

RESEARCH ARTICLE/ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN PARLIAMENT IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: CASE STUDY
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Abstract

The marginalization of women from political and economic activities has been a subject of debate and policy reforms across the world. In Africa, decades after most countries attained independence; women continue to face more obstacles in pursuing their political interests in a male-dominated field. This is partly due to the societal structures that alienated women from decision-making processes in favor of men. However, gradual changes in African societies such as improved access to education, globalization, the emergence of feminism and experiences such as conflicts in the continent have seen an improved representation of women in decision-making processes in the society. This paper, therefore, examines parliamentary women representations in Rwanda and Kenya through the historical development of women participation in parliament, the factors that facilitated these developments, the influence of women parliamentarians in legislation, and, the challenges that continue to deter women from effective representation and participation in parliamentary proceedings. This paper concludes that women parliamentarians play a significant role in good governance through their inputs in parliamentary legislation especially on pro-poor development and protection of vulnerable groups in the society.

Keywords: Women parliamentarians, Rwanda, Kenya, Legislation, Gender.**SAHRAALTI AFRIKA PARLEMENTOSU'NDA KADIN TEMSİLİ: RUANDA VE KENYA VAKASI****Öz**

Kadınların politik ve ekonomik aktivitelerden soyutlanması, dünya genelinde bir tartışma konusu haline geldi. Birçok ülke bağımsızlık konusunda yol katetmesine rağmen, Afrika'daki kadınlar hala erkeklerin egemen olduğu alanlarda politik hakları konusunda sorunlarla yüzleşiyor. Bu kısmen, kadınları karar alma süreçlerinden erkekler lehine uzaklaştıran toplumsal yapılardan kaynaklanıyor. Diğer yandan; eğitime erişim, feminizmin ortaya çıkışı, kıtada meydana gelen çatışmalar gibi değişimler Afrika'daki kadınların karar alma süreçlerinde giderek daha fazla yer aldığını göstermiştir. Bu nedenle, bu makale Ruanda ve Kenya'daki parlamentoda kadınların katılımını ve katılımın tarihsel gelişimini, bu gelişmeleri kolaylaştıran faktörleri, kadın milletvekillerinin mevzuattaki etkisini ve kadınları engellemeye devam eden zorlukları inceleyerek parlamentodaki kadın temsilcilerini ve Ruanda ve Kenya'daki katılımı araştırmaktadır. Yapılan araştırmalar ışığında, kadın milletvekillerinin özellikle toplumdaki savunmasız grupların gelişimi ve korunması konusunda önemli bir rol oynadıkları sonucuna varılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kadın Parlamenterler, Ruanda, Kenya, Mevzuat, Çatışma.

1. INTRODUCTION

The role of women in politics has attracted significant attention among policymakers and scholars. In particular, the question of women representation in different spheres of society has been part of the mainstream discussions surrounding development across the world. The disparities in gender balance have contributed to increased criticisms from feminists and this has been a subject of several campaigns advocating for change in the structure of governance in the society. Sentiments of some advocacy groups have seen some countries adopt laws that specifically require a particular threshold of gender balance to be represented in elective positions. Even the United Nations incognizant of this necessity, recommended a minimum 30 percent one-gender representation through the United Nations Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Powley, 2017: 8). Proponents of increased women representation in the political space argue that women, too have the potential to deliver substantive public service like their male counterparts.

In Africa and other parts of the world, women representation in decision making and leadership has historically been constrained due to cultural, religious, and social factors. The colonial era in Africa specifically isolated women from leadership as most struggles for independence were male-dominated, given the nature of the crisis at the time. Upon independence, men sought to dominate the political scene with all African countries having a male president at the helm of leadership. However, the last four decades have seen substantial changes and an increase in the number of women involved in national and political party leadership. Of the 54 countries, nine have elected women as presidents in the last two decades while parliamentary representation has significantly increased. By 2019, at least 27 African countries have taken affirmative actions such as introducing representative seats reserved for women in legislative institutions such as a parliament.

This paper aims to examine the extent to which women are being represented in parliament by assessing the trend in Kenya and Rwanda. These two countries represent some of the most committed African countries in empowering women representation in parliament. While both may have been inspired by different events, with Rwanda rebuilding from the 1994 genocide while Kenya's reforms being a product of persistent activism, both countries seem to be above the global average of women representation in parliament. First, the paper examines some theoretical arguments for promoting women representation.

