

## **Women’s Representation in Tanzania LGAs: Achievements and Limitations**

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### **Abstract**

The representation of women in decision-making processes is a widely discussed topic in both developed and developing countries since it is a crucial prerequisite for achieving gender equality. However, the representation of women in politics is marked by both achievements and limitations, which are experienced differently by women as compared to their male counterparts. Tanzania, being a developing country, faces a similar situation. Despite the government’s efforts to implement international, regional, and national instruments that promote equal representation of men and women in politics, the current state of affairs is still of concern. To understand the achievements and limitations faced by women in politics, questionnaires were employed, using the urban and rural local government authorities in Dodoma Region as a case study. The study surveyed 390 household heads, and the findings revealed that the quota system, character of political parties, electoral procedures, poor gender relations between men and women, and the financial positions of women: all are the factors that contribute to the success and challenges experienced by women local representatives in local politics. In conclusion, the government needs to address the challenges faced by women in local politics by taking such steps as improving gender relations, electoral procedures, and financial positions of women. Also, political parties have a role to play in ensuring that women are represented equally in decision-making processes.

**Key words:** *women representation, local government authority, local government structures, local decision-making organs*

### **Introduction**

The representation of women in local government structures as councillors and local committee members is crucial for ensuring that women’s needs and interests are adequately represented in decision-making processes to enhance gender equality (Hassan & Silong, 2007: 365). Despite having a population with more women than men, women’s representation in local government structures in Tanzania has been male-dominated (Meena et al., 2017: 11). This underrepresentation of women persists despite the government’s initiatives to increase women’s representation (Mushi, 2010: 5). To address this issue, the Tanzanian government has implemented national frameworks that aim to ensure equal representation of both men and women in decision-making bodies. These frameworks include Articles 66 (i) (b) and 78 (1) of the Tanzania Constitution, as well as a quota system for women’s representation (URT, 1977; Meena, 2015: 6; Manandhar, 2021: 40). Additionally, Tanzania is a member

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state of various international and regional conventions and agreements that set standards for women's representation in local government committees. These instruments—such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995, Maputo Protocol, Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, East African Gender Policy, Commonwealth Secretariat (1995), and the SADC (Southern African Development Community) (1997)—commit to attaining at least 30% of women's representation in political and decision-making structures. These policies have resulted in an increase of women's representation in parliament, which has translated into an increase in women leaders in government.

However, there is still a lack of research on the achievements and limitations faced by women elected to local government structures in Tanzania, despite the increase in their numbers from 19.7% in 1999 to 36.7% in 2014 (Mtasingwa 2022: 29–31). The limited information on this issue significantly contributes to the underrepresentation of women in local government structures. Evidence shows that the underrepresentation of women in local government councils of developing countries causes gender imbalances in the representation of community needs, particularly women's interests and needs in society (Swai & Mackfallen, 2013: 5). Thus, the objective of this paper is to comprehend the achievements and challenges experienced by women representatives in selected local government authorities in Dodoma Region, Tanzania, by specifically examining the representation of women in decision-making bodies through a gendered lens in the political context. By doing so, it aims to highlight the achievements and limitations faced by women representatives in local government structures in Tanzania.

### **Literature Review**

#### ***Understanding the Significance and Reasoning behind Women's Involvement in Politics***

The issue of gender and election in the political sphere is closely linked to representation in society. Conceptually, political representation means the act of standing on behalf of citizens (Dos Santos, 2021: 442). According to Pitkin (1969: 29), representation is a phenomenon of someone acting on behalf of other people in a specified area of jurisdiction. This study focuses on women councillors and local committee members (i.e., *mtaa* and village committees) who represent community needs and interests in decision-making organs in the wards, *mitaa*, and villages in their localities. Pitkin's (1972) framework posits that the understanding of the representation of women involves four distinct dimensions: formalistic, descriptive, symbolic, and substantive. However, this paper adopts two dimensions of Pitkin's framework—descriptive, and substantive representation—to bring an understanding of women's successes and challenges in Tanzania's local politics.

Descriptive representation aims to increase representation for both men and women in decision-making organs, while substantive representation involves addressing the needs and interests of different groups in decision-making processes (Meena et al., 2017: 19; UN Women, 2018: 17). In the one hand, descriptive

representation reflects the experiences of women engagement in decision-making organs, and thus affects their participation in decision-making processes (Ingelaere et al., 2022: 1). Both at the national and local politics, descriptive representation is viewed as a human rights approach that opens up spaces for men and women to participate in politics (Kleineljmer, 2018: 4–5). This has been succeeded through the implementation of a quota system to facilitate gender balance in decision-making organs (Ballington & Karan, 2005: 30; Meena, 2015: 2; Coker et al., 2018: 11). In Tanzania, the quota system has resulted in an increase and attainment of the targets of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action of 30 per cent women's parliamentary representation (Yoon, 2011: 84; Meena, 2015: 2; Lihiru, 2022: 63–65; Mtasingwa & Mtasingwa, 2022: 43). Again, Articles 66 1(b) and 78 (1) of the 1977 constitution of the Republic of Tanzania, as cited in Lihiru (2020: 10), emphasize this by making sure that women make up not less than 30 per cent in parliamentary seats. This has improved women's access to power, decision-making and holding of leadership positions (Athahirah, 2022: 2693), and improved the social and economic welfare of the society.

