessed resurgence and a generational 1, renewal of the women's movement as younger women became involved. The impressive mobilization across classes and generations was heralded as a 'new women's movement' (e.g. Morgonbris, 1992, p. 3 quoted in Sainsbury (2004, p. 81). Its newness was reflected in a new generation of activists, inventive tactics,

more emphasis on networking than previously, and a stronger presence of trade union women. The main organizers of the network were women academics and publicists. They demanded for gender equality called for changes involving both sexes – not just women. Men and women were to share equally the tasks of caring and earning. The achievement of this goal required changes in labour market policy, taxation, family law, education, social security measures, and public services. Their other demand was a call for greater democracy. Initially framing the issue in terms of the equal rights of all citizens rather than the representation of women's interests emphasized an understanding of political women as citizens rather than party activists, strategically converting political women from a minority within each of the parties into a majority of the electorate. As a majority of the electorate, women laid claim to at least half of the seats (Sainsbury, 2004, p. 82). Some of the Political Parties such as the Social Democrats changed their by-laws to stipulate that the party lists provided an equal distribution of sexes at the 1993 party congress. The change gave new legitimacy to the existing praxis of alternating lists, pushing Social Democratic women's parliamentary representation closer to 50 percent. Their share rose from 41 to 48 percent in the 1994 election. (And) Women's parliamentary representation rebounded, reaching a new high of 40 percent in the 1994 election. The Social Democratic government that came into office after the 1994 election was the first cabinet in which women and men were equally represented. These outcomes were the product of the combined pressures of women inside the parties and the external women's movement (Sainsbury, 2004, p. 80).

### **Feminist movement Struggle for females' political representation in Ireland**

In Ireland, the term 'Irish suffrage movement' may be applied to a loose amalgam of scattered groups of varying sizes, which began in the 1870s. Among these groups were the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association (IWSLGA) founded in Dublin by Anna and Thomas Haslam in 1876 ( Beaumont et al., 2020, p. 1058). Beaumont et al (2020) argue that the Irish women's movement reached its peak of activity between 1908 and 1914. The movement was made up of numerous regional and local groups (and) was not characterized by the militant versus constitutional dichotomy (although) some groups adopted militant tactics such as the Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL) and Irish Women's Suffrage Society (IWSS), there were many more non-militant groups including the long-established IWSLGA, the Munster Women's Franchise League (MWFL) and the Irish Women's Reform League (IWRFL). In addition, the Irish Women's Suffrage Federation (IWSF), an umbrella organization founded in 1911, brought together several smaller, non-militant, local groups. The suffrage movement in Ireland as in many other countries, had a diversity of views and tactics, including constitutional and more militant methods. Beaumont et al (2020) argue that the Irish women's movement in the 1920s and 1930s was not fully coherent but rather focused on a range of social, economic and political issues and reforms relevant to women's lives. Therefore, the suffrage campaign as a 'social movement' (was not) a cohesive and united organization. As in many other countries, the movement in Ireland included a diversity of views and tactics (2020). However, despite this diversity, a major achievement, for example, in the Irish Free State established in 1922 was the winning of the right to vote in national elections on equal terms with men and for women within that jurisdiction the same year (Beaumont et al, 2020, p. 1065). In the post-suffrage period, Irish women, continued to use their experience in the suffrage movement to resist restrictive legislation led by organizations such as the National Council of Women of Ireland (NCWI) and the Joint Committee of Women's Societies and Social Workers (JCWSSW) (Beaumont et al, 2020., p. 1065). With reference to the Irish suffrage movement, Beaumont et al. (2020) state that suffrage movements are complex identities, actions and motivations behind women's collective action (with) continuities over time through periods of mobilization and latency and visibility and invisibility.

### **Feminist movement Struggle for political representation in Rwandan**

In the post-1994 genocide in Rwanda, females were actively involved in the reconstruction and peace-building in their country. According to Mwambari (2017), given the significantly higher number of women compared to that

of men in the new society and given women's activism at different levels of society, the consultative talks included a number of women participants. Their participation was aimed at correcting previous laws that restricted women's freedom, and to uplift their place in society (Mwambari, 2017, p. 92). Females were mobilized through their organizations such as the national umbrella organization Pro-femme/Twese Hamwe (which) had the ability to mobilize ordinary women in rural areas as well as the elites in urban areas. In the period after the genocide, it was one of the most active organizations that created various peace initiatives in communities around the country (Mwambari, 2017, p. 88). Other groups included the Rwanda Women Network. Through these networks, women were mobilized and actively participated in the reconstruction and peace-building including the constitution-making consultations. The constitution of Rwanda entrenched an affirmative action principle which provides for the election of females in the Chamber of Deputies as follows:

Twenty-four (24) women: Two from each Province and the City of Kigali. These shall be elected by a joint assembly composed of members of the respective District, Municipality, Town or Kigali City Councils and members of the Executive Committees of women's organizations in the Province, Kigali City, District, Municipalities, Towns and Sector levels (Article 76:2).

