

# When does the 'shoulder' pass the 'head'

A case of pastoralist political aspirant women in northern Kenya

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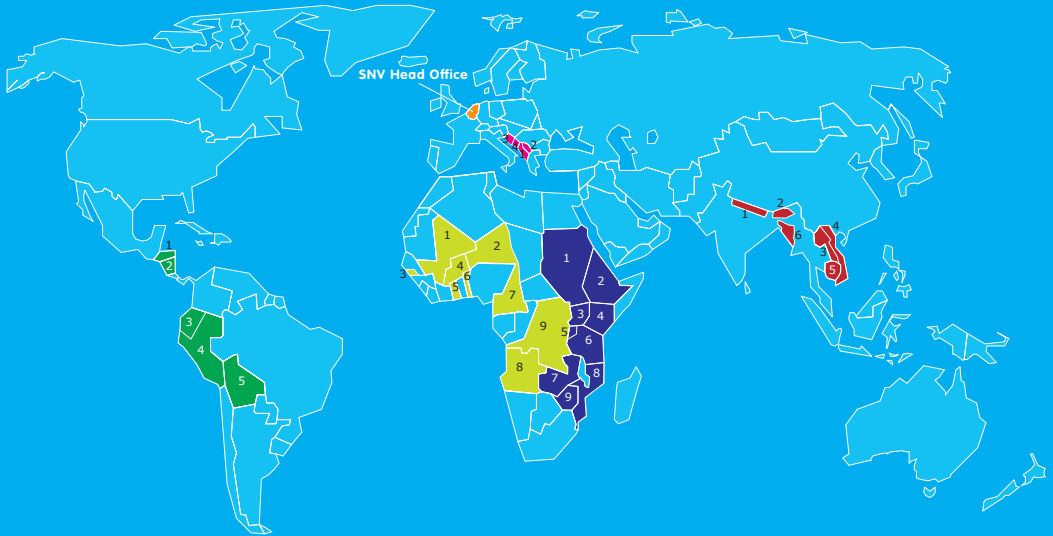
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- 5 Cambodia
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# Table of contents

	<b>Abstract</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Case study</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Research methodology</b>	<b>4</b>
3.1	Site selection and target communities	4
3.2	Sampling, Data collection and Analysis	4
3.3	Research hypothesis	5
3.4	Definition of Key Terms	5
<b>4</b>	<b>Research findings</b>	<b>6</b>
4.1	The Electoral process	6
4.1.1	Motivation to vie	6
4.1.2	Candidate selection/legitimization process	7
4.2	Campaign process	16
4.3	Electoral ballot	16
<b>5</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>17</b>
	<b>References</b>	<b>19</b>
	<b>Annex: research questions</b>	<b>21</b>

# Abstract

**The research examines the informal factors that influence pastoralist women's access to elective political leadership at local government level. The study focuses on family relations, social groupings and political affiliations. The major findings are that pastoralist women are constrained by informal political processes and social pressures, which influence their ability to achieve political office.**

## 1 Introduction

Crusaders of decentralization argue that decentralization of public authority and public functions gives citizens more and better opportunities to influence decision-making and promote democratic governance. However, one fundamental problem facing the process of democratic governance in Africa is the continued lack of gender equality in political leaderships (Norris and Inglehart, 2000). A recent study by UNECA indicates that women currently occupy only 6.1% of seats in local authorities in Nigeria and 50% in South Africa (highest in Africa) whereas a similar study in Kenya shows total women occupancy (both elected and nominated) of 13.1%<sup>1</sup>. Given the nature of politics in Africa and the practice of political leaders who deliberately instrumentalise identities and promote socio-cultural exclusion for their personal advancement (Guichaoua, 2005), women advancement to local government political leaderships may remain an uphill task.