2. THEORIZING WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION

Feminists are perhaps the leading advocates of women representations not only in politics but in different spheres of society. For some scholars such as Young (2000) and Mansbridge (1999: 633) women representation in leadership and decision process is not only a just act but also a matter of democracy and human rights. But, increased demand for women representation has opened up a new avenue for debate. That is whether increasing the numerical representation of women in parliament would lead to the adoption of more women-friendly policies. Several scholars (Pitkin, 1967; Cowell-Meyers 2001; Phillips 1995) argue that this would only be likely should the women representatives be distinct from the males in terms of the policy.

It is therefore not surprising that a majority of studies on women representation have often sought to examine the relationship between women representation and their impact on the formulation of policies. Also, questions such as; how the political environment and dynamics influence the legislative behavior of women representatives, their legislative capacities and the nature of legislation proposed by women have also been previously examined. Studies by Franceschet et al. (2008: 397), Carrol (2001) and Beckwith et al. (2007: 557), reveal that there exist differences between men and women in formulating legislative agenda that target the interests of women. Some other emerging questions have been whether women representatives should only target issues touching on women's development, or whether their sole mandate is to prioritize the interests of women in legislations and how their identities and interests influence legislative processes. While others (Carroll 2001; Grey 2002; Swers 2002) have yielded results indicating that women representation in parliaments has impacted on parliamentary proposals, debates and outcomes, other studies (Crowley 2004; Gotell et al., 1991; Pelletier 2001) argue that there is minimal or no difference in the conduct of either male or female legislative representatives relative to policy formulation.

The absence of a unified conclusion, therefore, necessitates a different approach in examining women representation in parliament. This paper examines three approaches;

2.1 Policy-Making Processes

According to Tamerius (1995), looking at the policy-making process in general, such as the voting patterns during enactment, may be misleading. This is because it overlooks some common practices such as women mostly being minorities in most parliament or issues specifically touching on women alone are rarely passed. To overcome this analytical bias, it is prudent to retrace policy-making processes at different stages such as before during and after legislation. In other words, the input of women may not be much visible at the voting and debating stages but certainly very influential in other stages. Childs (2006: 527) denotes that the processes involved in the formulation of policies are complex and often, the policies tend to emerge from a series of events that significantly propel a particular issue to prominence and its subsequent enactment as a policy. Bratton (2002: 429) also argues that to a significant extent, policy cycles influence the adoption of issues into the legislative agenda. As such, consideration must be made regarding the broader understanding of the term 'impact' that may extend way beyond the processes of formulating policies to for instance improving the general participation of women (Mackay, 2001).

2.2 Interests and Identities

The assumption of the legislative behaviors of women is often attached to gender as the fundamental identity in political discourses. Cowley (2003: 367) documents that this approach emerges from normative perspectives that attempt to distinguish a common view among women as the justification to advance their presence in political discourses. Dodson (1991) however, draws attention to the fact that a significant portion of empirical studies regarding women representation focuses on differences such as political party affiliations, race, and class which may be a deterrence to the advancement of a collective legislative agenda. It is therefore important to note that the diversities in identities and interests may affect collaboration

amongst women representatives in political affairs. This differentiation has both theoretical and practical relevance because for one, as feminists argue, categorizing women as a group may reify one difference while obscuring others (Carroll, 2001). Reingold (2000: 133) also emphasizes that possessing the female tag may be less significant than the question of gender consciousness for attaining feminist objectives because for instance, the ascension of women to representative offices may be in their capacities as mothers relative to the traditional aspects of gender identity (Franceschet et al., 2008: 397).

Philips (1995) argues that the influence of women on the policy may only be discerned if they behave differently from men in the political discourse. However, this approach has been criticized because of existing dynamics that differentiate how men and women act in political affairs. Schwindt (2006: 576) argues that even if both genders share the same legislative priorities, their support for feminist agendas and the will to propose such policies may be divergent. Secondly, the possible presence of pro-feminist male representatives and anti-feminist women representatives may provide a balance across both gender preferences (Reingold, 2000: 127). Also, Norton (1995) draws attention that high numbers of women representatives in parliament may influence men to take note of the interests of women in policy formulation.

2.3 Political Parties and Parliament

The context of the existing political parties and parliamentary proceedings have a significant influence on policies that are formulated in parliaments regarding the interests of women because the context in which they exist may provide the necessary support needed by women to advance their agenda or act as a deterrence. It is therefore important to analyze the political parties and parliamentary contexts if any attempt is to be made in understanding the behavior of women in legislative discourses. This will also facilitate the identification of the circumstances that facilitate or curtail women's descriptive and substantive representation. According to Mackay (2008: 129), often, political party rules tend to bend towards a bias that favors male domination and experiences and thereby subjecting women to adapt to masculine tendencies that may hinder their capabilities to include women's interests during formulation of policies effectively.