It is argued that women's presence in politics can encourage the political engagement of women constituents and citizens more generally (Author et al., 2012: 5). This is because women have a unique leadership style that is different from that of men (Hassan & Silong, 2007: 370). Different researchers argue that women are more democratic and consensual; while men use commands and are autocratic in leadership. Gunn (2012: 5) and Idris (2018: 9) opined the same by arguing that a woman in a political office *does something*, while a man *becomes somebody*. This is because women, when compared to men, are less hierarchical, more cooperative and collaborative, and oriented to embed their personal experiences in decision-making processes (Eagly, 2013: 3). Hence, the need of women representation in the local committees to enhance democracy in a local area.

Although descriptive representation is useful in promoting gender balance in politics, this paper argues that women's presence in decision-making organs is not enough. It is crucial to understand what women contribute to their communities and the challenges they face in fulfilling their leadership roles (Kage et al., 2019: 287). Studies show that several factors affect women's participation in politics, and these include the culture and values of electoral processes (Jakimow, 2022: 77; Meena et al. 2017: 13), financial capability (Kenyatta, 2023: 6), and cultural beliefs (True & Niner (2013: 13). A study conducted by Misafi (2014: 87) in Kondo, Tanzania, points out that the presence of women in politics is influenced by incentives, access to information, power relations, knowledge of Kiswahili, and interest in local governance. Jakimow (2022: 76) argues that gender-based violence at work places, harassment, and the burden of domestic workload are barriers for women representation in local politics. This paper argues that these barriers hinder efforts undertaken by the government of Tanzania to increase women's representation in local governance.

On the other hand, substantive representation is influenced by several factors, including the actions of representatives and the groups they represent. It is important to recognize that women are not homogeneous in terms of their abilities, confidence, and competencies (Manandhar, 2021: 39), which can impact their representation of the needs and interests of their communities. Research indicates that women often lack confidence when speaking in front of their male counterparts during meetings (Asiyanbola, 2005: 21), and believe that their views and arguments are disregarded by men (Ndari, 2014: 9–10). As a result, women often remain silent and support men's views and ideas during meetings. This behaviour has been attributed to cultural beliefs that women should not speak in front of men or disagree with them (Araujo & Tejedo-Romero, 2016: 889).

Researchers suggest that patriarchal norms and customary practices are the primary causes of women's weak participation in governance bodies, and their limited ability to influence decision-making (Chan et al., n.d: 28). This is not only the case for women who speak in meetings; they are often representing women and girls' issues, and their contributions are not sought after like those of men (Houlihan, 2020: 13). Studies further indicate that men tend to prioritize issues related to production, such as land and livestock ownership; while women tend to represent issues that concern women, such as access to water, healthcare, and education for their children (Kisambu, 2016: 26). This implies that the representation of community needs is a gender issue. It is important to recognize that both men and women have their own interests and needs that should be considered in decision-making processes. The inclusion of both men and women in decision-making bodies is crucial to ensure that the concerns of both genders are adequately represented. This paper argues whether an increase in the number of women in local decision-making bodies leads to better representation of community needs and interests.

***Tanzania Local Governments: Structures, Responsibilities and Women in Politics***

Local government authorities in Tanzania have a long history dating back to the pre-colonial era (Likwelile & Assey, 2018: 3; Boex et al., 2015: 4; Mdee & Thorley, 2016: 10; Mustafa, 2008: 11; Shivji & Peter, 2003). After independence, the government of Tanzania began improving local government structures by creating two types of authorities: urban and rural (PO-RALG, 2013: 5). Urban authorities include city, municipal and town councils; while rural authorities comprise district councils with township and village councils (Shivji & Peter, 2003: 2). Currently, Tanzania Mainland has 26 regions with 40 urban authorities, and 132 rural district councils; while Zanzibar has 5 regions, 4 urban authorities and 7 rural districts.

The chief executive of each council is an executive director (DED), who is appointed by the Minister in charge of Local Government (PO-RALG, 2013: 7). These local government authorities have the crucial responsibility of serving the people within their communities. They work towards ensuring that the needs and interests of the community are effectively connected to their surroundings. Tanzania's local government authorities have various roles and responsibilities.

Their structures are meant to enable them provide improved quality and quantity of community services closer to the people, including social services (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2006: 102; Boex et al., 2015: 5), such as water services (Mandara et al., 2013: 116), and education services (Yoshida, 2008: 129). Administratively, local units like villages, *vitongoji* (hamlets) and *mitaa* (streets)—as the smallest structures—provide avenues for citizens to conserve land, thus ensuring environmental conservation and protection (Mbwambo, 2015: 15).

Scholars of local government and gender argue that local governments not only provide community services closer to the people, but also greatly influence women's ability to perform their gender roles effectively. Women perform better when their duties are closest to their families and children. This is because of the reproductive and productive gender roles of women in the society (Moser, 1993: 55). Local government structures, being closer to the citizens, ensure adequate provision of basic services that women can easily access to meet their gender roles as mothers, caregivers of family members, and community leaders. Local government authorities collect local taxes and fees, facilitate local economic development, and maintain law and order at the local level (Shivji, 2002: 58; URT, 2006: 7). Locally, governments empower residents to decide on local welfare issues and provide opportunities for men and women to become local leaders (Tanzania Women Lawyers Association, 2014: 18). They also empower communities to improve their economic conditions through social groups such as Village Community Banks (VICOBA), and Women Development Funds (WDF).

According to the Local Government (District Authorities) Act of 1982 and its amendment in 1999, there are specific legal requirements for women's representation in local government bodies. These requirements state that women should comprise one-third of ward committees, and 25% of village council members (URT, 1982: 33). Mousa (2021: 1479) posits that the representation of women in local government structures plays a crucial role in providing job opportunities, improving living conditions, and allocating resources to address women's needs and interests. While men are often encouraged to take on productive roles (Athahirah, 2022: 269), women's reproductive roles are an integral part of their lives as political leaders in local government structures (Moser, 1989: 56). Scholars have shown that women tend to perform well in positions where they are able to maintain close connections with their families, children, and relatives (Moser, 1989: 55).