The main aim of this research is to try and examine the 'informal' factors that influence women's access to political leadership positions at local government level. Drawing on a field research sponsored by SNV Netherlands Development Organization among the pastoral communities of Northern Kenya (Marsabit, Samburu, and Isiolo districts), the paper reveals how the institutions of the family, clan and social groups shape the electoral process, thereby determining the legitimate representative. Building on the debate: *Africa Works. Disorder as political instrument in Africa* (Chabal and Daloz, 1999), the findings concur with the indistinct boundaries of politics in contemporary Africa and that politics at the

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1 This is also in contrast to the assumption by gender advocates that participation of women at local government level is much easier to achieve than national level because eligibility criteria are less stringent and that local government is closest to a woman's sphere of influence.

local level is an overlap of various spheres of life. Further, that politics is an interplay of various registers which are played against each other to influence outcomes of an election process. The study however, attempts to add value to some of the notions by revealing how the nature of pastoralist communities and the resultant socio-political exclusion of women present a special situation for women politicians and electorate.

The paper is divided into five sections. Section one explains the objectives of the study. Section two describes the social & economic environment of Northern Kenya districts. Section three discusses the research methodology employed in undertaking this assignment. The research findings, which are structured according to the electoral process and the formal and/or informal processes candidates pass through, are presented in section four. The last section deals with the conclusions arising from the analysis of the research findings and the research questions.

## 2 Case study

Northern Kenya comprises of five districts namely Marsabit, Moyale, Isiolo, Samburu and Turkana. These districts are occupied by pastoral communities keeping livestock such as cattle, sheep, goats, camels and donkeys. The districts are also characterized by periodic droughts, which trigger conflicts about water and pasture among the various groups populating the area, sometimes spilling across the national borders into Ethiopia and Sudan. This study was done in three (Samburu, Marsabit, and Isiolo) out of the five mentioned districts. The dominant ethnic communities in these districts are Boran, Gabbra, Rendille, Samburu, Turkana, and Burji.

Among pastoralist communities, ownership and control of livestock, pasture and water resources are in the domain of men. This is due to the traditional cultural beliefs that preside over community

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- 2 For example decision making within the public domain is the responsibility of male members of communities. Women's main responsibilities are within the homestead, the private domain. Public functions are activities within the public domain like decision making on key communal issues and leadership in socio-political and cultural issues.

governance structures.<sup>2</sup> These cultural beliefs, enforceable through rewards (blessings) or punishments (curses) are within the custody of the institution of elders. This institution commands unobtrusive exercise of power (Stuart and Kelleher 1999), i.e. people do not realize that power is exercised at their expense and therefore it causes no resistance or conflict. For women this has resulted into internalized subordination and acceptance of the status as normal. Consequently, women operate within the periphery of community decision-making organs and processes. The same situation is mirrored at the local government level whereby a scan of four county councils (Marsabit, Samburu, Isiolo and Moyale) has shown only two elected women councilors over two terms.<sup>3</sup>

The resource persons for this research were anticipated to be women councilors<sup>4</sup>, but because of the limitation of their numbers, women who aspired for civic elections but were not successful in the past two elections (1997 and 2002) were also interviewed. It is foreseen that the findings from these three districts will be representative enough for other pastoralists' communities, because of similarities in socio-political and cultural perspectives that shape day to day operations.

## 3 Research methodology

### 3.1 Site selection and target communities

The sites for the study were selected from SNV Northern Kenya areas of operation. These areas are home to various pastoralist communities who are also governed by traditional institutions that are actively shaping day to day decisions (Mbote, 2004).

### 3.2 Sampling, Data collection and Analysis

Because of the limited number of elected women councilors, the researcher was compelled to identify women who had sought civic

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3 This refers to terms in office. In Kenya the term in office is five years.

4 Those who got elected to civic positions over the last two terms. For purposes of comparisons, male councilors from pastoralist communities and women aspirants from settled communities in Laikipia were also interviewed.

positions in the past general elections through the county councils but had not been successful. The researcher also involved local district women networks<sup>5</sup> to gain more insight into some of the issues raised by the respondents. A total of sixteen women (four from Samburu, two from Marsabit, five from Isiolo and five from Laikipia) and four men from pastoralist communities were interviewed. Three focus group discussions were also held with three social groups affiliated to women politicians.