On the appointment of representatives to the Senate, the Constitution notes that "The organs responsible for the nomination of Senators shall take into account national unity and equal representation of both sexes (Article 82 part 2). The implementation of the constitutional affirmative action provisions, which set a 30 per cent quota for women in elected positions, has seen an increase in the number of females entering the political arena since 2003. In 2003, barely a decade after the genocide, nearly 50 per cent of parliamentary seats were occupied by women. The 2013 Rwandan Parliamentary elections marked a significant milestone, as women candidates secured a remarkable 64 per cent of the seats. This achievement solidified Rwanda's position as a global leader in promoting women's participation in politics (UN Women, 2018).

### **Feminist movement Struggle for political representation in Kenya**

In Kenya, the females' struggle for political participation spanned several decades. According to Kabira (2012), the movement had its origins in the self-help groups which existed even in pre-colonial societies (Kabira, 2012, p. 13). According to Kabira (2012), the 1995 United Nations Conference gave Kenya Women's Movement an opportunity to reflect on their directions and their priorities. Many individual women in the professions such as law, media and academia organized workshops, seminars, educational tours and public campaigns to educate women on their rights. Federation of women lawyers (FIDA-K), women in the media, Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD), and many women's organizations have been at the forefront in ensuring women's interests are raised to the highest level of leadership (among them) political and other leadership representations (p. 16). Kabira (2012) notes that a National Women's Convention held at the Kenyatta International Conference Center in 1992 and attended by over 2000 women, was significant in setting the Kenya women's agenda which focused on ensuring a critical mass of at least 33 per cent of women's representation in parliament and other political and public decision-making bodies (p. 16). Following this convention, the women's movement initiated some initiatives to legislate the affirmative such as Phoebe Asiyo's motion which aimed at increasing the number of women parliamentarians to 18 at least two from each province and two extra from the Rift Valley Province (p. 20). The motion did not pass. On April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2000, Hon Beth Mugo, in collaboration with the women's organizations and the support of the affirmative action committee, tabled the affirmative action bill to improve and increase representation for marginalized groups, particularly women, in policy-making institutions (Parliamentary Hansard April 12, 2000). Parliament was non-committal and they pushed the responsibility of affirmative action to the Constitution of Kenya Review Commission (CKRC) which was just embarking on the comprehensive constitutional review process. At this time, Kabira (2012) notes, the females were already coordinated, focused and had defined

their agenda clearly (p. 30). It is this well-coordinated movement that set on the constitutional review process journey with a view of ensuring that affirmative action is entrenched into Kenya's new constitution. In 2007, Hon Martha Karua, the then Minister for Justice, published a bill to amend the Constitution to allow the creation of 50 special seats for women's representation in Parliament. The women's movement rallied their support behind the Bill. A male-dominated parliament flopped the Bill. With several initiatives and lost opportunities, thousands of Kenyan women embarked on a journey to a new constitutional dispensation (Kabira, 2012, p. 3) whose destination was to entrench the affirmative action principle in Kenya's constitution. They never relented.

The efforts of women were not in vain, and the gender quota, commonly known as the "two-thirds gender rule," was enshrined in Kenya's Constitution of 2010. The Constitution stipulates that the State is obligated to take legislative and other measures to implement the principle that no more than two-thirds of the members of elective or appointive bodies should be of the same gender (COK 27(8)). Additionally, the Constitution requires the inclusion of special seat members to ensure that the composition of the assembly does not exceed two-thirds of a single gender (COK 177:1(b)), among other provisions. Implementation of Kenya's gender quota has produced notable gains. After the 2013 elections, women fared better in county assemblies, holding 33 per cent of the seats — yet this level was only achieved through a nomination process designed to maintain compliance with the gender quota, rather than through open, competitive elections. Just 82 women were elected to 1,450 open county assembly seats. The August 2017 elections saw these numbers improve slightly: 88 women were elected to non-reserved county assembly seats — 6 per cent of the total. This led political parties to nominate more than 750 women to county-level reserved seats to maintain compliance with the gender rule (Berry & Kamau, 2020, p. 2).

As illustrated in the foregoing, the gender electoral quotas were the greatest achievement of females' struggle at the different levels. They have greatly contributed to increased descriptive representation of females in the political arena. However, they have not gone without criticism such as the competency of the beneficiaries of the affirmative action seats but it is worth noting that, as Allen et al (2014), note, the conceptions of merit may simply reflect dominant male attributes (p. 144). It may be important to develop female-friendly criteria for measuring the outcome of the quotas.