The dynamics of political party politics also influences the position occupied by women in parliamentary committees (Norton, 1995; Nyadera & Agwanda, 2019) who often do not occupy influential positions in the committees and challenges arising from gendered norms of power (Kathelene, 1995: 173). Additionally, Beckwith (2007: 558) argues that the 'minimal' experience of the new women representative also derails their capacities to influence policy. However, this paper is cognizant that women representatives may establish parliamentary groups and caucuses to facilitate and enhance the contributions and participation of women representatives in policy formulation.

Women's legislative behavior is also attached to the political party ideology and affiliation. This is because, foremostly, political parties are responsible for making the selection of candidates to compete for elections and become part of the legislative arm of the government (Zetterberg, 2008: 447). Also, parliamentary party positions on particular legislative issues influence the approach of women on given policies. The

party ideologies as left-wing or right-wing may support the new roles and opportunities for women or favor the traditional responsibilities assigned to women respectively (Carroll 1991). Notably, political parties especially those with a parliamentary majority, play significant roles in formulating policies and even more importantly, those that resonate with the interests of women (Reingold 2000: 136).

Having examined the general perspective of women representation, we will look at the place and role of women in the parliaments of Rwanda and Kenya.

3. WOMEN PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION IN RWANDA

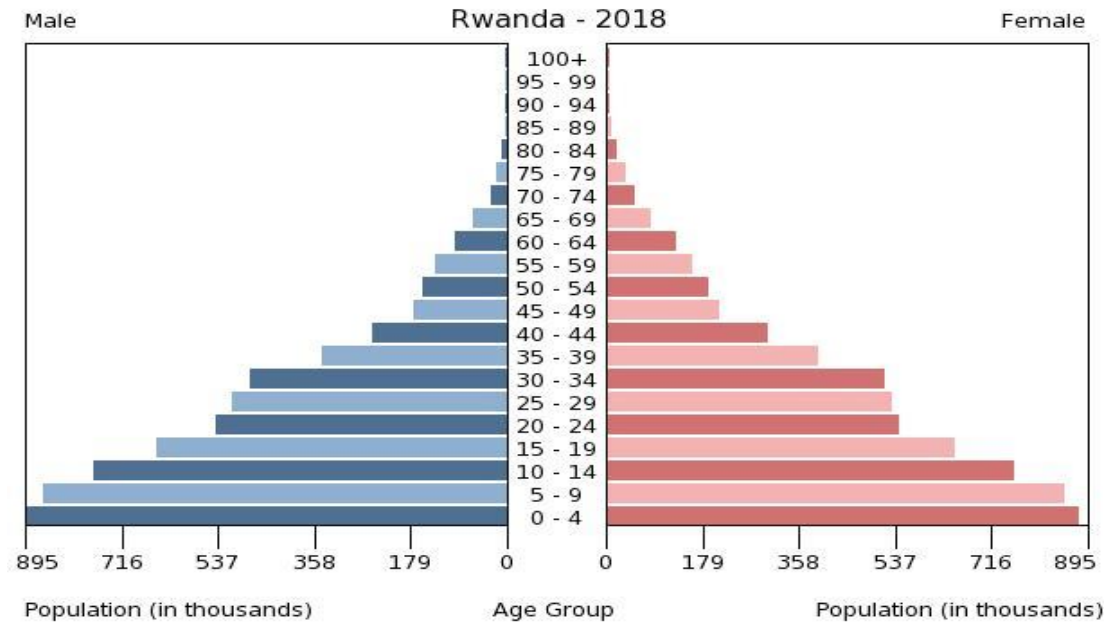
Rwanda for the longest time has always been associated with its dark historical past following the events of the Rwandan genocide in 1994 that pitted the Hutus and the Tutsis in an ethnic conflict that claimed the lives of approximately 800,000 Tutsis and displaced others to the neighboring countries (Mackay, 1996: 208). During the genocide, women were targets not only because of their ethnic orientations but also due to their gender identity that subjected them to torture and sexual abuses such as rape, breast oblation, and forced incest. According to Taylor (2002: 142), Agathe Umwiringiyimana who was the first female prime minister was among the first victims of the genocide and who in the lead-up to the outbreak of the genocide, was often depicted by the local print media through cartoons as being promiscuous thereby, suggesting that her murder was also partly because she was an articulate woman.