Data was collected both from secondary sources and primary sources. The secondary sources were relevant documents on politics in Africa and gender and development. These included books, journals and other research documents accessed through the internet. The primary sources were of importance because of the qualitative nature of the research. These were key informant interviews, focus group discussions and further validation of the same with the women networks operating in these districts. The information generated was then used to provide nuances for the verification of the various hypothesis of the study.

### 3.3 Research hypothesis

- The family is a **crucial** institution that determines whether the woman can access elective leadership position outside the home.
- The social groups and **participation therein nurtures women** and influences women's access to political leadership.
- Informal political affiliations are **an important parameter that determines** women's access to elective positions at local level.

### 3.4 Definition of Key Terms

#### *Access*

Access is used to describe the formal and informal process from the time the candidate develops the interest to vie, through the election process until election time. These processes have been described in the chapter on research findings as **candidate legitimization at**

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5 The women networks are Samburu Women Advocacy Network, Marsabit Women Advocacy Development Association, Laikipia women advocacy development organization and Network of Pastoralist women in Kenya, all clients of SNV.

family and clan levels, the role of social groups, informal relationships with the MP and gate keepers,<sup>6</sup> **the campaign process** and **the electoral ballot**.

### *Informal dynamics*

The informal dynamics considered for this research are:

- Family relations-how the interactions within the family, role division, access to resources and decision making enable or hinder women from participating in elective positions at local level. A family in the context of this research is defined as the nuclear family (father, mother(s) and children) and the extended family (in-laws).
- Participation in informal social groups-being involved in group activities in leadership positions. These are non formal groups like "merry-go-rounds"<sup>7</sup>, wedding and religious groups that are not created by any formal arrangement.
- Informal political affiliations-These are relationship with the area Member of Parliament (MP) and local party officials (gatekeepers). The relationships considered here are blood (kin), clan or friendship.

### *Registers*

This is a term borrowed from Chabal and Daloz (1999), implying the different socio-political behaviour, attitudes and habits adopted by the political aspirants in order to ascend to political positions.

## 4 Research findings

### 4.1 The Electoral process

#### 4.1.1 Motivation to vie

The research reveals that 25% of women aspirants are inspired by the unique and inequitable position of women in society whereas 75% are motivated to continue with the leadership roles vested in their

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6 The gate keepers are power brokers in the community who may not hold superior positions in the community but through their manipulative strategies could influence the electorate.

7 This is a village resource mobilization and lending system common among women groups in Kenya.



maiden families. The women aspirants concur that their leadership desires have not been fully realized because the various processes<sup>8</sup> set up to select 'legitimate representatives' and the instruments used do not provide level ground for all candidates. These processes and instruments are elaborated in the subsequent discussions.

#### **4.1.2 Candidate selection/legitimization process**

It is apparent from the study that individuals interested in political positions require an endorsement from their clan before presenting their interest to the larger community. This 'legitimization' process applies to all candidates (male and female alike). For women aspirants; the go-ahead for the position has to be sought at family level first.

##### *Informal dynamics at family level*

At the family level, women<sup>9</sup> usually seek consent to vie for political positions from the husbands and the extended family.<sup>10</sup> Women's interest for political positions is received with mixed reactions from the family members. The first 'defiance' may be from the husband. About 90% of the respondents pointed out that husbands fear that when women are elected, they become more powerful than them and the subservient power relationship at the household level is challenged. This is symbolized in a Borana saying: "when does the shoulder pass the head".<sup>11</sup> Participation in political leadership is assumed to steer women to the position of the head and men reduced to position of the shoulder. This, for men is considered shameful and may be a point of ridicule from other members of the community as evidenced in popular phrases like:

*'Amemkalia ('sitting on him')', 'she has tied a rope around his neck', etc.*

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- 8 The clan vetting/selection/legitimization/endorsement processes. The instruments are blessings/curses, bribery and male superior positions which are used to coerce the female electorate.
  - 9 For women who are not in marital relationships, it was indicated that there is enough room to make the decision in consultation with the maiden family.
  - 10 Contrary to the situation with male candidates who need not have consent from their wives as long as the elders of their clan accepts their candidature.
  - 11 A Samburu equivalent of "when does the neck pass the head". Women are referred to as the shoulder or neck and men as the head. Indicating that he has no leverage for making own decisions.