### **Challenges to Feminist Movement Struggle for political space**

Despite the many achievements of the feminist movements, the struggle was not without challenges. This is because women are not one harmonious group and so they may at times have divergent opinions and perspectives on certain issues. In Nigeria, for example, Nigerian women, were divided along political affiliations and many of them viewed the Women's Movement claims critically, especially those who were linked to the female section of the Action Group (AG). They criticized the interference of Mrs. Adekogbe in the political sphere, considering that it was an area that should be reserved for men, the only ones capable of taking political decisions (Panata & Zancarini, 2016, p. 182). In Zimbabwe, for example, the Women's Coalition on the Constitution, a broad lobbying and advocacy front that pressed for the adoption of a constitution that would protect women's political, social, economic and cultural rights was faced with financial constraints. This pushed the members to pool resources and complemented each other to sustain a process that did not necessarily fall within their particular organizational ambits (Shereen, 2005, p. 3). In Kenya, the female constitutional movement faced several challenges, including financial constraints and the patriarchal culture. In an interview with the Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE Hub), one female Pathfinder from Kisumu noted that men often take advantage of women and can easily divide and rule them. She said that this was the worst challenge she faced during the constitutional review process (WEE Hub Cluster 4 Report, 2023). Religion, which is another aspect of culture was a divisive force among the females as another Pathfinder from Nairobi pathfinder narrates:

*Women were at times divided amongst themselves on certain issues. For example, Christian and Muslim women were divided on the Kadhi's Court and the exemption clause for Muslim women concerning inheritance. Christian women believed that the Muslims were trying to bring the Sharia Law through the Kadhi Courts which they were opposed to. Muslim Women were in support of these issues as they said they were denied talaka/inheritance upon divorce because the Kadhi Courts were not run professionally. Anchoring them in the constitution would guarantee them their rights in Marriage and divorce. As regards inheritance, the Muslim Women preferred what is provided for in the Koran since adopting the proposal by other Kenyan women would make them lose what they were guaranteed by the Holy Book which included inheriting from the father, husband and brothers (WEE Hub Cluster 4 Report, 2023).*

But as WEE Hub notes, women were able to address the challenges that arose along the way and move on as a united front in pursuit of their constitutional agenda. This is what enabled them to realize the rights including affirmative action, the social and economic rights among other provisions that were enshrined in the Constitution of Kenya 2010.

## **Conclusion**

Literature shows that the feminist movement has achieved a great deal, including the establishment of gender quotas for positions of power and decision-making at the global, regional, and local levels. The implementation of the gender quota has contributed greatly to the increased descriptive representation of females in the political arena at national and devolved institutions of governance. However, the struggle is not yet over. Females are yet to enjoy the benefits of representation at the different levels of decision-making. As O'Neil (2016) notes, there is a need to have in place well-designed laws (that are) tailored to the context and anticipate how new rules will work alongside existing laws (e.g. electoral rules), social norms and informal rules (O'Neil et al, 2016, p. 10). Therefore, new groups must continue to form and surviving organizations continue to transform in response to environmental shifts as well as internal needs (see Disney & Gelb, 2000; Evans, 2003; Ferree & Martin 1995; Whittier, 1995) to continue with the agenda. The females who enter into the positions of power and decision-making, created through the gender quota must not lose the vision of females' struggle for representation. They must pick up the baton, from their predecessors and, as in a relay, continue the struggle until all females are liberated from the yoke of poverty, ignorance, discrimination and oppression including gender-based violence in its different faces. Despite the establishment of gender quotas, women are still underrepresented in institutions of governance and decision-making. To address this, women must learn from the successes of their predecessors in the women's movement. They must realize that the descriptive representation was a means to their substantive representation. As the literature reviewed in this section illustrate, a strong women's movement was essential for women's realization of the descriptive representation. However, as Kabira notes, we have not reached the destination yet, we need to reflect and tell those who are new in the journey that even those who have exited from this world continue to water the seeds of freedom (Kabira, 2012, p 3). As the struggle enters another phase, there need for a strong feminist movement to move it forward and ensure females are substantively represented in the institutions of governance. According to Stetson Substantive representation is defined in terms of the representative seeking to advance a group's policy preferences and interests (Stetson, 2001, p6). The representatives should, therefore, advance the practical and strategic sex and gender needs of the represented, in their respective institutions. Those who access the political arena, through the electoral gender quotas must, therefore, work closely with the females' fraternity to realize this goal.

The following section presents research findings of a study conducted in the former Central Province of Kenya with the aim of establishing, from the voices of female beneficiaries of the electoral gender quota principle, enshrined in Kenya's Constitution (2010), in the County Assemblies, whether there is networking and collaboration

between them and the female fraternity in setting and advocating for the females' agenda in their respective county assemblies.

### **Voices of Nominated Female Members of The County Assemblies (FMCAS) on Their Engagement With The Female Constituency From Former Central Kenya Province**

This section presents the finding of primary research conducted in the counties of former Central Kenya Province, namely Kiambu, Kirinyaga, Murang'a, Nyandarua and Nyeri. It sought to capture the experiences and challenges in networking and collaboration with the female leaders of organizations/groups in their respective counties with a view of the setting and advocating for the females' agenda in the county assembly. The section covers the research methodology, the findings and the conclusions, recommendations and policy proposals.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

This was predominantly qualitative research. The researchers employed female-friendly participatory research methods that enabled the participants to share their world view, their experiences, knowledge and perspectives on networking and collaboration between the nominated female members of the county assembly (FMCAs) and the female leaders of groups/organizations involved in promoting females' empowerment in their respective counties.

