

# THE WALLS WE CAN'T SEE

Public Policy Lethargy on Women's Political Participation in Kenya

A publication in partnership between the Heinrich Böll Stiftung, East and Horn of Africa and the African Women's Studies Center at the University of Nairobi

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## Beyond parliamentary representation What representation: counting the numbers!

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### Key Points

- Between 1963-2007 of the total number of women parliamentarians was 75 (4%) compared to 1823 for men (96%).
- Even though it is not easy within a short period of time to analyse the limits or opportunities of increased number of women in parliament, analysing the statistics allows us to begin the complex policy conversations in preparation for the next round of elections.
- Patriarchal, men dominated parties take women's loyalty for granted, and its dictatorial and leadership does not anyone. Women can do better by spreading their wings in other parties.

### Summary

Women have made tremendous strides in political participation including top political positions in the country. This paper seeks to bring out the numbers to highlight the representation of women in the highest offices in the country. Traversing a time span of 50 years, it analyses the real numbers and the extent to which the impact real and anticipated can cascade to the woman at the grassroots. The importance and illusion of numbers are projected in various scenarios leading to the opinion that increasing numbers without contextualizing the issues may only be an illusion that can lead to women being shortchanged in the end. The paper also presents contemporary challenges, the new emerging social issues and suggests that a top-down approach would be a better solution to the myriads of women's complex issues. Can wanjiku claim to feel represented because of the increased number of women in leadership positions? Are women feeling more empowered and closer to government? Are women leaders accessible, reach-able and do the women in leadership position look out and champion the rights of fellow women?

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### INTRODUCTION

Commenting on women representation in Uganda, Tamale (2001) and Tripp (2001) suggested that increased presence of women in parliament would slowly change people's attitudes towards women in politics and create a new political culture regarding the acceptability of women as political leaders. Burnet (2011), referring to Rwanda argued that through women's increased presence in parliament, women 'may have found respect' including respect from family and community members. While Kenya has made great strides in women's rights issues, there has been significant shortfall in political representation.

Gender equality in public life revolves around five critical areas: economic participation, economic opportunity, political empowerment, educational attainment, and health and well-being. Yet the quest for a gender sensitive and equal society is not confined to the public sectors alone but must also cascade into the private sector. There is a tendency to equate increased numbers of women in position of leadership with better representation thus the *ululations* when 90 women managed to find their way into the two legislative houses. These gains were heavily attributed to the passing of the new constitution. And hence the yearning to see the impact and the changes that could be brought about by this large group of women leaders.

However in the new parliament, women representatives – those elected to special seats to increase numbers of women in parliament - have faced new battle fronts and, realising that their positions did not come with as much 'goodies' for their constituents as they expected. Whereas, the Members of Parliament have the constituency development funds to help in their work, women representatives who do not have such funds have the finances to backup their work and the actual functions of their offices were not quite clear.

There is therefore an urgent need to articulate the gains made so far as it could determine the number of women elected to these assemblies in the next election. We should also be able to answer the question as to whether the increased numbers of women in parliament has increased representation corresponding to the expectations of the Kenyan woman. Recording milestones and achievements that women have made is in itself a key achievement.

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The right to vote and take part in an election is a right guaranteed in the constitution of Kenya. Any citizen aged 18 years and above regardless of race, creed or religion has a right to participate in the election of their leaders or ree to present themselves for elections.

Figure 1 presents the total data for a 50 year period from 1963-2007 of the political representation of the country by gender. Over a 50 year period, the total number of women representation in parliament was 75 (4%) compared to 1823 (96%) for men.

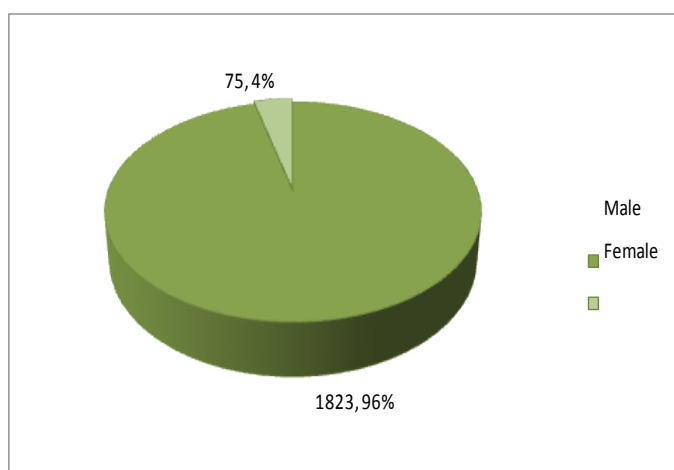


Figure 1: Total political representation - 50 years

From 1963-1968, there was no woman in parliament. In 1969, two women were elected and the number increased by a very small margin between 1974 and 1976. Subsequently, numbers progressively dropped each time by 1 (one) until 1992 and 1997 when seven (7) women and eight (8) women respectively were elected. This number increased by 56% in the 2002 election and by 18% in the 2007 elections.