For women in marital relationships<sup>12</sup>, marriage offers authority over a woman to a husband and consequently introduces dependence for the woman, hence the inability for a woman to make individual decisions and choices. This is further confirmed in the cases of the two women who got elected into political positions in the area of study who were not in marital relationships.

For 30% of the female respondents; husbands' fears are that a woman may fail to capture the seat, resulting in shame and embarrassment to the family. In view of this, it was argued; husbands who allow their wives to vie were also keen to support them to win elections. However no practical case existed to shed more light on this information. On the contrary, for male respondents shame is only experienced when one uses unacceptable means and language during the electioneering process yet ends up losing the election.

Another contentious issue for the woman is the use of family resources for campaigns and other support requirements. Women's candidature is usually seen as a channel for misusing meager family resources<sup>13</sup>.

Also children can be consulted, depending on their ages and subsequent understanding of what is going on. However, most women prefer not to involve their children in the campaigns except in cases where children are old enough, in order to protect them from public ridicule and insults<sup>14</sup>.

All women aspirants indicated that they enjoyed immense support from their maiden families. This was also evidenced by the high percentage of women motivated to continue leadership roles vested in their maiden families. The maiden family derives pride from their daughters' participation in political leadership and would offer any support to ensure they are elected. One respondent highlighted her story.

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- 12 According to a key informant, "going for a political position was a do or die decision. My husband threatened to throw me out of the home", whereas for another resource person" these are just threats from the husbands to keep wives under their control".
  - 13 Same is not true for male members of the community because they make decisions on the use of resources.
  - 14 Boys are considered old enough after they are initiated (over 14years old).

"My father said in politics I will cross paths with many people<sup>15</sup>. So he called the elders from his kin and blessed me so that I am protected as I seek for votes".

The perception of the maiden family towards their daughters' participation in politics questions the entrenchment of the traditional perception that women are not supposed to participate in the public realm of politics. But the situation was said to be different with the family into which they are married, where they are expected to be at home taking care of the husband and his family but not to *roam* the village.

This question of authority and dependence for women is crucial for the analysis of the individual exercise of civic rights. The lack of separation of the women from the husband and the marital family seems to *interfere* for women with individual exercise of civic rights. For men however, the ability to make decisions at the family level allows them the autonomy which *reinforces* their exercise of individual civic rights. The ambiguous identity of women even at the very basic unit of society (family) impairs free, fair and competitive elections.

The family is the first factor that women political aspirants encounter and at times a barrier to their political pursuit. This has led to women trying to play other registers as explained in Chabal and Daloz: "... far from behaving randomly or rationally, political actors make sound and shrewd instrumental use of different registers on which they can legitimately draw" (1999: 146).

#### *Clan Consultations and endorsement of a Candidate:*

A clan is said to be represented by the institution of elders who are mainly respected male members of the community who either have socio-political or religious functions. These elders are considered very influential. The elders perform functions ranging from settling disputes to performing ritual sacrifices. It was revealed that this elders' council is the institution through which various candidates are vetted. When elections are announced, candidates express their interest to vie for a seat (parliamentary or civic) to their clan elders. Male members of the community can do so in person or represented by

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15 The phrase cross paths is used to mean disagreements with others.

any elderly male relative. A woman's interest was said to be mainly articulated by the husband<sup>16</sup>. The institution of elders will then sit to vet the different interests and settle for the candidate who is seen to be legitimate<sup>17</sup> enough to represent the clan. Once the candidate has been identified, decisions are made to support the incumbent with whatever requirements including resources, positive publicity, and making alliances with other clans to increase the candidates' chances of winning the seat.

