



Women in Politics



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Women's social, economic and political role is still a topic of contestation in the early 21st century. Though global trends show an increase since the 1970s, the numbers of women in politics are still not representative of their demographic size. Their equal participation and autonomy are not only essential for the empowerment and respect of their existence, as asserted by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but are also fundamental to achieve sustainable development for all.

In 2021, 24 women serve as head of state or government, and 119 countries have never had women leaders. Why is this important or relevant? Overall, inclusivity is a determinant for progress, which is important for collaboration, engagement and innovation. The exclusion of the largest demographic that influences the creation, nurturing and raising of the human species tends to result in higher mortality and poverty, and lower wellbeing, health, prosperity, equality, economic development and legal protection in society. Despite these advantages, Women are significantly under-represented in political leadership and decision-making.

Out of 193 countries worldwide, only 14 countries have approximately 50 percent of women in the national cabinet. However, in the last 25 years, the number of women occupying parliamentary positions has increased from 11.3 per cent to 24.3 per cent. This growth signals a progressive global development that allows for increased participation of women in democratic spaces to influence legislation and policies. This increased presence of women in politics impacts their political and social capital, challenging traditional status quo, power dynamics and providing an avenue for more diversity and inclusivity.

However, what does it mean to be a woman in the frontlines of social and political change? What does it take, individually, socially and professionally to advance the line of female representation? In this white paper, the importance of female participation and leadership in politics will be presented. Women play an important role in advancing inclusivity and democratisation. The work of the Oslo Center seeks to support their empowerment and participation to enable meaningful representation of all members of society.

Women's Political Participation in Kenya

In Kenya, the legal framework provides the infrastructure needed for gender equality and representation in public and elective offices. Though the number of elected women has increased in the last years, equal representation is still an aspiration, as observed by the numbers on the right.

Women inclusion in politics is a resource for Kenyan social capital, prosperity, and democratic consolidation. Women have different life experiences, needs and abilities to be considered. For examples, their involvement in the Sexual Offence Act has resulted in higher protection of women by enhancing social safeguards and offering punitive measure for offenders.

Empowerment

Empowerment is often described as internal power and confidence to stand up for one's rights and needs; the ability to present and advocate for one's position. As such, the road to empowerment is not only influenced by structural access and political change but requires marginalised individuals to challenge the socio-economic status quo. Patriarchal hierarchical systems, conventional norms, gender and racial stereotypes, and unequal access to resources do only influence the external environment but also the relationship and belief system individuals have towards themselves.

In the case of women, female empowerment in politics usually entails technical capacity building, and structural and procedural reforma to facilitate their access and knowledgeable participation in the political system. This type of work usually entails

Women representation in National Assembly



- 2/3 Limit rule for gender representation in National Assembly
- Number (68= 20%) of women in National Assembly
- Number (281=80%) of men in National Assembly



- 2/3 Limit rule for gender representation in National Assembly
- Number (76= 22%) of women in National Assembly
- Number (273= 78%) of men in National Assembly



the participation of women and men to rebalance the scales of power and create understanding for each other's perspectives and needs. However, prior being politicians, women and men are individuals who have to question their own individual belief systems to know who they are and what they represent. This requires a very human centered approach where women might struggle with self-confidence to communicate, represent and lead.

The journey to empowerment is therefore not only an external one, but also an internal where women have to overcome interpersonal, social, economic and political challenges to have an equal sit around the table. Though improvements have been made globally, "We are still a long way in getting women in every table where critical decisions about them are made", as stated by female politician Betty Adera. Female empowerment is not only about the individual but about the inclusivity and representation of the needs of the people.

Empowering Women in Politics (EWIP)

Over the last years, the Oslo Center has developed progressive programmes for women in politics. The EWIP programme, running since 2019, engages women by enhancing their capacity on the legal framework, political and electoral systems, budgetary processes, and sub-national representation. A gender-based analysis on the systemic barriers that impede women's full participation in politics lead to the creation of a strong network of women politicians, and strong communication and campaign messages.

The Oslo Center trained 77 women under EWIP to express themselves with renewed confidence in solving existing political problems. Trained women are now involved in political discourses at their localities and have been significantly engaged in national and local citizen-centred approaches to build trust and strengthening public participation and inclusivity.

Trained women now lead national processes for political reforms and constitutional changes. Women members of county assemblies (MCAs) have also advanced sub-national development by representing societal needs in policy and decision making. In addition, trained MCAs have also assumed proactive financial monitoring roles and oversight at their respective county assemblies. EWIP women have not only escalated in their own political parties but also created space for meaningful social representation.



"We are still a long way in getting women in every table where critical decisions about them are made."

Ms. Betty Adera, Chair, KANU Women Congress Nairobi County.



Thematic areas supported by the Oslo Center

The Oslo Center supports women's meaningful participation in the following ways:

Structural reforms: Assists structural reforms to ensure equal access for women to facilitate full and effective participation in decision-making processes. This can be within political party structures and government institutions to integrate women in policy prioritisation and implementation.

Legal framework: Strengthens women's capacity to understand complex legal documents, processes, and roles and responsibilities in political institutions. We also provide legislative support for female members of parliament and sub-national representation bodies to strengthen legislative prioritisation and oversight.

Human development: Provides capacity building to women in politics to strengthen their confidence and access to decision making platforms. We also facilitate peer networks and mentorships to learn from women's experience and encourage individual growth.

Institutional capacity: Advices on organizational optimal performance and strategies to strengthen democratic roles. Using in-depth knowledge of local political dynamics, the Oslo Center combines international best practices for tailor-made solutions.

Supportive networks: The Oslo Center is a member of a peer network to exchange best practices on women's participation in political parties, institution building and democratisation processes. The exchange of knowledge and experiences is used to apply innovative practices and support women in our programming.



Recommendations

- **Promoting political and civic education** through sensitization on the role of women in politics, power dynamics, women agency and the interrelationship between gender equality, and social change.
- **Strengthening women's representation** – enhancing legitimacy and accountability, resourcing and capacity development to clarify roles and responsibilities, and ensure female recognition.
- **Fostering participatory governance at national and sub-national levels** – further strengthening of sub-national decision-making structures to empowering women's participation and engagement.
- **Reforming legislative framework and constitution** – relating to women's representation quota in structures and roles at national and sub-national structures.

"The Oslo Center has empowered me, fine-tuned my *leadership and social skills* that have strengthened my character in the political world."

Ms. Ann Ngugi, Aspirant Senator, Nakuru County