The study used both primary and secondary data. Secondary data, referring to data collected by researchers from the works of other investigators (Jameel & Majid, 2018, p. 1), were obtained through a comprehensive review of published books and journal articles. On the other hand, primary data, gathered directly from research participants by the study investigators and exclusively used for this research (Jameel & Majid, 2018, p. 1), were obtained through in-depth interviews and panel discussions with nominated female members of the former Central Kenya Province's five county assemblies. The researchers employed pre-prepared research tools, including in-depth interviews and panel discussion guides, to collect the primary data. Face-to-face interviews and panel discussions were conducted, and a mobile phone voice recorder was used to record these interactions. The researchers subsequently listened to the recordings and transcribed the relevant sections for the purpose of this paper.

The study population comprised the elected and nominated members of the county assemblies (MCAs) from the five counties of the former Central Province in Kenya, for the period 2017 to 2022. From the entire population, the researcher narrowed down to the female members of the county assemblies (FMCAs) who comprised those elected Ward representatives through universal suffrage and those nominated to represent various interest groups in their respective County Assemblies.

The study targeted at least a third of the nominated FMCAs from 2017 to 2022 in each of the five County Assemblies of the former Central Province in Kenya. Table 1 below shows the total target per County:

**Table 1: Study sample size of Nominated Female MCAs from Central Kenya Counties (2017-2022)**

County	Nominated Female MCAs (2017 – 2022)			30% of Nominated	Nearest whole Number
	Marginalized	Gender Top up	Total	FMCAs	
Kiambu	1	28	29	9.66	10
Kiririnyaga	2	9	11	3.67	4
Murang'a	2	14	16	5.33	5
Nyeri	2	10	12	4	4
Nyandarua	2	10	12	4	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>27</b>

*Source of data: IEBC Data Report of 2017 Elections (2020)*

The result was 9.66 for Kiambu, 3.66 for Kirinyaga, 5.33 for Murang’a, and 4 for Nyeri and Nyandarua Counties, respectively. The fractions for Kiambu, 9.66, Kirinyaga, 3.66 and 5.33 for Murang’a were rounded up to the nearest whole numbers. This formula produced 10 for Kiambu, 4 for Kirinyaga and 6 for Murang’a counties, respectively.

The study employed purposive sampling, with the assistance of women leaders who either linked the researcher with the nominated FMCAs from their respective counties or mobilized them for me. Once linked to the nominated FMCAs, the latter also assisted in linking me with their colleagues or contacted them for me and set the date and time to go and conduct the interviews or the panel discussions.

## STUDY FINDINGS

### Responses

A total of 25 nominated FMCAs from the five target counties from the former Central Province in Kenya, for the period 2017 – 2022, participated in the study. Figure 2 below presents the number of participants from each county:

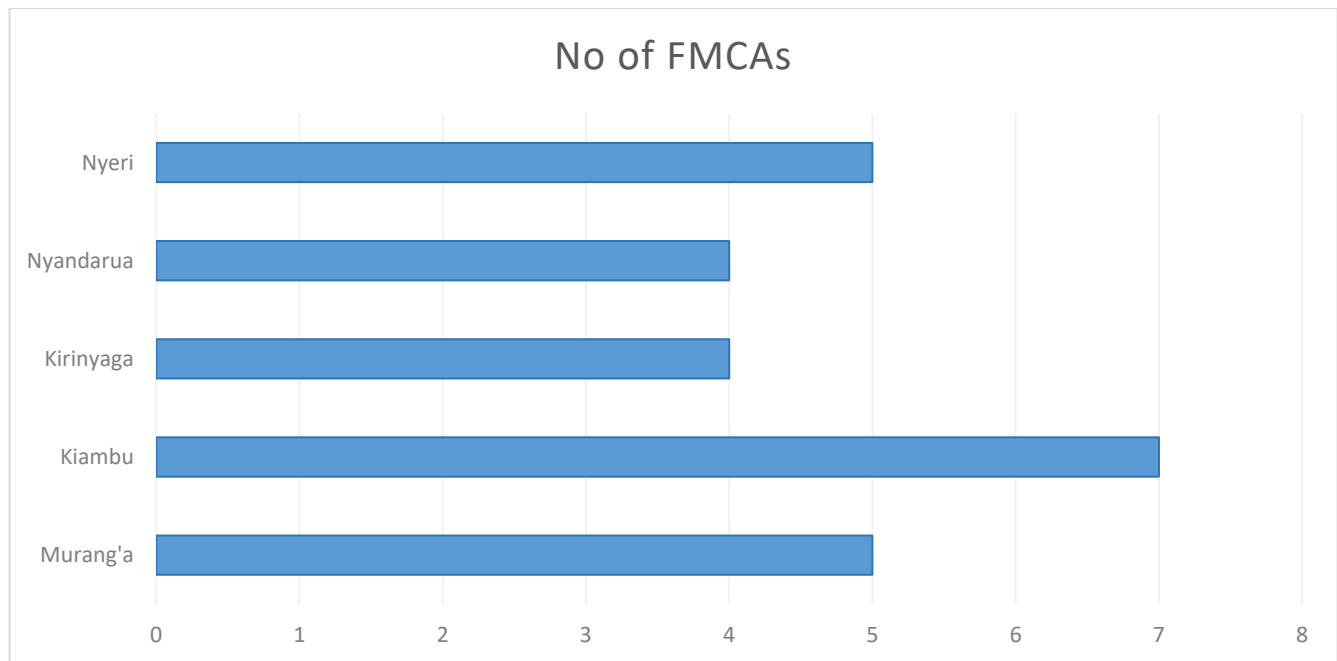


Figure 1: Number of nominated FMCAs participants per county

Seven (7) nominated FMCAs were drawn from the Kiambu; five (5) from Murang’a and Nyeri each; while Kirinyaga and Nyandarua had four (4) each. The following had been identified but did not turn up for the interview; one (1) from Kirinyaga, two (2) from Nyeri and two (2) from Murang’a. They were replaced with others to ensure that at least 30% of the participants were from each county. However, as this was predominantly qualitative research, saturation was reached after interviewing 25 nominated FMCAs, with no new information being generated. The interviews were then closed.

### Networking and Collaborating with the Female Leaders

The nominated FMCAs were asked to share their experiences regarding networking and collaboration between the nominated FMCAs and female leaders of groups and organizations in promoting females’ empowerment in their respective counties. The following were the responses:

- PD1:1: *We do not engage with them*
- PD1:2: *I am a beneficiary. I was lucky to get engaged with women's organizations CMD, NDI FIDA they used to invite us for training activities*
- PD1:3: *Women in the villages are very good. It is easy to access the groups and so long as you have that title with you, the fact you are a Mheshimiwa (Kiswahili term for honorable or your excellency often associated with elected leaders), they will give you an ear and that way you will chance to deliberate issues with them.*
- PD1:1: *I was a member of MYWO. I continued to interact with the women even when in the County Assembly because I was an official in the group and I am still an official*
- PD2:1: *Outside the County Assembly? No. Very minimal outside the County Assembly*
- PD2:2: *I visited all wards in the county to meet with people with disabilities. I used my own resources as we were not given any resources.*
- PD2:3: *Women tell us what they would want to be done but it's very difficult because we have no resources*
- PD5: *We continue as members (of groups we were in before being nominated) we humble ourselves and put your leso (Kiswahili term for a piece of cloth used as a wrapper by women) on the ground and sit as they are doing and they feel very very happy that you are now going down to where they are (one of the discussants was going for a meeting with her MYWO, who were meeting at her home, after this (PD 5)*
- II3:1 *We engaged with women leaders, but I feel we could have done more. We didn't have a budget for the women's caucus, so we couldn't constructively engage with them. We needed money to facilitate meetings, media coverage, and other activities. We thought we couldn't keep getting money from our pockets, so we decided to use the money that female MCAs had received from the government.*
- II1:2 *As women, ladies in the County Assembly we work with them, we rely on them, we want to understand we talked with them. Being an MCAs we are the representatives of Wanjiku. There are various platforms where we meet with them. They have forums. Women have formed forums. Maybe women want to empower each other. Okay. They are entrepreneurs. They come up with groups' forums to study each other and you find they need us fellow women leaders because we are the ones who are going to represent their needs to the County (Assembly). There are times they are even invited to the County Assembly to do public participation (N.B The respondent believed there are forums though she had not personally encountered one having been in the CA for about 11/2 years)*
- II2:3 *I have had a hand in very many organizations, including those that I am not a member, as I have assisted very many women's groups to achieve, even before I joined the County Assembly, including linking them to donors and the National Council of Women of Kenya, which was led by Lillian who was a lawyer. She educated me on how to fight for women's rights as well as get lawyers who could assist women who could not afford to pay for legal services.*
- II3:4 *I was working in business in a salon. I started with my fellow women from the salon. I came one day from work and I went to a cyber and typed a small note and told them I want us to meet on Monday. I never told them the agenda. They all came. I told them I want us to form a group. Each one pays two hundred shillings for registration. They all registered. As we are talking today we have two million in our account. We do table banking and give loans at 5% interest*
- II5:3 *I was a member of women's groups and I did not leave I am still a leader. First of all, you have to be very sober and differentiate between the two when you are working as an MCA but when in the group you are a are members like any other you should not go with your leadership. (About engagement of other groups) I have been going to different parishes in the diocese to talk to Catholic Women Association (CWA). Those of us who had groups we continued to meet them though based on availability. CREAM brought us together with the other though we only met with the other women once or twice.*



II5:4 *We have really tried but as you understand a lot of it is lack of resources because for you to go look out for these women leaders and also to interact with women with the hard economic times that are there, there is an expectation for every meeting you attend to whether you form it or is called by other people. Yes, we have been able to meet with other women but it's not as it should be.*

II5:5 *I am the woman leader of Supkem. I am still with the women, the Swahili groups. Before I joined I think we were very close but after I joined I don't know where the gap comes in. After you join the seat (MCA), I don't know why people come to fear you somehow. They are not social as they used to be even somebody approaching you is a problem but you are still the same woman but you see them sending somebody if they want to talk to me they are sending somebody.*

## **Conclusion**

The findings demonstrate that the majority of the nominated FMCAs who had a prior engagement with female organizations/groups, as members or leaders, such as II3:4 and II2:3, did not sever those ties and they continued networking and collaborating with the group. However, as leaders, at the county level, they did not extend their engagement to other organizations/groups. Those who had not belonged to a female group/organization, such as III:2, did not have engagement with any particular group. They note that it was not very easy for them to network and collaborate with the female leaders of groups/organizations in their respective counties. With an unstructured engagement between them and the female leaders of groups/organizations, there was a semblance of females' collective agency that could be termed a females' movement aimed at championing the females' agenda in the County Assembly.