When the conflict was halted by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), parliamentary politics commenced with the establishment of the Government of National Unity as the transitional government in November 1994 until the first elections were held in 2003. During these elections, the RFP won 33 out of the 55 parliamentary seats (Longman, 2006: 148). Following the promulgation of 2003 that reserved 30 percent of parliamentary seats to women and affirmative actions by political parties to voluntarily reserve particular quotas for women on their election candidate lists, Rwanda's female representatives accounted for almost 50 percent of the parliamentary composition after the 2003 elections.

Powley et al. (2003) highlight that the women in Rwanda who survived the vicious genocide experienced extreme losses. They had lost their children, close relatives, husbands, experienced extreme psychological torture, family separations, starvation, displacement, torture, rape and source of livelihoods. Consequently, the destruction of the social structures in the society post-genocide left thousands of women as the new heads of families and communities. This endurance by the Rwandese women who bore the consequences of the genocide, therefore, became a foundation for their need input in the post-genocide recovery of Rwanda. Moreover, a report by the Women's Refugee Commission (1997) also documents that women (inclusive of girls) constituted 70 percent of the entire Rwandan population demography and thereby, significantly contributed to their occupation of new roles and responsibilities as community providers and new builders of the new Rwandan state by firstly burying the dead victims of the genocide, building new shelters and homes for close to 500, 000 orphans in Rwanda (Lampman, 2001).

The women in Rwanda continue to hold a slightly higher number of more than 50 percent of the population demographics, according to the CIA World Factbook (2019). They have therefore become a critical force in contributing to the development of Rwanda in social, political and economic sectors.

Graph 1: Rwanda Population Demographics, 2018



Source: CIA World Factbook, 2019

Powley (2017: 3) highlights that 35 percent of the working adult population of Rwandan women are responsible for producing a significant portion of the country's agricultural output that forms the backbone of the economy. As such, the women in Rwanda play a critical role in the physical rebuilding of Rwanda, governance and social reconstruction.

Since 1961 when Rwanda gained independence from Belgium, women were granted the right to vote and participate in elections as candidates for whichever representative seat they opted for. According to Powley (2017: 4), the first female parliamentarian in Rwanda was elected in 1965. However, before the genocide crisis, women parliamentarian never accounted for more than 19 percent in the national assembly (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1995). It was until the post-genocide era that the number of women representatives increased significantly to 25.7 percent in the transitional government of national unity through the appointment. In terms of the legislative representation structure of the bicameral parliament of Rwanda, the Chamber of Deputies which serves as the lower house, consists of 80 members with a five-year mandate. Among them, 53 are elected by political parties through a proportional system of representation. Notably, 24 seats are reserved for competition among women themselves as candidates and as voters. Consequently, the increase in the number of women representatives witnessed in the Rwandan parliament is the outcome of affirmative actions to increase women representation through the electoral structures, quota system, and constitutional guarantees.

Drude (1998: 6) argues that the experience of members of the RPF during their exile in Uganda was a big influence on advancing the agenda of women representation using the model of quota system

used in Uganda and the appreciation of the women capabilities in politics as had been witnessed from the women league of the African National Congress of South Africa. Within the ranks of the RPF, women also played a crucial role in the organization that enabled them to advocate for more space for women representation during the post-genocide transitional stage. Aloise Inyumba who became the pioneer Minister for Women’s affairs previously served in the finance docket for the RPF and is today considered by the majority of Rwandese as the founder of post-genocide women agenda in Rwanda.

4. WOMEN PERFORMANCE IN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

The first transitional parliament after the genocide in 1994 consisted of 70 parliamentary seats and eight seats representing a paltry 11.4 percent were taken by women. This number increased to 17.1 percent during the 1997 general elections and increased to 25.7 percent by November 2000 (Devlin, 2008: 242). The elections in 2003 were crucial in the development of women’s agenda in Rwanda as it also marked the inauguration of the new constitution that introduced the quota system guaranteeing 30 percent of the parliamentary seats in Rwanda and other organs involved in making public decisions to women (Art. 9 (4) Rwandan Constitution 2003). The 2003 constitution guaranteed two special seats in each of the 11 provinces and an additional two special seats reserved for women in Kigali as the capital of Rwanda resulting in a total of 24 seats (Longman, 2006: 141). In addition to the seats won through regular political competition by women, the number increased to 39 women representatives out of the total 80 or as a percentage, 48.75 percent of the Chamber of Deputies (Devlin, 2008: 243).