The glaring under representation of women in the political arena for the period 1963-2007 is captured in figure 2. And it began in an era where citizens were relatively free to vote. In the 60's and 70's, there was little voter manipulation, stealing of votes, threats and intimidation compared to today. The numbers between 2002 – 2007 were still very low even though they increased marginally. In 2002, they were 18 women in parliament (8.1%) of whom 10 women were elected and 8 were nominated, and 22 in 2007 (9.1%). Those 18 in 2002 were elected out of a total pool of 44 women who presented themselves for election.

This was considered a huge rise in the number of women participants. It also translates into a success rate of 22 % for the women who vied. In the 2007 elections, a larger number of 269 women presented themselves for election. Only 22 went on to get into parliament. The success rate was lower at 8% (inclusive of those nominated).

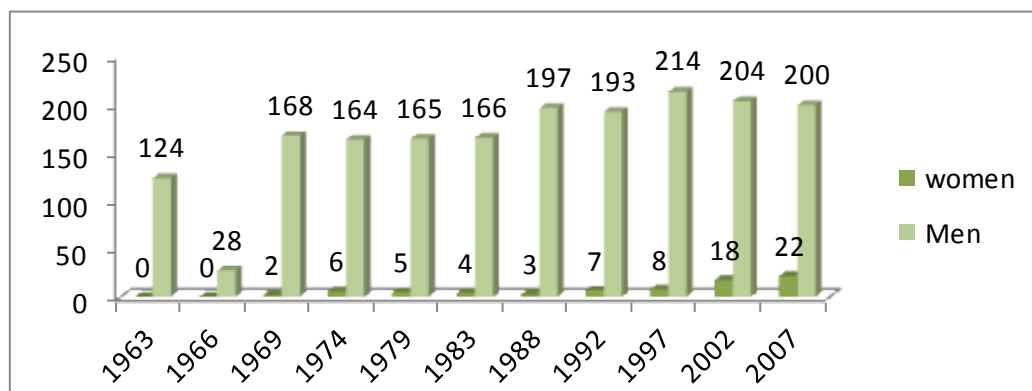


Figure 2: Representation in parliament by each election year - 50 years

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Table 1 below shows the total number of positions in the National assembly across time; it shows an increase from 170 to 200 and then 222 positions in 2007. The increase in the number of parliamentary seats did not significantly affect the numbers of women in parliament across time. Furthermore, the 12 positions for nomination were always given to men with a token one or two for the women.

Year	1963	1966	1969	1974	1979	1983	1988	1992	1997	2002	2007	2012
Male	124	28	168	164	165	165	197	193	214	204	200	416
Female	0	0	2	6	5	4	3	7	8	18	22	90
Totals	124	28	170	170	170	170	200	200	222	222	222	384

Table 1: Data of parliamentary representation for 50 years

### PARLIAMENTARY POSITIONS PERCENTAGE AND TREND

The average percentage of women in parliament is 3.3% and that of the men is at 96.7% as is shown in figure3. However, with increased agitation and affirmative action, the last two elections brought more women into parliament, although notably most came through nominations.