## **Challenges to Networking and Collaboration with women leaders**

When the nominated FMCAs were asked to identify the challenges they experienced in their effort to network and collaborate with the women leaders of groups and organizations, their responses were as follows:

PD1:1: *The electorate does not differentiate between the nominated and elected MCAs and we the nominated have no allocation for project funds and you cannot go to the electorate empty-handed. Therefore, we don't go*

PD1:2 *The only problem is that when Wanjiku sees you, they have high expectations. They seem like you have goodies to take to them and the reality is you may not have anything. And again you cannot call women leaders to a meeting and you do not facilitate them. You have to facilitate them and you only have your salary and allowances*

PD2:1: *We the nominated have no funds allocated*

PD1: *The Constitution is not clear on who is supposed to be nominated. Normally what happens the leaders who get the opportunity to nominate someone pick probably their relatives or whoever someone they are related to irrespective of the level of education or the understanding or even that calling. You know leadership especially governance is not something you just pick from nowhere; I mean it has to start from you from the inside for it to get to that level. When they are nominating they do not consider that. So when you meet at the Assemble not all of us are called to be leaders to lead Wanjiku or the kind of leadership you are talking about may not get a good number. So even going back to Waniku or to the village, you find it's just a few who are positive of the leadership that is most needed at the grassroots level*

III:1 *To mobilize women or even take them through any kind of training or even have a seat and have interaction for me to understand what the main challenges I do not have the resources to do that. Our nominated women in the County Assembly have zero budget. The leadership yardstick in this country is about development. So if you put me in the Assembly and you do not provide me with the resources my constituents will judge me as they are judging the elected MC (who has all the resources) that I have not worked*

- II1:2 *There is no coordination. We do not coordinate and we don't work hand in hand we don't cooperate. Not every woman will be able to go there and share their challenges*
- II4: *I vied but I didn't win and later got nominated. I tried to engage with the women groups but the elected male MCA would tell me I had no right to engage with them because, "they did not elect you; they rejected you and they elected me to represent them. He would tell me (in front of the women), "ask them they are here. They rejected you".*  
*Such humiliations make it very difficult to engage with women's groups/organizations.*
- II2:1 *There are very many challenges as women are being taught how to reject women's leadership. They are told "If you are led by so and so (woman lead) won't she will steal your money?"*
- II3:4 *I started going to the grassroots (Mashinani Kiswahili term for grassroots) to educate the females on the different funds Uwezo Fund and even when the Hustler fund is given you will also benefit from it. I start training two groups but I can tell you even the third meeting we never attended. The elected MCA rushed to the Governor and said that he wanted I specifically be rung and told "I have no business; I wait until your time comes"*
- II5:4 *Lack of resources because for you to go out looking for these women leaders and even interact with the women, the hard economic times that are there for every meeting that is there, there is an expectation, whether you form it or is called by other people. We have been able to talk with the other women but in the real sense, it is not as it should be. Not so much. The main challenge has been resources such as money, and transport among others. Basically, it is resources which is the main challenge*
- II5:5(i) *Before I joined, I think we were very close but after I joined, I don't know where the gap comes in. After you join the seat (MCA), I don't know why people come to fear you somehow. They are not social as they used to be even somebody approaching you is a problem but you are still the same woman but you see them sending somebody if they want to talk to me they are sending somebody.*
- II5:5(ii) *Another challenge is that I don't have money but when someone asks me for financial support and I am unable to support them, they seem like I am refusing to support them. We don't have any kitty for community development from the County Assembly, as the elected MCAs, but someone wants you to support a community project but you cannot...you finance everything with your salary*

## **Conclusion**

Almost every FMCA involved in the study, either through in-depth interviews or panel discussions, identified a lack of resources to facilitate meetings or forums between themselves and the female constituency, from their respective counties, as a major challenge for networking and collaboration between the two groups. Intimidation from elected MCAs was also identified as a challenge as the latter feel threatened when they see the nominated FMCA engaging with the female constituency. As II4 and II3:4 noted, the elected male MCAs will use different mechanisms to intimidate and keep the nominated FMCA away from engaging with the female electorate. Ignorance of the role of elected and nominated MCAs, among the electorate, was also cited as another challenge. As a result of this knowledge gap, the electorate tends to judge the nominated MCAs, who have no development kitty, the same way as the elected MCA who have a development kitty to spend on projects on the ground. Another challenge, that was identified by Participant II5:5, is the social gap or social distance that develops immediately after a colleague joins the County Assembly. This undermines interactions between the nominated FMCA and the female electorate.