In Tanzania, the representation of women in local government structures exists in two levels: in urban and rural local government authorities. In urban authorities, representation comprises the lowest level in the *mtaa*, followed by the ward, and finally in the township council, municipality, and city (PO-RALG, 2013: 5). In contrast, in rural local government authorities, the hamlet (*kitongoji*) is followed by the village, ward, and finally the district council (Shivji & Peter, 2003: 12). The election of councillors and local committee members is primarily governed by the Local Government Authorities (Elections) Act, (Cap 292 R.E 2002); Tanzania Local Government Authorities Election Act No. 4 of 1979; Local Government

(District Authorities) Act, 1982; and the Local Government (Urban Authorities) Act, 1982. These legislations encompass provisions regarding the eligibility criteria for voters and candidates, as well as the processes pertaining to voter registration, candidate nominations, election campaigns, voting, result tabulations, and result declarations in the electoral processes. Regarding candidates, the laws stipulate that they must be endorsed by a registered political party. Additionally, the laws outline election offenses and the corresponding penalties (Tanzania Electoral Commission, 2015: 5; ALAT, 2011: 10; URT, 2006: 10).

The election of leaders in villages, sub-villages, and sub-ward committees in urban areas is governed by the Local Government Authorities Acts No. 7 and 8 of 1982 (URT, 1982: 11–13). Section 30(4) of the Local Government Act (District Authorities) No. 7 of 1982 gives the Minister responsible for local government the authority to issue regulations regarding the election of *vitongoji* and *mitaa* chairpersons, as well as their respective committee members. It is important to note that ward councillors in Tanzania Mainland are elected during national elections, where local government elections are usually conducted in every five years; and one year before presidential elections.

Since 2015, local government elections in Tanzania have been coordinated under the President's Office, Ministry of Regional Administration and Local Government. Directors of each respective council serve as electoral supervisors at the levels of city, municipality, town council, and district; while their assistants are selected from the villages, wards, and *mitaa* within a district. According to the Local Government Acts Nos. 7 and 8 (1982) (as amended in 1999), it is emphasized that at each council level, both the councillors of the respective council and *mitaa* committee members should consist of one-third representation of women; while a quarter of village council members should be represented by women. Studies show that the threshold of 30% representation of women has been achieved at the district and village levels in Tanzania Mainland. However, there are still unanswered questions regarding the impact of women in political office. What accomplishments have they achieved in their respective localities? Are they effectively utilizing their leadership positions to influence decision-making for the betterment of their communities? What challenges do they face that hinder them from fulfilling their leadership roles? This paper addresses these questions in an effort to examine the achievements of women in local politics, and explores the challenges that affect their performance.

### **Theoretical Review: Agency Theory**

This paper is guided by the agency theory which examines the relationship between principals and agents, where principals (community members) appoint agents (women representatives) to represent their interests and needs in local decision-making bodies. Agents have the responsibility to fulfil the roles and tasks assigned by the principals. Initially, economists like Besley and Coate (2003), Dixit et al. (1997), and McComas et al. (2006), used the agency theory for analysing public accountability.

However, political scientists now also employ it to analyse accountability in leadership positions. Women representatives in local politics are held accountable to the needs and interests of their constituents (Malmir et al., 2014: 84). The theory assumes that principals have objectives that agents must fulfil (Lyoni et al., 2017: 5). This paper argues that men and women have different attitudes and preferences regarding local values; as influenced by their social realities and constructions (Araujo & Tejedo-Romero, 2016: 888; Mensah et al., 2014: 233). Therefore, the representation of community needs in decision-making bodies is also a gender issue.

Scholars further suggest that gender roles in a community are social constructs shaped by culture and socialization acting as foundational elements (Mechkova et al., 2022: 3). Consequently, women in local politics have been found to represent community needs and interests, particularly those related to their reproductive roles. Studies provide evidence that women in local politics are more likely to advocate for healthcare services, education, and access to water and sanitation within their localities than men (Hassan & Silong, 2007: 367; Mensah et al., 2014: 205). Women—as mothers and caretakers of family members responsible for nurturing their families—play a crucial role in advocating for essential social services to be accessible to a community. However, it is important to note that this does not imply that men neglect services that affect women. It is only that men often prioritize matters related to production and ownership of resources within the family, and the society at large; such as access to land, infrastructure, and economic empowerment (Kisambu, 2016: 11). Therefore, by being closer to citizens, women in local politics are assumed to have more influence on decisions to ensure that services are easily accessible to their communities.

### **Research Methodology**

The study was conducted in Dodoma City and Bahi District councils, which are located in Dodoma Region, Tanzania. These specific councils were deliberately chosen to represent a broader range of urban and rural local authorities in the country. The selection criteria focused on including local government authorities where women had successfully achieved the 30% target set by the SADC, and the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. The study area encompassed a total of six (6) wards; with three (3) wards selected from the Bahi DC; and three (3) wards from the Dodoma City Council. Specifically, three (3) villages were included from Bahi District (namely, Kigwe, Kisima cha Ndege, and Ibugule); and three (3) *mitaa* (neighbourhoods) were selected from Dodoma City (namely, Samora, Kikuyu, and Chinyoya).