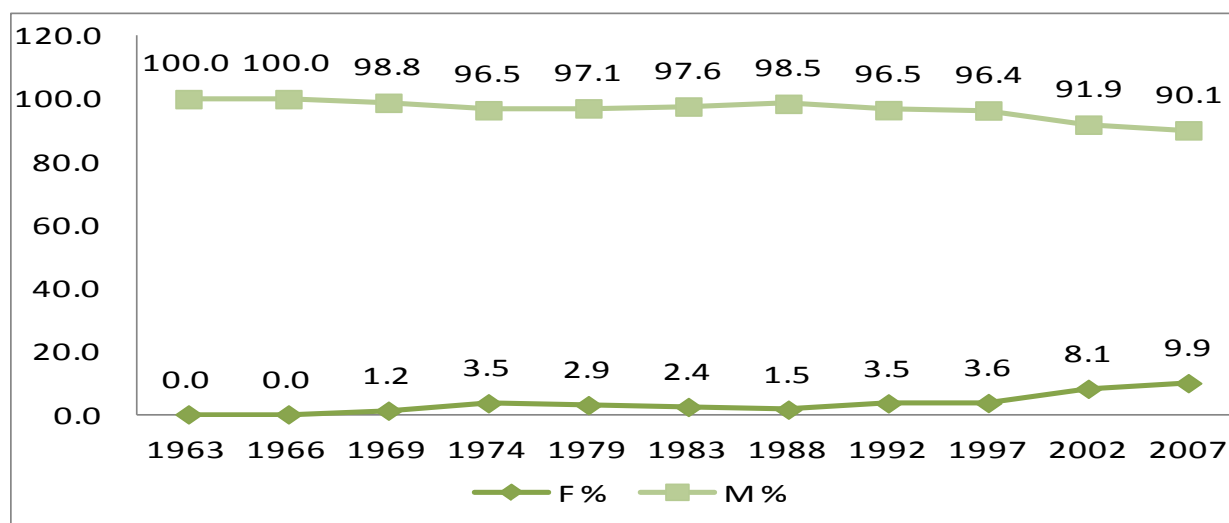


Figure 3: Representation in parliament 1963-2007 by percentage

The 2013 general election attracted the highest number of candidates of 2,392 men and women. It also brought in the highest number of women representation since 1963. The increased number of women MCAs and CEOs at the county level helped to cascade political representation at the grassroots.

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The performance in the various categories was as follows;

- 1 Governors** - women did not get a single governors seat out of the 47 seats although there were 8 female aspirants. There were no positions for nomination.
- 2 Senators** - There were 19 female aspirants for the position of Senator and not one woman was elected. There were 20 seats for nomination and the women got 18 (27%) seats while the men got 2 nominated seats giving a total of 49 (73%) seats for men in the Senate.
- 3 National Assembly** - March 2013 saw elections for the first bicameral parliament in Kenya since 1966. The 2010 Constitution provided for an enlarged 350 member National Assembly (up from 224) and a 68member Senate. In the National Assembly, there were 152 female aspirants. A total of 18 women were elected. Only 5.1% of women in parliament were elected. When this number is added to the 47 Women's Representatives (special seats reserved for women) the total is 65 (19%). In contrast, there were 1,937 male aspirants who won 284 (81%) seats in parliament.
- 4 Women Representatives** - There were 303 women who ran for the 47 women representative seats - more women competed against each other for these seats than "general" seats, in which only 152 women who vied for the 290 constituency seats

However, the constitutional requirement of no more than two third of one gender in the legislature did have an impact on many parts of the country. Women were nominated in places like Nyanza, Kisii, Kuria, Western Kenya and Northern Kenya where resistance to women in politics is high.

### IMPACT OF MORE NUMBERS FOR WOMEN REPRESENTATION

The proportion of men and women office currently stands at 82% for men and 20% for women. This is a number that has doubled for women from the last four centuries. This small milestone is by no means negligible because it promises to give voice to the many voiceless women who have been unheard for too long. The expansion of freedom of choice and action to shape one's life has serious implication on control over resources and decisions. (Narayan 2002) states "that a growing body of evidence points to linkages between empowerment and development effectiveness at both the society-wide level and the grassroots level". Political representation is therefore an important empowering approach that gives voice to the women.

In Kenya, the results of being deprived of these rights vary but are all significant. For example, in Nyanza, malaria kills children who die for lack of medicine worth only a few shillings while in Machakos, they may die of hunger and starvation due to lack of long term storage facilities for food. FGM is unknown to many regions in the country just as jiggers as a festering issue is a menace more prevalent in Central province than anywhere else.