## **Strengthening Networking and Collaboration between Female MCAs and women leaders**

The nominated Female Members of the County Assembly were asked to share their opinion on how to strengthen networking and collaboration between female MCAs and women leaders. The following were their responses:

- PD1:1: *In the near future, they should give us a fund (to enable and facilitate women) ...If we are given a fund even if a coin we can go and support the girls, PWDs and women*
- PD1:2: *We have a group. We started a group where we contribute and assist one another when one is invited to go to meet the women*
- PD1:3: *Need to educate our people because the reason why we are not having many women elected our people have an issue with embracing women's leadership.*
- PD1:4 *Something must be done that after you are nominated you are assured of the ticket for five years with no intimidations because we've been doing less of what we were supposed to have been doing because you are given a mandate by the Party if you go against the Party*
- II2: 3 *If there can be allocated a fund for women, leave alone those for women's empowerment but a fund such as AGPO which is very good because women can register with AGPO and be given some tenders...women access to the affirmative action funds*
- II1: 1 *There should be a kitty for nominated women MCAs ...*
- II1:2 *Women who are already in the County Assembly to coordinate. To work hand-in-hand with those other women who are outside there because maybe most of the time an MCA being in the office may not actually understand very well what the fellow women or women out there go through. But if we have other women representatives. Okay. As you see in every Ward we have representatives based on age bracket, a lady to go out there, source information, interact with fellow women, and know what they need. And they come and share Also if there are forums formed for women. Women from many groups, the chamas, the SACCOs, if they come together it's me I interact with them I would run with them. coming together from should be such a forum where women from. Because, when I am in the office maybe I don't interact with everyone or I don't get a chance to interact with everyone*
- II5:3 *Through taking those women in leadership to make them understand that we cannot all fit in the Assembly because it's like those who are left out are not so positive to the ones who go in so even if you want at times even if you to talk to them they have a cold attitude ya but still I believe we can do something to improve it. There can be somebody to talk to them separately and talk to the FMCAs separately and then bring them together and try to make them understand today it's me tomorrow it will be you and we need to support each other. They shouldn't feel now one is in the Assembly she is in another class and even the MCA they need to understand they are there for just a certain period and they will come back to the people. We all need to be very positive and respect one another; those inside and those outside.*

## **Conclusion**

The participants noted that networking and collaboration between them and the female leaders of organizations/groups, in their respective counties, could be improved by addressing the current challenges such as providing a development kitty for the nominated FMCAs, protecting the nominated FMCAs against intimidation in the county assembly, providing a forum where the two groups could meet and engage and educating the female constituency to be receptive of the FMCAs and bridge the social gap between the two groups. The FMCAs were also proactive in solving the challenges such as initiating a group to support each as noted by PD1:2. Addressing these challenges will be critical in enhancing effective representation of females as they will be able to collectively set their agenda and collectively pursue it.

## **CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

### **Conclusion**

The literature reviewed illustrates the significance of a strong feminist movement in driving various local, regional and global collective initiatives aimed at addressing females' exclusion in the political arena (Scherpereel,

2016, p. 21). Despite the factors that may divide them, women have consistently found common ground in pursuing shared agendas. The Irish women's movement won the right to vote for women in national elections on equal terms with men in 1922. The Rwandan and Kenyan women's movements saw the entrenchment of gender quota provisions in the constitutions of their respective countries. For effective impact, women from various backgrounds, such as law, the media, and academia, need to work together (Kabira, 2012c, p. 16). Civil society organizations, and politicians among others, must be involved in the entire process from the setting of the agenda to its actualization.

Unfortunately, from the research findings from the Kiambu, Kirinyaga, Murang'a, Nyandarua and Nyeri Counties, it emerges that there is a very weak link between the nominated FMCAs and the female fraternity represented by the female leaders of organizations/groups. Various factors are responsible for the weakening of this linkage among them:

- Lack of structures for enhancing networking and collaboration between the nominated female members of the county assembly and the female fraternity from their respective counties;
- Lack of resources for supporting collaborative forums forcing the organizer(s) to shoulder the burden of facilitating the participants and catering for the expenses such as venue charges, meals;
- Intimidation of nominated FMCAs by their elected colleagues who view them as a political threat when they start engaging with females' groups in their Wards, among others;
- Ignorance of the role of nominated and elected MCAs on the side of the female electorate
- The social distance between the nominated FMCAs and the female fraternity from their respective counties

Due to the aforementioned challenges, the nominated FMCAs who engage with the female fraternity only do so at a personal level. This is done with groups they belonged to before becoming MCAs. While some have severed links with groups they were involved in before becoming MCAs, those who were never members of any group have not linked with any due to the collaboration and networking challenges. This means that there is no common agenda setting and there is no females' collective agenda, that unites females, in any of the five counties of the former Central Province in Kenya. Considering that females are still a marginalized category in the County Assemblies in Kenya and the females this may be a major hindrance to the realization of the goal of females' struggle for representation in decision-making institutions. Their practical and strategic sex and gender needs are yet to be realized. As Nzomo (2011) says, the women's movement remains the best means of giving women visibility and voice (p. 4) and so females must not abandon their collective struggle until all females have been liberated from discrimination, oppression, poverty, illiteracy and disease. Until all females have been empowered in all aspects of life, they must come together at the national and county levels and, as Kabira (2012) says, embark on the second part of the journey (Kabira, 2012).