The study sample was obtained through the categorization of respondents into two groups: male and female household heads, and male and female political representatives within the local government structures of the study councils. The political representatives included ward councillors, village/*mitaa* committee members, ward development committee members, and council chairpersons. Key informants—such as district executive directors, members of parliament, and district commissioners—from the study councils were also included.

To gather comprehensive data, a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches were employed. The qualitative paradigm provided an understanding of the experiences of women representatives in local government structures; while the quantitative approach yielded numerical insights on the positions held by women in the study areas. Additionally, quantitative information was triangulated with data from documents obtained from the Dodoma City Council and the Bahi DC. The sample consisted of 390 men and women household heads. In addition, 32 village/*mitaa* committee representatives, 16 ward representatives, and 8 women ward councillors (4 from each district) were purposively selected. Two (2) district commissioners, two (2) district executive directors, two (2) council chairpersons, and two (2) members of parliament from the study districts were also chosen. Various data collection methods were employed, including household surveys, focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, and non-participant observation. Semi-structured interviews with women councillors provided insights into their successes and challenges in local leadership roles. Data were analysed using descriptive statistical procedures, focusing on the frequency of variables related to success, such as the impact of women representatives in their localities, and the challenges they faced.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Women in Local Politics: Notable Achievements***

The findings indicate that the achievements of women representatives in local government structures in Tanzania vary across different contexts. However, overall they have made significant contributions towards promoting gender equality and empowering women in the society. The study observed an increase in the number of women holding political positions through local government committees, and as councillors in the study areas. The following observations were made within the study's local government authorities.

#### ***1. Increasing Women's Representation in Local Government Structures***

As of 2020, the Dodoma City Council (DCC) had 4 divisions, 41 wards, 39 villages, 100 *mitaa*, and 222 hamlets (*vitongoji*). On its part, the Bahi District Council comprised of 4 divisions, 22 wards, 59 villages, and 553 hamlets (*vitongoji*). Both Dodoma City and Bahi districts had a single electoral district each, known as Dodoma Urban and Bahi, respectively. In the Dodoma City Council, there were a total of 59 councillors, with 41 being elected male councillors, 14 holding special seats, and 4 being elected women councillors. Additionally, there was one (1) elected Member of Parliament, and one (1) special-seats member of parliament. Regarding the Bahi District Council, there were a total of 22 elected councillors, with 7 of them being women. Since its establishment in 2007, the Bahi District Council has maintained a consistent number of women councillors which was 8 in both 2010 and 2015 elections, with one being elected; and 7 holding special-seats positions. However, in the 2020 election results, there was a decrease in the number of women to 7: one elected councillor, and 6 special-seats councillors.



The study findings indicate an increase in women’s representation within the local government structures of the Dodoma City Council; but the trend in Bahi DC is different. Table 1 illustrates this, showcasing the growth in the number of women serving as ward councillors across different election years. In Dodoma City, the percentage of women serving as ward councillors increased from 11.2% in 2000 to 39.1% in 2020. Conversely, the proportion of women in Bahi DC remained consistent at 30.1% from 2010 to 2015; and slightly dropped to 30.4% in 2020 (URT, 2022).

**Table 1: Percentage of Women Ward Councillors**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Dodoma City Council</b>	<b>Bahi District</b>
2020	39.1	30.4
2015	33.7	31.9
2010	30.2	31.1
2005	23.33	-
2000	11.2	-

**Source:** Compilation of various documents from Dodoma City and Bahi District Councils (2023) by the author.

Further, the study findings revealed a progressive increase in the representation of women in various local committees over time in Dodoma City. However, there was a decrease in the percentage of women members in these committees from an average of 62.7% in 2014 to 55.6% in 2019. This decline in women representation was particularly notable in the years 2014 and 2019 as shown in Table 2. In contrast, in Bahi District the proportion of women village councillors also increased from an average of 38.3% to 45.8% in 2014 and 2019, respectively.

**Table 2: Percentage of Women Village and *Mtaa* Committee in Bahi District and Dodoma City Councils**

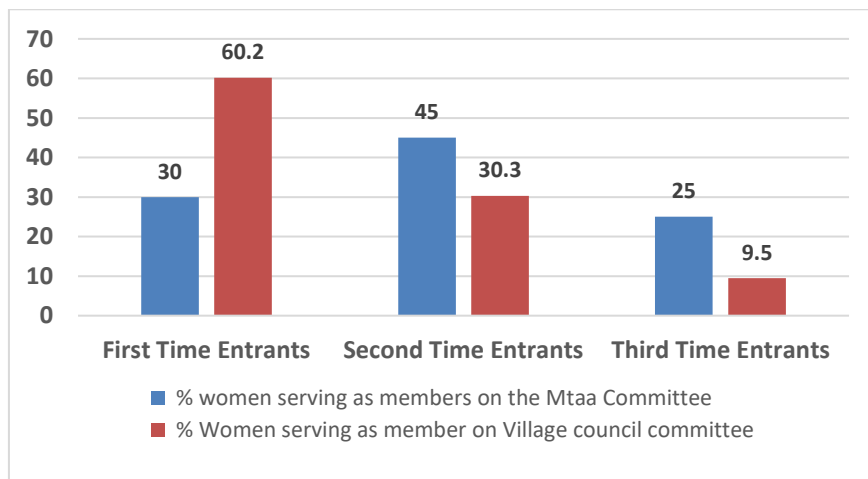
<b>Year</b>	<b><i>Mtaa</i></b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>% of women</b>	<b>Village</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>% of women</b>
2014	Chinyoya	3	3	50	Ibugule	16	9	36
	Samora	2	5	71	Kigwe	14	9	39.1
	Kikuyu	2	4	67	Kisima cha Ndege	15	10	40
	<b>Average</b>			<b>62.7</b>	<b>Average</b>			<b>38.3</b>
2019	Chinyoya	2	4	66.7	Ibugule	15	10	40
	Samora	2	4	66.7	Kigwe	13	10	43.4
	Kikuyu	4	2	33.3	Kisima cha Ndege	11	13	54.1
	<b>Average</b>			<b>55.6</b>	<b>Average</b>			<b>45.8</b>