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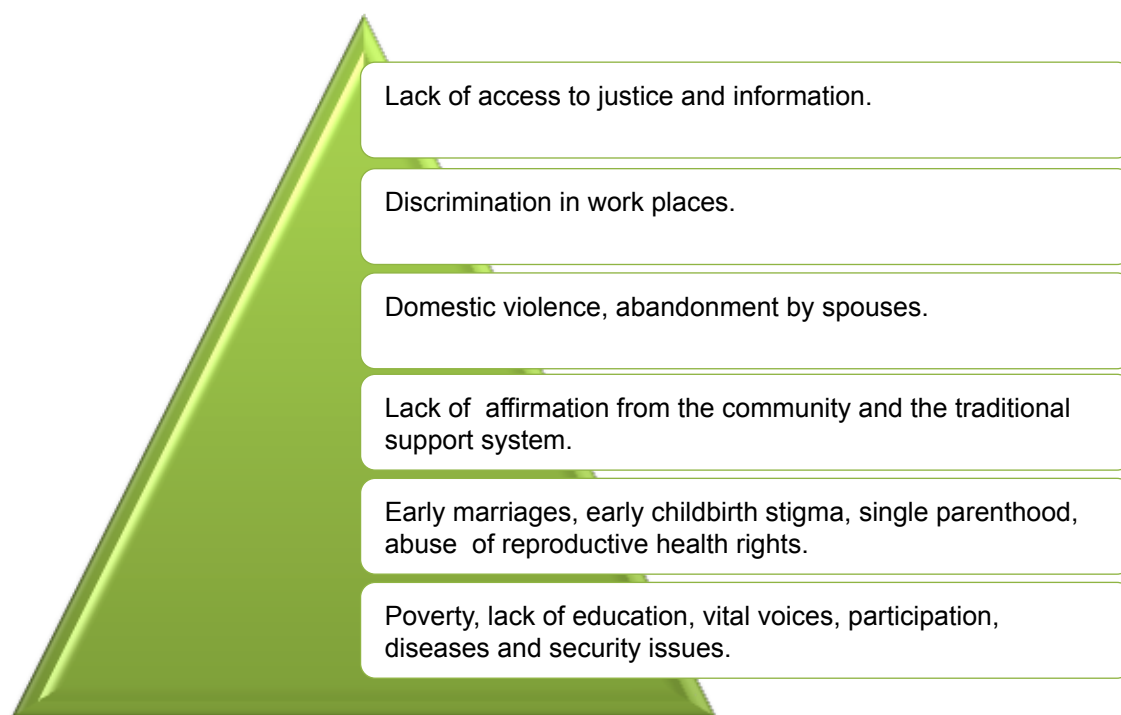


Figure 4: Hierarchy of pressing women issues

The table hints at some of the issues facing women in Kenya today. Increasing political representation is one but a very important factor on which empowerment can be anchored and an approach to give voice to the women so that they can expect a better tomorrow. Increasing the numbers of women in political representation can create that enabling environment that can propel women to great success. The significance of numbers can be summarized as follows:

### NUMBERS ARE IMPORTANT

Even though it is not easy within the one year period to attribute failure or success to increased number of women in parliament, one can start by moving from the unknown to the known. Political representation creates a class of women who can excise certain freedoms can voice their concerns and demand

accountability from their leaders. It facilitates a shift in public conversations from purely politics to developmental issues.

Yet women's participation in parliament has not been entirely positive. Women parliamentarians were absent when the much maligned Marriage Bill was drafted and passed, allowing a bill to pass that most women did not agree with, especially on the issue of polygamy. The leaders have caucused on key issues and have instead been reactive to issues advanced by men. And they provide the numbers that their male counterparts require to pass some noxious bills especially when it concerns increasing their pay.

Many women leaders in many regions have not been able to provide effective leadership and direction to the women as to how they can access to funds set aside to support the devolution process. Funds like

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the Uwezo fund for the youth, the global fund for women and others such as Njaa Marafuku fund are existing facilities that can be used to economically empower the women to reduce inequalities. Such funds can be used to train and educate the women on skills that are vital for their economic growth and empowerment. Women leaders have not been visible in advocating for the disbursement of these funds.

While it is unfair to hold women to a different standard than men, if the women leaders behave just as badly as the men, the electorate will wonder if all the effort is worth it. Some women have triggered such questions by engaging in public fights and squabbles, or being militant and aggressive in causes that are not related their constituents' needs. Women appear to be the fighting as hard for personal financial increments as their male counterparts.

Figure 5 proposes a top down approach to addressing women problems in the country. It suggests that fewer women politicians and CEOs and more women officers at the grassroots and middle level managers would enhance better service to the women at the grassroots. Therefore, policy efforts focusing on increasing more women and women professionals at the middle and the grassroots would have maximum impact on the lives of women.