% of members of legislative bodies that are women

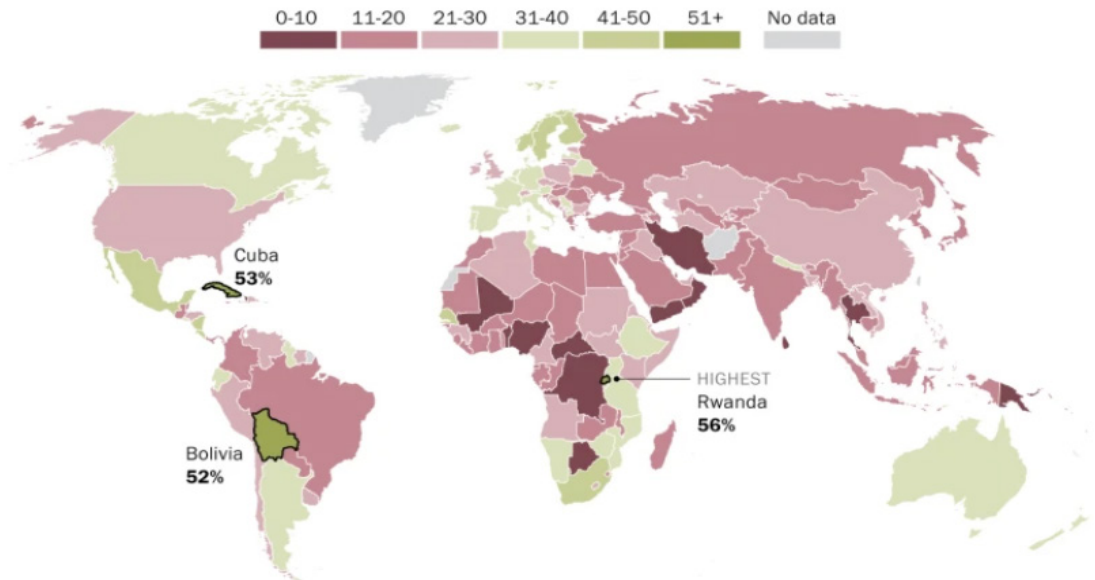


Figure 2. Only three countries have more than 50% of women representatives in the world; the highest is Rwanda.

Source: Pew Research Centre Data Analysis (2019)

In the 2017 elections in Rwanda, women recorded the biggest gains as they occupied 52% percent of all the parliamentary seats making the country the leading in women representation globally.

Importantly, behind these impressive data by Rwanda, the women in Rwanda have played significant roles in terms of policy formulation. According to Childs et al. (2006: 527), the women parliamentarians in Rwanda have not appeared to be constrained by the traditional sectors that have been relegated to women. This is because women parliamentarians have been appointed to act as cabinet secretaries in ministries such as the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Science, Technology, and Research. They have also taken leadership of parliamentary committees and are also adequately represented in institutions such as those dealing with Economic Planning and Cooperation.

The increased number of women parliamentarians in Rwanda has also resulted in increased gender-related policies that have been purposely formulated to improve the welfare of Rwandan women. According to Devlin et al. (2008: 248), the women parliamentary representatives in Rwanda have solidified the notion of unity among women and women welfare over party politics. Additionally, Devlin (2008) argues that the critical mass of the women in Rwandan parliament has had a significant influence in shaping the legislative house towards gender sensitivity and that the other side of the gender-divide (males) have made significant efforts in accepting women interests as part of the legislative responsibilities. These interests have been expressed relative to the ideas of the economic empowerment to women entrepreneurs, and education among both young girls and adult women. Within the parliamentarians, women representatives have also advanced for their personal development through attending leadership seminars, study trips, and workshops.

In Rwanda, women representatives have contributed immensely to the formulation of gender laws. This is because the quota system has increased the bargaining power of women in parliamentary discourse. One of the significant legislations from parliamentary women lobbying was the Category One status that was granted to offenses such as sexual harassment (rape and sexual torture) after the Rwandan genocide enacted in 1996. Other legislations include the child protection against violence law (2001); the inheritance act granting women equal rights with men (2003); rights of pregnant and breast-feeding mothers at places of work (1997); laws on gender-based violence (2008); the labors laws for equal pay and value for work (2009); and, laws granting maternity leave for new mothers informal employment (Abbott et al., 2014). Such legislations have endeared Rwanda as a model example of women's interests globally.