The vetting process as explained by the respondents is characterized by bribery. Bribery involves giving out "something" ranging from *miraa*<sup>18</sup>, money or even cattle to the influential elders so that they could influence the decision in favour of a particular contribution and when I asked for their blessings to vie, candidate.

During the vetting process, certain criteria are applied. Key among them is the 'representativeness' of an individual of that clan. Representation according to a clan is linked to identity "who is ours, who takes our name forward". A legitimate representative is one who is born in that clan and is seen to perpetuate the clan name, as Chabal and Daloz confirm: -The legitimacy of the representative is thus a function of the extent to which s(he) embodies the identities and characteristics of the community" (1999: 55).

This criterion critically complicates the situation for women aspirants. Born in one clan, married in another, women are not seen to be *bonafide* members of any of the clans. Women therefore fail to fulfil the criteria of legitimate representatives in their marital clan. Nevertheless, women's legitimacy in the marital clan was said to improve substantially if she bore children (especially sons) into the clan. For example, a case was presented of a woman interested in vying for a parliamentary seat who went to seek the blessings from her marital clan (together with the husband). This woman

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- 16 In the absence of a husband, a male relative shares a woman's political interest with the elders. For single women, it was indicated that their interests are articulated by their maiden relatives or through the choice of non-symbolic site as explained under the chapter on social groups.
  - 17 Legitimacy here is defined from the socio-cultural and political perspectives of the clan.
  - 18 This is an energy enhancing herb (in some countries listed as a drug) which is accepted and used among the dominant Muslim groups of northern Kenya.

had however not had any children. The elders' verdict said it all:

*"We bless you to have children but not votes."*

The elder's verdict is a manifestation of societal perception of the fundamental role of women: procreation. The birth of a child seals the legitimacy and stability of marriage. A woman without a child has one foot inside the settlement and another one outside, indicating a position of mistrust.

The central question is then how women aspirants are viewed in their maiden clan. Even though they may fulfil the criteria of being born in the clan, their identity does not stretch far since the clan name is only perpetuated through male members of the clan (patrilineal), which makes men more legitimate in representing the clan.

Elders use two logical/rational orders to come to a decision. The first is that men are considered closer to the clan than women, therefore it is logical to give them priority over women. The second is the logic of behavioural standards<sup>19</sup> for men and women. These standards are broader for men and stringent for women. According to this logic women's chances to be vetted are quite limited. However, a good public performance of women can positively influence this order to women's political advantage evidenced in the two women who were endorsed by the elders and won elections. One such case is highlighted below:

*"I was divorced when I was still young because I could not have children. My divorce was witnessed by both my maiden kin and my marital clan. I worked hard and reconstructed my life. I helped my family and helped the community in many ways. They recognized my the majority of the elders granted me"*

Another issue that emerged is how approval for political positions is viewed like any other social cultural consideration that affects the

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19 A woman who visits bars and other public places is not acceptable in the public eyes, whereas the same criteria does not apply to a male aspirant at all. Equally women who are perceived to be immoral (indulgence in extra-marital sex) are considered unacceptable whereas the equivalent has no moral consequences for a male aspirant.

community at large. For example a woman political aspirant was forced to step down in favour of a male candidate who fitted the elders' criteria of a leader and a representative. The aspiring MP who was also from this clan promised to support her for a nominated position if he won. When the time came for the woman to receive her 'reward', the MP decided to leave the whole issue to the clan to further decide whom to be nominated.