Below are recommendations and legislative proposals on what needs to be done in the next phase of females' collective struggles.

## **Recommendations**

### **Legislative**

- Amend Article 90 of the Constitution of Kenya (2010) regarding the Allocation of party list seats (1). The proposed amendment suggests that elections for seats in Parliament as specified in Articles 97(1)(c) and 98(1)(b), (c), and (d), and for members of county assemblies under Article 177(1)(b) and (c), should be conducted through proportional representation using party lists. This change aims to ensure that the selection process is carried out by the category being represented in the specific institution, promoting allegiance to that particular category rather than solely to the political party.
- Put in place a legislative framework to provide a clear criterion for the nomination of FMCAs which should

include the level of education, and leadership experience among others.

- Put in place a legislative framework that protects the term of office for nominated Members of the County Assembly (MCAs)
- Put in place a legislative framework to ensure the nominees to the County Assembly are residents and/or voters from the county they seek nomination to ensure they are conversant with the concerns of the females in that particular County
- The County Budgets should have an allocation to provide development funds or kitty for nominated Members of the County Assembly (MCAs) to enable them to implement projects at the grassroots.
- For countries that are yet to legislate the electoral gender quotas or entrench them in the constitution, the paper recommends that the female fraternity, be the one mandated with the selection of the beneficiaries of the system. This will ensure allegiance to the female fraternity and liberate the beneficiaries of the gender quotas, from intimidation and gagging that is endemic with political party nominees.

### **Non-Government Organizations and other Development Agencies**

#### **Civic education and awareness creation programmes for the electorate**

- Formulate and implement civic education programmes to sensitize the electorate on the significance of embracing women's leadership.
- Civic education programmes to the electorate to understand the role of elected and nominated members of the County Assembly.

#### **Networking and collaboration**

- Develop a programme to provide for structured consultations between nominated female Members of the County Assembly (FMCAs) and the female leaders within the county to set the females' County Agenda that they support and advocate for collectively.
- Organize and hold consultative forums, and agenda for female members of the county assembly (FMCAs) and the female leaders to set the agenda and strategize how to realize this agenda in their respective counties
- Develop a communications strategy to ensure the flow of information from the FMCAs to the female leaders within their respective counties and vice versa

#### **Training and capacity enhancement for FMCAs**

- Provide technical support for the female members of the county assembly in drafting the necessary bills/motions for the legislation of females' county agenda.
- Advocate for the females' county agenda with the different stakeholders among them the county executive arm comprised of the Governor's office the women representative, and the senator among others
- Develop training and awareness creation programmes for the female members of the County Assembly to understand their role as female representatives in the County Assembly
- Build the capacity of the FMCAs through training, skills enhancement and technical support to enable them to effectively represent females' in their respective County Assembly, particularly through mainstreaming females' practical and strategic sex and gender needs in the legislations and programmes by the County Assembly. They should also have the capacity to oversee and ensure the implementation of such legislations and programmes by the County Executive.

#### **Recommendation on further research**

- This article focused on the experiences and perceptions of nominated female members of the County Assemblies, from Central Kenya, on their networking and collaboration with female leaders of organizations/groups involved in promoting females' empowerment in their respective counties. The

authors recommend further research to capture the experiences of the female leaders of these groups/organizations to get a more comprehensive picture/perspective of women's collective agency in influencing county assembly policies and programmes to address females' practical and strategic sex and gender needs.

- The assessment of the outcome of electoral gender quotas has been based on the traditional patriarchal worldview. There is a need to conduct a study on the appropriate female-friendly criteria for assessing the outcome of the electoral gender quotas.
- On national parliaments, Htun and Piscopo (2010) note that countries that score better on the United Nations' Gender Inequality Index do not necessarily have more women in parliament. Barbados, for instance, receives the highest gender equality score for all the LAC, but elects few women. The vast majority of LAC countries receive poor gender equality scores but have parliaments where fewer than 10 per cent of seats are held by women (such as Panama) to houses where women hold more than 30 per cent of seats (such as Ecuador). Only for the Central American sub-region does high gender inequality consistently correlate with low women's representation; for the Anglophone Caribbean and for South America, the relationship is nonexistent (Htun & Piscopo, 2010). Research should be conducted to assess whether there is any correlation between the descriptive increase of females in devolved governments or the County Assemblies in Kenya and females' empowerment in general such as improvement in economic empowerment; Access to justice; Reduction in sex and gender-based violence; Reduction in female illiteracy? Perception of females in the community and support to childcare services among others.
- Finally, mobilization for directed social change is costly financially and time use intensive. Therefore, as Mccammon (2010) et al notes, successful fundraising could support both insider and outsider work (Mccammon et al 2001 p 58). The feminist movements, at the county level, need look for resources from both external and local donors to advocate for their agenda in their respective county assemblies.

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