5. WOMEN PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION IN KENYA

Kenya attained her independence from the British in 1963 following an intense diplomatic offensive by the early founders of the republic at international platforms and organized armed struggle domestically (Ghai et al., 1970; Nyadera, & Kisaka, 2019). In the domestic armed struggle, women played a very fundamental role by providing support and intelligence to freedom fighting organizations such as the Mau Mau movement (Olupu et al., 2018: 1516). However, after independence, women's presence in public scenes such as parliament and other public institutions was very minimal. According to Kamau

(2010: 17), the absence of an organized structure to advance the interests of women publicly and at the relevant platforms affected their ability to voice their concerns in policy formulation. The earliest non-governmental organization established to advocate for women's issues was the *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* (translates to Development for Women) in 1952 when Kenya was still a British colony. Kiragu (2006: 18) highlights that the main objectives of the organization were to advance the development of women's welfare through income capacity building. Notably, this organization in the earlier stages did not challenge the patriarchal nature of Kenyan leadership space that had characterized the era but rather, strived at finding a way through which women would address the imbalance of power distribution to improve their general welfare in the society. The organization however evolved to become the women's wing of the ruling party; the Kenya National African Union (KANU) representing approximately 3 million women and became a platform that nurtured pioneer Kenyan women into elective politics for members of the national assembly (Kamau, 2010: 17; Kisaka & Nyadera, 2019).

The record of women that have been elected to the national assembly in Kenya has not been as expected but progressive. During the first elections at independence in 1963, no woman was elected into parliament. The first woman to be elected into parliament was Grace Onyango in 1969, while the first female minister appointed was Nyiya Mwendwa in 1995. However, it was until the aftermath of the 2007 general elections that spilled over to post-election violence that claimed approximately 1000 lives, internally displaced an estimated 600 thousand people and destroyed properties, that women's interest came to the limelight. This is partly because, just like the Rwandan experience, women bore the brunt of the post-election violence through experiences such as rape, sexual harassment, displacement, loss of children, and a breakdown of complete family structures.

The promulgation of the 2010 constitution marked a critical stage in advancing the welfare of women at the national and local levels of governance. This is because the 2010 constitution emulated what had previously been stipulated in the independence constitution of 1963 that provided for a bicameral parliament and devolved units. The 2010 constitution provides a solid foundation for Kenya in advancing gender equality within the country in terms of representation. According to Article 27 (8), the state is mandated to enact laws and other legislative actions that guarantee the effective implementation of the two-thirds gender provisions in either elective and, or appointive public positions (Constitution of Kenya, 2010). Cognizant of these provisions, the government-appointed six women to cabinet positions representing 30 percent minimum provided for in the constitution. Moreover, in the 2013 general elections that was held as a first under the new constitutional dispensation, 16 women were directly elected to the national assembly in addition to other 47 County Women Representatives for each of the 47 counties in Kenya, and, who also legislate alongside the elected Members of Parliament to serve in the national assembly. However, these figures do not compare to the 274 men who were directly elected to the national assembly.

Elections Year	Women	Male	Total	% of Women
1963	0	165	167	1.2
1969	2	162	169	1.4
1974	7	166	170	2.4
1983	3	167	170	1.8
1988	3	197	200	1.5
1992	7	193	200	3.5
1997	8	214	222	3.6
1998	9	213	222	4.1
2002	18	204	222	8.1
2007	22	200	222	9.9
2013	65	285	350	18.6

Table 1. Parliamentary Women Representation (1963-2013)

Source: Author compilation from various sources

In the 2017 general elections, there was an improvement in the number of women elected and nominated to the bicameral parliament and other levels of public representations. Relative to the gender balance constitutional requirement, the national assembly still requires an additional 41 members to meet the stipulated threshold in the national assembly. The senate, which is also involved in legislation, requires an additional two members to meet the one third quota requirement. Whereas women occupied 145 seats out of the 1,883 electoral seats in 2013, their figures slightly improved to 172 seats in 2017.

Seat	Number of Women	Total	Women as a % of the total
Governor	3	47	6.4
Deputy Governor	7	47	14.9
Senator	20	67	29.8
National Assembly	76	349	21.8
County Assembly	658	2,222	29.6

Table 2. Women Elective Representation in Kenya (Nominated and Elected in 2017)

Source: Data Compiled by Author

The increasing number of women in the national assembly of Kenya has been mixed. This is because of the patriarchal nature of the Kenyan political space. Nonetheless, the women parliamentarians in Kenya have been able to influence policy through various bills and motions that have been introduced by these women parliamentarians to improve the welfare of Kenyan women. Some of these bills include the Sexual Offences Act; the Two-Thirds Gender (Amendment) Bill 2015; Marriage Bill, the Children's Bill; the Matrimonial Property Bill, In Vitro-Fertilization Bill; Victims Protection Bill; the Protection against Domestic Violence Bill; Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Bill; and, Exemption of Taxes for Female Sanitary Towels Bill (Nthiri, 2014: 36). In addition to contributing immensely to the enactment of these legislations, Kenyan

women parliamentarians are also members of various select committees within the national assembly. Some of these committees have also been chaired by women such as; the Liaison Committee (Joyce Laboso), Regional Integration Committee (Florence Kajuju), Research and Technology Committee (Sabina Chege), Catering and Health Club Committee (Janet Wanyama), Health Committee (Rachel Nyamai), and the Justice and Legal Affairs Committee (Priscila Nyokabi, Vice-Chairwoman) (Kenya National Assembly, 2018).