In the end the position was given to another male member of the clan and the woman received only further blessings. Considerations made were:

*"He is poor, has no job, his children are not going to school because of school fees, for her, she has a business and a wealthy husband who can take care of her".*

This further verifies the argument by Chabal and Daloz (1999) that "politics in these communities is not functionally differentiated from or separated from the socio-cultural considerations which govern everyday life."(52)

To ensure conformity to their verdict, the elders use one powerful register (spiritual) in form of blessings and curses. These instruments have immense effects on political mileage of these people. It was indicated that any candidate who fails to get the blessings of the clan would be hesitant to go for a position because of the apprehension of what may happen in the absence of these blessings. These instruments are also used by maiden families to protect women aspirants as portrayed below:

*"My ex-husbands' clan threatened to curse me if I vied against their candidate. My family is superior in religious ranking and their curses could have more bearing than that of any clan. When this threat came, my family came to my support and threatened to curse anyone who would dare curse me".*

This also confirms the notion of the irrational: –The world of the irrational is one which binds the individual with the community in ways which are not open to choice" (Chabal and Daloz, 1999: 68).

All respondents<sup>20</sup> agree that the spiritual register is available to male members of the society and a few elderly women<sup>21</sup>, though more powerful for men than for women<sup>22</sup>. Because of the institutional limitations, this register is not available to younger women.

Another finding of the research is the institutionalized bribery which is seen to be legitimate within the sociopolitical transactions of these communities. The fact that the means of transaction is locally acceptable valuables like cattle and *miraa* is an indication of how embedded this practice is in these communities. The effect of bribery on the decisions made by the elders is so profound according to 50% of informants; such that even with such stringent criteria, the balance could still be tilted in one's favour. However, the control and ownership of resources mostly lies in the hands of male members of the community thereby curtailing women's chances of influencing the decisions in their favour. Women try to circumvent these effects by drawing legitimacy from another source, the social groups.

#### *Involvement in community work/ social groupings*

All women aspirants were members of social groups with activities ranging from weddings, fund raising<sup>23</sup>, merry go rounds and preparations of handicrafts to community based development projects. The groups may take a formal nature because of the presence of officials, though not registered with relevant formal institutions. Most of the groups composed mainly of women, exceptions being groups involved in handicrafts which may sometimes be mixed.

Participation in group activities was singled out as one important step in enhancing women's leadership capacities and empowerment process. It develops their leadership potentials and nurtures them to maturity. Additionally, they have been able to prove their capacities, thereby building confidence and self esteem. This empowers the women: "The key to empowerment lies in the ability of women to overcome their internalized oppressions, which starts on a personal

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20 Respondents referred to are from pastoral communities.

21 Depending on their status or traditional religious placement in society.

22 Especially of superior clans in religious terms.

23 Popularly known as Harambee in Kenya.

level and is consolidated and supported through women's organizations and networks" (Mercer, 1999: 103). Through these channels women overcome their internalized subordination and aspire for political leadership in the public arena. A good public performance of women helps to change the negative societal perceptions about them as highlighted in one case.

*"I started the first women group in this region and it has done a lot for the communities. I used to go for recovery of cattle when they are stolen by rustlers together with the men. I did not fight myself but carried water and food for those fighting, gave them morale and courage using comforting words and when they return home I prepare food and tea and offer them a resting place They saw that I can perform and when I asked for their blessings to vie for political position, they gave me. Not only elders of my clan but also of other clans and tribes."*<sup>24</sup>

Through the groups support and encouragement, some women are able to withstand the public ridicule and insults that characterize the electioneering processes, as it "allows them to think of themselves as a collectivity capable of meeting new challenges." (Mercer, 1999: 103)

Lastly, any analysis of the social groups will be extremely limited if we fail to look at it vis-à-vis the clan represented by institution of elders. Although the two may appear to operate on a parallel line, there is cause to believe that there are some informal interactions between these two institutions. It is vital for any woman aspirant to utilize both institutions<sup>25</sup> for the success of her political career. This is confirmed in the case of one of the two elected women councilors from the whole of Northern Kenya.