**Source:** Compilation of various documents from Dodoma City and Bahi District Councils (2023) by the author.

These findings underscore the positive effects of increased women’s representation in leadership roles, contributing to enhanced gender equality and women’s empowerment within local committees. The study findings align with the research

conducted by Kairuki (1992: 17), Lihuru (2022: 66), Meena (2015: 11), Meena et al. (2017: 13), and Mtasingwa and Mtasingwa (2022: 31): who all observed that increasing women's representation through quota systems has been beneficial. However, the findings also noted some challenges faced by women in urban committees. This was confirmed by an official who stated that in Dodoma City, which serves as the capital of both the country and the Dodoma Region, there is intense competition in elections. Consequently, just like men, women are required to possess confidence and competency to participate as candidates for electoral seats.

The findings in Bahi District indicate a notable drop in women's participation in local politics, as presented in Tables 1 and 2. Despite the district's achievement of the 30% threshold set by the SADC and the 1995 Beijing Platform of Action, women in Bahi District exhibited inconsistent durations of service. It was further mentioned that some women representatives engage in local politics through different rounds. Some women participate in only one round, while others continue to be involved for two or even three rounds. (Figure 2).



**Figure 1: Length of Women's Service in the Study Villages and Mitaa**  
Source: Field Data (2017)

According to the results, a majority (60.2%) of the members on village committees in all surveyed villages were newly appointed; with 30.3% having held their seats for a second term, and 9.5% having held them for a third term. In comparison, more than half (57.2%) of the men reported being re-elected for a second term. Likewise, approximately 45% of the women serving on *mitaa* committees were in their second term, while a quarter (25%) were in their third term. Despite these scenarios, women who managed to secure positions had successfully served their communities, as evidenced by their notable durations of service. They demonstrated confidence and employed diverse strategies to mobilize members for active participation in various

community activities (FGD with DCC, 2017). Nevertheless, the number of women in local government structures was not the primary concern within the study area. Instead, the emphasis was on the capacity of women to inspire and drive change. Participants in FGDs highlighted that the abilities of women held greater significance than their numerical representation, a sentiment that was also supported by the interview findings. Asiyabola (2005: 20) proposed a strategy for encouraging the presence of women be felt within a community. According to Asiyabola, this can be accomplished by providing opportunities for women to participate and be represented in various aspects of community life. This means that providing platforms, spaces, and resources that enable women to engage in decision-making processes, express their opinions, and contribute to community development. By offering such opportunities, a community can encourage and promote the inclusion of women, hence ensuring that their voices and perspectives are heard and valued (Asiyabola, 2005: 20),

2. Basic Service Delivery Improved

The study findings indicate that the presence of women representatives has played a crucial role in advocating for improved access to essential services, including healthcare, education, and clean water. Regarding healthcare services, the study noted a significant improvements in the study councils. All respondents in Dodoma City reported an improvement in the availability of drugs; while 81.6% mentioned an improvement in the availability of medical health centres and dispensaries (Figure 2).

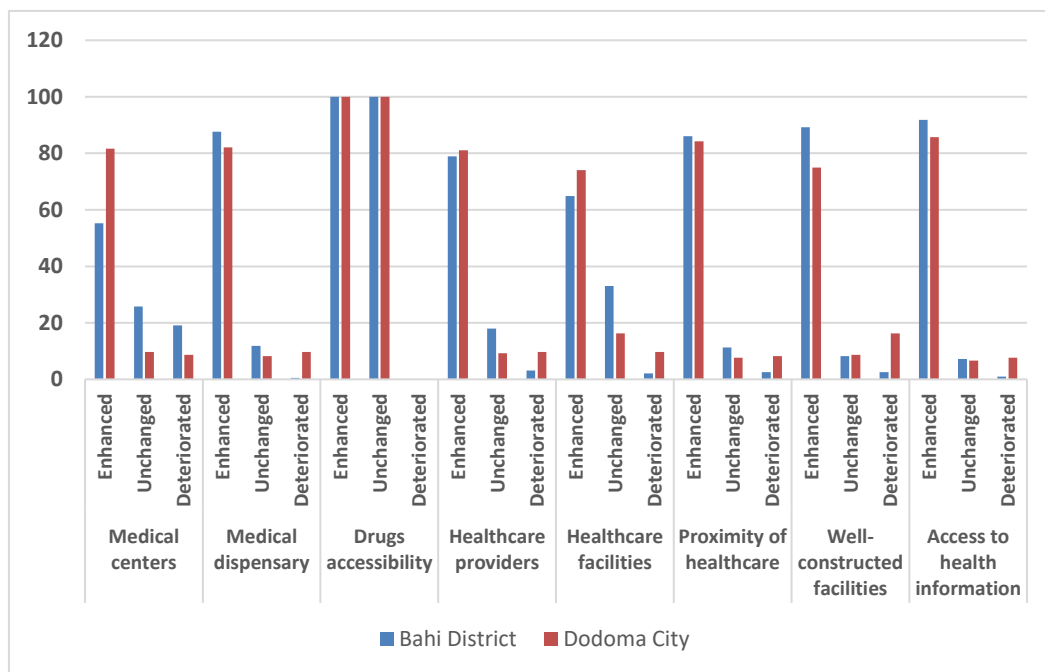


Figure 2: Status of Health Services in the Study Area

Source: Field Data (2017)

Figure 2 further shows that 84.2% of the respondents noted that the proximity to health facilities had improved, while 81.1% reported an increase in the availability of medical personnel. In Bahi District, similar improvements were observed, with 87.6% noting an improvement in the availability of medical dispensaries; with other improvements being noted in health centres (55.2%), proximity to health services (86.1%), and in the availability of medical personnel (78.9%).