Inroads into politics have been made because women have been agitating for changes that could empower them and improve their lives. The issues affecting the women in their different communities' means that local solutions must be the focal point. There must also be a desire for regional and ethnic balance in women representation across appointments in government offices because women belong to their regions and ethnic groups too and they are not blind to ethnicity.

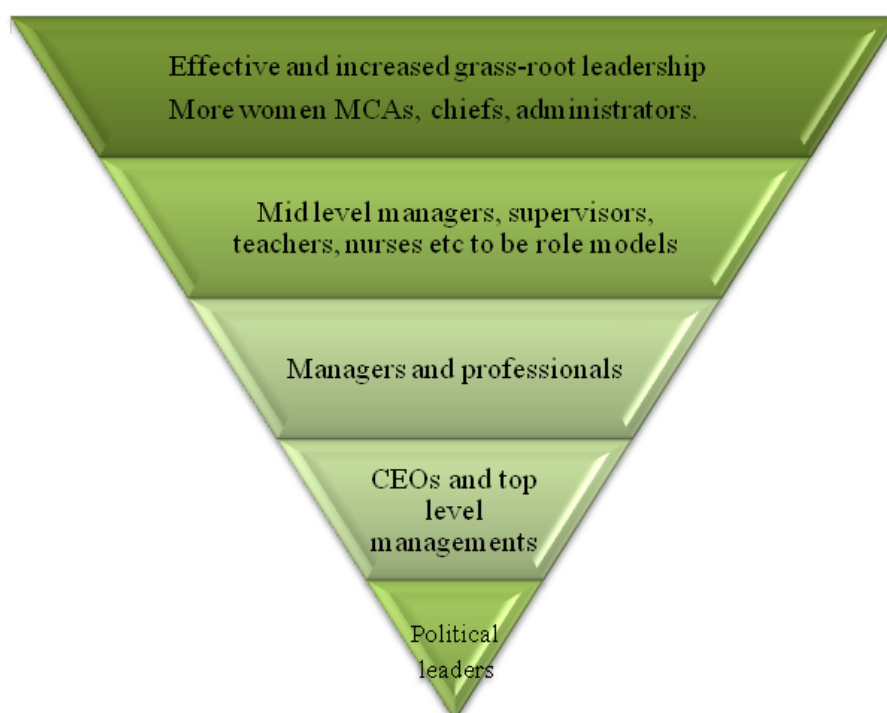


Figure 5: A top down approach to pressing women problems in Kenya



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Ultimately, the electorate is looking for women leaders seeking equal treatment of genders across all communities without favoritism and cronyism. Leaders who constantly run back to the claim being discrimination because she is a woman when facing challenges sometimes of their own creation will sour the situation for all women.

All in all, Kenya's historical data reveals that certain regions and communities have always had women representation in parliament, in the cabinet and other senior government positions while other regions have had none, even those that started off well like Nyanza. In regions where there has been no woman elected to office for at least 30 years, children grow up with the knowledge that leadership is a male domain. Even the women themselves have a problem with voting for a fellow woman. It has therefore become exceedingly difficult and almost impossible for a Luo woman or Luhya to vie for political leadership.

Furthermore, when women join parties of their 'menfolk', the parties will determine their fate unless they take a paradigm shift. Patriarchal, men dominated parties take women's loyalty for granted, and its dictatorial and leadership does not anyone. Women can do better by spreading their wings in other parties. To remain relevant women must consider diversifying their political base.

## CONCLUSION

Many communities in Kenya are not ready to vote in a woman as a political representative over a man. This observation made based on the fact that under the new constitution and on the whole, the number of women who got elected is still the same at 5% as it was over the 40 year period. This calls for rethinking new strategies of increasing their numbers in the political field. Indeed increased nomination seats for women would require that women have to force quality leadership into the nominations so that these positions are not left as handouts to sycophants and cronies, which is the current reality.

There is need for women to realign themselves to political affiliations that are more gender sensitive and performing against those that make promises and have excellent constitutions for women but in reality everything is just on paper. Women must choose carefully to identify with leaders who are not dictatorial in nature because they tend to be worse for women.

Women from certain regions need to rethink their strategies of making political presence felt. Women from Nyanza, Western and North Eastern Kenya must rethink their strategies of being in one political party of the region and they must learn to spread their wings to other smaller parties that are not in their strongholds to increase their chances of getting to play a more active role in politics and to increase their chances of nominations. Women must offer a different type of leadership from that of men to make a positive impact and lasting impression in the country.



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