Among the Rendille, the elders sit at a symbolic but also highly religious site (*geeyi makhabaale*). These sites are completely inaccessible to women. This woman understood this quite well and respects this fact, but had to find a non-provocative way of going

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24 The same woman was given a stick (a symbol of authority) after her election so that she may stand in front of men and address them. This is because in Samburu culture women are not supposed to address men (talk in men's presence) while standing. She can only do so while sited.

25 Through the informal wife-husband relationship.



around this to get the attention of these elders. She went and stood far out of the holy site but near enough to catch the attention of the elders and communicated her interest. Since she had already done commendable work through her group, the elders' had no choice but to give her their blessings.<sup>26</sup>

The social groups have less power over the electorate in comparison with the clan because it lacks the powerful instruments (like blessings and curses) to enforce and influence the electorate in their favour. However, it was indicated that because of their contributions to social goods and services, the social groups also command some status. This is one of the most favourable register for women and an opportunity for enhancing women participation in political leadership. This register could also be utilized in various ways, including influencing the clan register.<sup>27</sup>

#### *Political affiliations with Member of Parliament and the Gatekeepers*

The relationship with the MP is seen to be acceptable or not depending on whether it is a blood relationship or not. In case of a family relationship, this could be very useful because the MP may support the woman with his own resources for campaigning as was highlighted by two respondents. However, if the relationships are not blood relations, this could be damaging for a woman because it could easily be turned into an affair,<sup>28</sup> which could be the beginning of a smear campaign against the woman.<sup>29</sup>

Since good morals are one of the criteria for choosing political leaders, especially for women, it was indicated that such propaganda was enough pressure to pull down a woman and ruin her political aspirations.

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- 26 She got re-elected for a second term because of her good performance.
  - 27 It was indicated that good performance of the group could further influence the decision of the elders on who could be vetted.
  - 28 This has been confirmed by P.K.Mbote and K.Mubbu: "female sexuality is one of the mechanisms of maintaining and preserving women's subordination to men"
  - 29 A woman aspirant made a political alliance with the MP and they steered their campaigns together. Her political opponents used this against her in the campaign to the detriment of her career. Women's political participation is sometimes seen as a gateway to promiscuity.

## 4.2 Campaign process

The campaign process was said to be one rough terrain women aspirants have to follow. The process is marred by physical and mental<sup>30</sup> violence for women and their families. In several instances women are insulted, ridiculed and intimidated by people who are paid by the opponents.<sup>31</sup> During the campaign process, it was specified that a lot of lobbying, informal networking and bribery happens at night. The women aspirants pointed out that operations at night are not very safe for them implying that they can only go out in the company of their male relatives.

Worth noting at this stage is how the different registers are played against one another and victory depends on how many registers are available to the individual and how powerful these registers are to be able to woo voters on to ones' side. From earlier discussions it is clear that the registers available to women are few compared to those available to their male opponents, a position that gives their male counterparts comparative advantage to access the political leadership position.

## 4.3 Electoral ballot

From the discussions, most women would like to vote for fellow women though there may still be resistance<sup>32</sup> from a few. But the wishes of the women to vote for fellow women cannot materialize because they cannot independently decide whom to vote for. Their husbands decide this. Men are said to give in to bribes; use the money or resources that ensue from the bribe for their own needs but demand that wives vote for a candidate of their choice. In most cases the man and the woman are from different clans and considering the clan politics at play, men would like to ensure that their wives do not vote for another clan other than that of his choice. In case women resisted their husband's advice on who to vote for, it was intimidated

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- 30 Mental violence is defined as psychological harm or suffering of women caused by threats, insults, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether in public or private life.
  - 31 Women are more vulnerable in their moral reputation to insults, but also more than men exposed to insults and intimidation.
  - 32 These were given as mostly elderly women who are not members of any social group. These women also hold the traditional view that women cannot/should not lead.

that such a case would lead to shame for the man because he is seen not to be 'in charge' of his wife.<sup>33</sup> Cases were given of men who would carry their wives' identity cards and voter's cards just to make sure that they do not vote against the standing agreement to a certain candidate. However, it was indicated that most people would remain faithful to the oath they may have taken (inform of bribes or otherwise) and vote accordingly.