These improvements can be attributed to the efforts of various actors, including local government leaders, particularly women leaders. However, it is crucial to address the disparities in health services between Dodoma City and Bahi District; as well as the barriers faced by rural women compared to their fellow urban women counterparts. The higher ranking of medical dispensaries in Bahi District may be due to the reliance of rural citizens on these facilities for medical services, which were more accessible in the surveyed villages. Evidence show that women representatives have been long appreciated in spearheading the improvement of health services in the community (Bustreo et al., 2013: 33). During an FGD with a ward councillor, one participant (a woman) indicated that the experience of women as mothers and family caretakers inclined them to give higher priority to health concerns.

Also, during FGDs, other female participants emphasized the fulfilment of the needs that specifically affect women's interests (FGD, DCC, December 2017). For example, in Bahi district, women consistently advocated for the allocation of funds for the construction of a ward theatre, which was previously non-existent (FGD, Bahi, November 2017). Also, ward councillors actively mobilized other women to participate in the Community Health Fund (CHF). According to Maluka and Bukagile (2014: 368), the CHF is recognized as an effective mechanism for promoting voluntary community engagement and garnering support for healthcare in Tanzania. One official confirmed this, stating that the mobilization of women in the CHF depended on the duration of time women leaders had resided in their respective villages and *mitaa*. To verify this, the researcher conducted interviews with councillors to determine the length of time they had lived in the areas they represented.

The results revealed significant variations between men and women in each district council, as presented in Table 3. Notably, in Dodoma City, a significant variation ( $p=0.054$ ) was observed between men and women. Among women household heads, 12.9% were natives of the area, 39.6% had resided in the area for less than 10 years, and 47.5% had stayed in the study area for more than 10 years. Conversely, a small proportion of men were natives to the area (4.2%), with 35.8% having lived in the area for less than 10 years, and the majority (60.0%) having resided there for more than 10 years. These findings indicate that a large number of men in Dodoma City were not natives to the area. Due to Dodoma's status as the capital city of Tanzania, it is likely that some male household heads migrated from other parts of the country to Dodoma City for employment, settlement, or educational opportunities, as suggested by Ajaero and Onokala (2013: 1–2). This

trend aligns with the common practice among rural inhabitants, particularly men, who move to urban areas in search of better financial prospects, such as improved employment opportunities and higher wages compared to rural areas.

In contrast, the majority of women household heads in Bahi District were natives to the area (48.5%), with 45.5% having resided in the area for less than 10 years, and less than half (45.3%) having stayed there for more than 10 years. This phenomenon can be explained by the fact that female migration from rural to urban areas in Dodoma is often influenced by their marital status and the number of children they have. It indicates that *de facto* female-headed households are more prevalent in rural areas compared to urban areas, primarily due to the migration of males to urban areas, while leaving women behind. Additionally, it suggests that most *de jure* female-headed households may relocate to urban areas due to their inability to sustain livelihoods in rural areas (Smajic & Ermacora, 2007: 73).

**Table 3: Duration of Stay by Women Representation in the Study Area (n=390)**

Length of Stay	Dodoma City			Bahi District		
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Chi-Square Values	Male (%)	Female (%)	Chi-Square Values
Since birth	4.2	12.9	$\chi^2= 5.844$	51.5	48.5	$\chi^2 = 0.171$
Less than 10 years	35.8	39.6	$P= 0.054$	54.5	45.5	$P= 0.918$
More than 10 years	60.0	47.5	$df= 2$	54.7	45.3	$df= 2$

Source: Field data (2017)

This findings is supported by Shames (2013: 3), who opined that women who participate in local politics create networks that bring strong connection. Women were inspired to participate in the activities of their communities by fellow members in the village or *mtaa* in councils (FGD, DCC, December, 2017). It is important to underscore this because, usually many societies have negative opinions on women local representation (Eagly, 2013: 6). Women representatives in decision-making bodies prioritize the fulfilment of needs that directly impact women and their children. This was cemented by one participants from Kigwe village who demonstrated that:

*Many matters related to women fulfilling their practical gender needs were not attended by men, particularly matters on water sources. I was touched to represent other women needs and other members in the society from inside the council, rather than from outside (Member FGD Kigwe Village Council, November, 2017).*

Another FGD participant (a man) at the same village confirmed this by saying: “... representation of women in the village committee is significant since they have a great effect on matters touching other women in the society.”

A woman from Kilimani gave a similar opinions:

*I was very concerned with the problems we face in fulfilling domestic needs. This was the only reason that inspired me to represent women in the local politics. This group of people were accessing water from far; sometimes compelling them to go to nearby hospitals or schools where water sources were protected. As such I can represent women’s needs and interests in meetings (Member FGD Kilimani Mtaa Committee, 2017).*

Another similar view was also given by the Ibugule village councillor, who said:

*The administration was not responsive to women issues.... Some significant matters such as safe water and issues of gender based violence—such as beating wives, sexual harassment, forceful marriages, marrying many wives—were not being addressed effectively. I believed that when I participate in the local politics, I might raise these issues of the needs and interests of women in meetings, and decisions can be reached (Member FGD Ibugule Village Council, 2017).*

The findings suggest that the representation of women in local decision-making bodies is important, as it ensures that women's needs are well represented. It also amplifies the feminist thinking that women should participate in politics so as to represent women's needs and interests (Tong, 2012: 32).