Several studies on women parliamentary representation in Kenya (Masandu, 2008; Milligan, 2014; and Biegen, 2016) have concluded that impact of Kenyan women in parliament is comparatively low compared to the other regional counterparts partly due to the absence of the minimum gender quota requirement or failure to achieve the critical mass that would significantly empower women to influence policy formulation. This challenge was evidenced during the parliamentary vote on the gender bill on 28th February 2019 that was supposed to give more seats to women in political representation and other public offices. This bill collapsed due to a lack of quorum after the male members of parliament boycotted the vote.

The women parliamentarians in Kenya have also established the Kenyan Women Parliamentary Association (KEWOPA) in 2001 by only nine pioneer women parliamentarians in the eighth parliament. This caucus was established by women parliamentarians from across the political divide as a means of increasing their influence on parliamentary procedures to bring to attention issues regarding the welfare of women in Kenya. According to KEWOPA, the mandate of the organization is to fundamentally advance good governance and improve networking among female parliamentarians regardless of political affiliation in driving the welfare of women and the general social and economic development of Kenya.

6. DISCUSSIONS

The 21st century is witnessing an extensive transformation in the structures of the society as women are becoming more involved in the development of social, political, and economic sectors of the society. There is sustained movement from the traditional conceptualization of gender responsibilities to new understandings about women empowerment in terms of scope of the responsibilities bestowed on women. Culturally, the traditional African society assigned women the responsibilities of homemakers while men were in charge of the decision-making processes on behalf of the society (Kabeer, 2015; Malik & Courtney, 2011; Barton, 2005; Foulds, 2014). Indeed, these views continue to hold ground in certain sections of African societies even today. However, while these trends are gradually changing, they still play a significant role when it comes to the election of political representatives mandated to represent different groups in the society and therefore, partly accounting for the statistics of directly elected women to parliament as is the case of both Rwanda and Kenya.

Studies by (Hughes & Mwiria, 1989; Musandu, 2008) argue that women are best placed on formulating policies that are not just women-friendly, but also those that would attempt to support the improvement of the welfares for underprivileged members of the society. As a consequence, should a political system fail to incorporate women in decision-making processes, the interests of large sections of the society remain at risk of not being addressed. This argument is collaborated by a study conducted by Lawless et al. (1999) that concluded that the absence of women participation in policy formulation in parliament

hinders the efforts to alleviate poverty. As such, Biegon (2016) emphasizes the need for women to be conceptualized as development partners in society beyond the limitations of domestic responsibilities.

As discussed in both two cases, women parliamentarians have played critical roles in the enactment of key laws that are gender-sensitive to the interests of women in society. Notably, however, women parliamentarians in Kenya continue to lag in terms of their numbers to efficiently and comprehensively address the interests of women, especially regarding the issue of the Two-Thirds gender bill. Importantly, this paper gives cognizance that there are challenges that continue to affect the performance of women in terms of representation. Key among these include:

i. Financial Challenges. The nature of African politics is a transactional one. Over the years of personal rule across the continent especially during the Cold War era, a system of clientele politics developed that embedded a political culture emphasizing money politics as the basis for assessing prospective elective candidates rather than as a question of policy. This political behavior has evolved to the extent that election campaigns in Sub-Saharan Africa have been flagged among the most expensive globally. This has worked to the disadvantage of women who for a long period, have been marginalized economically because of issues and dynamics involved in, for instance, employment preferences and inheritance laws in a majority of African countries that did not recognize women as rightful inheritors to properties such as land. A majority of women are therefore not able to incur comfortably the electoral campaign expenses such as printing of political materials, logistics expenses, media and public relations costs and, payment of political party monthly or annual premiums and candidature fees.