What is emerging here is yet another quagmire of power plays, where men use their superior position to influence elections in favour of clientelism. This exercise of power is however triggered by the incentives given in form of bribes.

## 5 Conclusion

The informal institutions that influence women's access to political leadership are the family, clan (who have powerful instruments like blessings and curses), social groups and political affiliations.

The research revealed that the family is a first and crucial factor that women political aspirants encounter with. Women's interest in politics solicits mixed reactions from the various family members.

The concerns of the husband range from the assumed challenge to power relationships at household level, to the possible shame that may befall his family in the event of a failure. The in-laws worry is about the fulfilment of traditional roles and responsibilities of a woman whereas the maiden family belief in daughters abilities, the pride of a daughter politician and the fulfilment of their leadership roles. At this level, women aspirants are careful to maintain a delicate balance between family obligations, power relationships at household level and the realization of their political ambitions. This is also further verified in the findings where the only two elected women councilors were not in marital obligations. These findings suggest that the family institution may not be a favourable register for women in marital relationships because it limits their leverage for making decisions in exercise of their civic rights.

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33 For party nominations, elections are done using the queue system whereas for the general elections secret ballots are used. Most of the communities of study have been in one party, meaning that elections of a candidate sometimes end at the party nominations.

After the family, women are confronted with the institution of the clan, candidate vetting and legitimization processes. Critical in the processes is the selection of and subsequent blessing of the legitimate candidate of the clan. Legitimacy is looked at in terms of *who is ours* and *who takes our clan name forward*. The ambiguous identity of women greatly impacts on their legitimacy and representativeness. According to these considerations women's chances to be vetted are quite limited. The use of bribery to influence elders' decisions is a possibility not available to women because of the gendered nature of resource ownership in these communities.

The social groups were singled out as an opportunity institution for women to develop their leadership potentials and be involved in community work through which their capacities are identified and recognized. Good performance of women through these groups have helped change the negative perception about women and steered a few women to political positions.

Political affiliations with the MP and gate keepers are only seen to be viable if they are blood relations. In the absence of this, it could be detrimental for women's political career because of the potential exploitation by the opponents to tarnish women's public image.

The different registers at play in this political arena are the family, clan, social groups, political affiliations and instruments as the spiritual-blessings or curse and male superior position. Different registers are available to men and women, for example men have the spiritual register, which is very powerful and commands conformity from all members of the community whereas women have the register of social groups which is also powerful because of its contribution to social goods and services, one that can possibly influence other registers depending on past records of performance. The election process is interplay of these registers and the one who has more registers (numbers and power) wins the day.

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# Annex: research questions

## Key informant interview:

Name..... Marital status..... Sex.....

Number of children..... Age distribution.....

What is your education level?

What is your role in your family? In community?

When did you last seek elective position?

How did you develop the interest to vie? Who interested you/ convinced you? In what ways?

With whom did you share your interest to vie first? Why?

Who encouraged you/ supported you? In what ways?

Who discouraged you? In what ways?

How did your immediate/extended family react to your interest to vie?

How did they support you in the campaign process?

Who else had you to get go ahead from? Why?

What are some of the reasons given to discourage you?

What are some of the positive leadership qualities you possess and how did you acquire them?

What role did your involvement in groups play in your election/ re-election?

How did your relationship with the MP assist you or inhibit you from being elected?

How did your relationship with the party gatekeepers enable or disable your election?

What do you think needs to happen in order to improve women access to political positions?

**Focus group discussions (informal social groupings)**

What leadership qualities do you look for in a leader? Is participation in social groups useful in leadership ambitions? How? What are the group activities that nurture leadership qualities? Do group members always support fellow women for leadership? Why? Who do women leaders represent? Why is it so? Are women leaders seen as legitimate leaders? Why? In what circumstances? What should be done to improve women participation in elective political positions?





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