### **Limitations Encountered by Women Local Representatives**

#### ***Challenges in the Socio-economic Sphere***

The findings showed women experiencing poor economic conditions in their daily council responsibilities. This was revealed in the FGDs in Bahi, where it was stated that local duties are voluntary, with no incentives. Representatives were paid or not paid allowances for their responsibilities or/and seating allowances for meetings depending on the financial status of the particular local council. According to the Local Government Acts (1982), representatives in local government authorities are not paid workers; rather they are given incentives to facilitate them meet the costs of representing their communities (Shivji & Peter, 2003: 56). Thus, due to women's predominant involvement in reproductive roles within the household, they have limited access to financial resources, which consequently poses challenges for their full engagement in volunteer activities that however require financial support.

The findings further noticed that women received less economic support from men in their localities. One participant in an FGD argued:

*Despite achieving local leadership positions, women often face limited access to finance, which significantly impacts their productivity and hinders their ability to fulfil their professional duties (FGD, Bahi DC, November, 2017).*

*Despite holding local leadership positions, we face ongoing difficulties in earning respect from our men. This challenge stems from the misconception that male leaders are more competent (FGD, Bahi DC, November, 2017).*

The study findings further revealed significant disparities in educational attainment between councillors in rural and urban areas in the study area. The study found that most village councillors had primary school education, with only a few having secondary education. This may not be a significant issue because the qualifications for a Tanzanian to run for leadership position require the completion of primary school education. However, as Aikael (2010) argues, educational disparities affects the quality of decisions made by local leaders in decision-making organs.

***Challenges in the Socio-cultural Context***

The findings noticed that women representatives were mostly treated like mothers and not like local leaders. This finding is corroborated by Mukangara and Koda (1997), as cited in Yoon (2013: 1), that women are regarded as spouses and caretakers of family members; and not as local leaders. One participant argued that women are not allowed to speak in front of men in local meetings (FGD, Bahi DC, November, 2017). This was confirmed by another participant who revealed that women stereotype roles influenced women's performance in community development activities (FGD, DCC, 2017). It has been learnt that the misconception regarding the role of women in the society results in the lack of support from community members. (FGD, Bahi DC, December, 2017). This means that women in the community are not availed opportunities to participate in tasks outside, including local politics; rather, they are limited to household chores. This is in line with the feminist argument: that patriarchy has identified with men's presence and dominance in political representation, which are considered as major obstacles to women's representation (Tong (2012: 13). Additionally, the study found that women in rural areas are discouraged to speak up in meetings, being afraid of being humiliated in front of their husbands, in-laws and/or parents. This findings align to findings by Stotsky et al. (2016: 270) and Sundström & Stockemer (2015: 11), who all argued that limited freedom for women to speak resets back their efforts of mobilizing other women to participate in local politics.

The study further observed that most of the discussions concerning the welfare of women—such as inadequate sources of safe water, or women's lack of control over resources like land and cattle—should take place in the home and in informal spaces (FGD, Bahi DC, November, 2017). It was noticed that gender norms also affects the way women were able to represent views in meetings (FGD, Bahi DC, November, 2017). This corroborates the opinion by Dillip et al. (2018: 2): that men believe that discussions relating to family matters (such as on issues relating to workloads, gender discrimination in resource entitlements, or resource control and ownerships) are not for public forums; rather they should be discussed at the family level.

***Difficulties in Implementing National Gender Instruments***

The study findings indicate that government policies on gender equality are not closely monitored to support special-seats councillors to exercise their powers freely in local government structures (KII, DCC, December, 2017). Lihiru, (2022: 67) and URT (1992: 10) point out that, the introduction of gender quotas in Tanzania was aimed at opening up more spaces for women to participate in decision-making organs as men do. However, it was argued that the existence of conflicts between elected men/women councillors and special-seats women councillors affects the effective representation by women councillors in their localities (KII, DCC, December, 2017). It was argued that elected men councillors from the same division or ward discouraged women in performing their duties (KII, DCC, December, 2017).

It was further reported that men councillors were repeatedly telling special seats councillors that they did not have a clearly defined constituency to lead apart from being in charge of women themselves as a group (KII, DCC, December, 2017). This means that special-seats councillors were regarded as inferior to their elected counterparts in the study area. It also shows that the prevalence of stereotypes and misconceptions about women local leaders—if they remains unchecked and unaddressed—will continue to prevent women from gaining representation; and can affect the way community members perceive women as local representatives. This situation points to a potential barrier to women's meaningful participation and representation in governance. By devaluing the role of special seat councillors and limiting their perceived constituency, it undermines the potential impact and influence these women can have in shaping policies and advocating for the needs of their communities. The implication here is that, regardless of the mechanisms set by the government of Tanzania to increase women representatives in local politics, men have a greater role to play in ensuring and enhancing gender equality in political participation (Folke et al., 2016: 64).

#### **Challenges Related to Political Party Affiliation**

The findings showed that most of the women representatives in the parliament and local councils in the study councils belong to the ruling party Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM), followed by Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (CHADEMA) (Shayo, 2005: 13; Myenzi, 2007: 18; Tanzania National Election Commission, 2020: 11). Other political parties with representatives in local councils were *Chama cha Wananchi* or Civic United Front (CUF), National Convention for Construction and Reform - Mageuzi (NCCR - Mageuzi), Tanzania Labor Party (TLP), and United Democratic Front (UDP).