ii. Political Violence. In as much as several African countries, including Rwanda and Kenya, have established codes of conduct for electoral processes, these laws are frequently violated without any proper enforcement of sanctions to those culpable of such violations. The existing challenges in enforcing these laws have emboldened political contenders to exploit extreme measures in their quests for political support. Many candidates have been associated with hooliganism and political thuggery subjecting female candidates to a political environment characterized by fear and intimidation including threats from seeking votes in particular areas that are perceived as 'strongholds' to the certain candidate(s). Besides, women are not only subjected to physical threats but also extreme propaganda sometimes on their character that may impact them psychologically or their status in society. Despite the existence of these codes of conduct and other mechanisms for the prevention of conflicts such as early warning systems, the majority of prospective female candidates for electoral positions remain discouraged by the unpredictable environment of political competition.

iii. Perceptions about Women in Leadership. Women in African societies are also exposed to misconceptions about their leadership capacities. Whereas both countries have taken legislative actions such as introducing legislative seats reserved for women specifically, sections of the society have internalized this to mean that women should not compete for the other seats in the national assembly. In Kenya, the establishment of the position of women representatives has instituted a perception that women should, therefore not be fronted by political parties as candidates for other elective seats especially in the national assembly and senate which are involved in legislation. But these perceptions are not only confined within the male population. Despite women accounting of at least half of the population in the two countries, the

female candidates have failed to obtain adequate support in terms of voting patterns from other female members of the society.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper sought to add to the debate on women's participation in the political sphere that continues to gain momentum across the world. In particular, it selected two case studies, Kenya and Rwanda both from Africa to highlight the progress being made on women empowerment in decision making and leadership in this part of the world. It should be remembered that Africa and specifically African women have often been misrepresented and got little attention from existing literature. What is ironic however is that the continent seems to be taking up a significant pace in promoting gender balance in leadership. Specifically, not only is Rwanda the leading country with the highest number of women in parliament, Kenya is showing significant efforts by increasing the number and percentage of women each election cycle to parliament. This trend is also visible in other arms of government such as the executive and judiciary, wherein both countries women have taken up prime positions such as ministers of defense as well as foreign affairs. Nine countries in Africa have produced female presidents in the last two decades something that even established democracies such as the United States are still struggling to achieve.

This particular study is an important addition to the rapidly changing research of tracking women representation in parliaments. This is because the size and makeup of parliaments keep often changing while the availability of quality and quantity data may vary from place to place and over time. The study finds that women, despite questions being raised over their role and capacity in a leadership position, continue to make strides in improving good governance practices and highlight issues that affect women through different laws that have been enacted to improve the welfare of women specifically and the society at large. In Kenya for example, the study finds that women legislators have not only been vocal in supporting the formulation and implementation of two-thirds gender principle in all public institutions, but also continue to work towards improving the life and welfare of fellow women as it was the case of the legislation against female genital mutilation (FGM). Rwanda, on the other hand, shows a unique case of women's strategy in leadership. For example, while the law sets the minimum threshold for women at 30% by reserving some seats for women, veteran and popular women leaders chose to compete in the positions that are not reserved for women to give emerging women a chance to be elected. This gamble paid off as most of the veteran female politicians defeated their male counterparts thus increasing the number of women elected directly or through the reserve.

However, despite the numerous legislative actions taken to increase the presence of women in public representation, there are still several challenges that women politicians face in their political journey. There is still reluctance by some communities and religions in Kenya and Rwanda to allow women to compete for political office. This stereotype makes it difficult to implement affirmative action in some parts of the country thus causing inequality in the number of women being represented. Secondly, politics in Kenya and Rwanda continues to be highly capital intensive and one needs to invest a lot of money to win an election yet income inequality between men and women still prevails. In relation to this, politics continues to attract a lot of violence before, during and after elections making many people consider

it a dangerous adventure for women (Nyadera, 2018). Furthermore, the reserved positions for women representatives are not given the same financial allocation as the ordinary positions thus making these offices at times appear irrelevant.

Therefore, both Kenya and Rwanda need to adopt additional strategies that will transform the general perception of the larger society towards women and their leadership. Civic education must be conducted regarding the significance of inclusive leadership in the country as it not only fosters peace but also facilitates development. Women parliamentarians also need to be exposed to further tailored training, workshops, and seminars on legislative processes because political candidates are always drawn from different professional backgrounds that may not necessarily be conversant with processes of law or formulation of public policies. The offices of both women representatives and male representatives need to be properly funded and equipped with a meritocratic secretariat that is well vast with research on policy matters as well as ability to liaise with fundamental operational offices involved in parliamentary proceedings such as those of the speakers and clerks of the various national assemblies. In conclusion, both Kenya and Rwanda have shown a commitment to inclusive leadership by empowering women parliamentarians in various capacities and the future looks promising in achieving gender balance in parliamentary representation.

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