In the 2020 national elections, eighteen (18) councillors out of fourteen (14) (85.7%) who were expected to fill the women's special seats in Dodoma City were from the ruling party (CCM), and only two (2) were from CHADEMA. Similarly, in Bahi District, all seven (6) special-seats councillors were from the ruling party (CCM). The findings revealed that women representatives from opposition parties were sometimes intimidated by the ruling party (CCM) leaders who have a majority followers in the study area (FGD, DCC, December, 2017). It was discovered that when these opposition councillors had an issue to share with community members, they got little support from their fellow CCM women leaders (KII, DCC, December, 2017). Even when these opposition leaders do something in favour of the community members, the impacts are credited to the ruling party local leaders. This was a major barrier to effective implementation of women leaders' responsibilities. To ensure democracy and effectiveness, women should be able to champion progress in their respective areas regardless of their party affiliations.

The study findings reveal that the achievements of women representatives in local politics is guided by the directives of political parties (election manifesto), and not



public interests and wishes (KII, DCC, December, 2017). This is in contrast to various international, regional and national efforts to attain equal representation of men and women in political spheres, especially in local politics, to bring positive impacts to communities (Domingo et al., 2015: 34; Majury et al., 2015: 6 ILO, 2014; Kairuki, 1992: 10). As Myenzi (2007: 17) opines, political pluralism in Tanzania is meant to facilitate citizens' democratization in party affiliations. It is meant to open up gates for women to participate in electoral politics through political parties in the parliament and local councils, and not to gag the voices of women in the fight for their rights.

### **Challenges Regarding the Non-implementation of Electoral Procedures**

The findings from FGDs revealed a failure to adhere to certain electoral procedures for rural women (FGD, Bahi, November 2017). According to the Local Authorities (Elections) Act (Cap 292 R.E 2002), providing education to both voters and candidates is deemed crucial. However, the study found that the village government candidates had not received the necessary education as mandated by electoral regulations. Consequently, there was an evident disparity in the implementation of this law between rural and urban local government authorities (FGD, Bahi DC, November 2017).

The study found that no election training was conducted in rural areas prior to the nomination of candidates (FGD, Bahi DC, November 2017). As a result, rural candidates lacked the experience and knowledge required to participate in local government elections. In contrast, the findings indicate that regular trainings were conducted in urban areas before candidates collected nomination forms (KII, DCC, December 2017). Furthermore, the lack of knowledge among rural women about the procedures and rules for participating in local government elections had a significant impact on the election of women in local politics. Due to their limited understanding of the election processes, many rural women faced challenges in effectively engaging in the electoral procedures. This lack of knowledge often resulted in lower levels of female participation, and hence representation in local politics. Without a clear understanding of the procedures and rules, women will less likely run as candidates or actively participate in campaigns. Consequently, their underrepresentation in local politics will persist, hindering their ability to contribute to decision-making processes and address issues that affect their communities (KI, Bahi DC, November, 2017), The findings revealed that women candidates at the village and *vitongoji* levels relied solely on their own efforts to access electoral knowledge and vie for elections.

It is important to note that the Tanzania Local Authorities (Elections) Act, Chapter 292, governs all procedures related to local government structures, including candidate nomination procedures. This means that there are legal frameworks that outlines the rules and processes for participating in local government elections. However, the observed lack of knowledge among rural women regarding these procedures indicates a gap in awareness and understanding of the legal framework.

It emphasizes the need for targeted efforts to educate and empower rural women about their rights and responsibilities as potential candidates or voters in local elections. By providing information and support regarding the legal requirements and procedures, more women can be encouraged to participate in local politics and contribute to decision-making processes at the grassroots level.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of this paper was to examine the achievements and limitations experienced by women in local politics. The paper set to answer the question of whether increasing the number of women in political representation has had an impact on fulfilling community needs and interests. The study findings have shown that the implementation of the quota system in Tanzania's local government as a major contributing mechanism to increased women's representation in the study area. However, the findings indicated disparities in the performance between rural women and those in urban areas. Furthermore, it was noted that women in rural areas lack confidence and capacity to participate in the political arena. The findings show that politics are predominantly seen as the realm for men in rural areas, unlike in urban areas where women were reported to contest elections and mobilize community members to participate in politics.

Furthermore, the findings have indicated that the presence of women in decision-making processes at the local level has influenced improvements in certain services. The study specifically found that health services have improved in the study area under the leadership of women. It also found that women have made significant contributions to the enhancement of social services, particularly in the area of healthcare. Moreover, the study found that these achievement were facilitated by the duration of women's residency in their respective localities. It further noted that experiences in their localities significantly influenced women's participation in local politics. Additionally, the study reveals that existing community needs—such as long distances to access healthcare facilities and safe water sources—act as strong motivators for women to participate in political activities to ensure their needs are adequately addressed in local governments.

Also, the study noted that despite the achievements of women in local politics, they encounter challenges in effectively fulfilling their duties. Sociocultural and socio-economic issues, government gender policy, and political party affiliations are among the challenges prevalent in the study area that restrict women's ability to fully represent the needs and interests of women and other community members. The study recommend that the government should advocate for the development and implementation of gender-sensitive policies. These policies should provide support and resources to facilitate women's active participation in decision-making processes, and address the barriers they face.

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### **Women's Representation in Tanzania LGAs: Achievements and Limitations**

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