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Examining Barriers to Women Participation in Local Government Structures: A Case Study of Kabwe Municipal Council

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Abstract

This study Examined Barriers to Women's Participation in Local Government Structures: A Case Study of Kabwe Municipal Council" sought to investigate the challenges that hinder women from effectively participating in local governance and decision-making processes. The study was motivated by the persistent underrepresentation of women in leadership positions despite numerous global, regional, and national commitments to gender equality, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 and Zambia's 2016 Constitution, which promotes women's inclusion in governance. The problem identified was that women in Kabwe Municipal Council continue to face institutional, cultural, and socio-economic barriers that restrict their participation in local decision-making. The research adopted a mixed-methods case study design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue. Data were collected from 50 respondents using structured questionnaires and interviews and analyzed through descriptive statistics and thematic interpretation. The findings revealed that 60% of respondents believed women lacked adequate financial support for political and leadership activities, while 41% indicated that existing institutional policies at Kabwe Municipal Council did not adequately promote women's inclusion. Additionally, 42% of respondents rated leadership and skills training programs as moderate, and 32% rated them as poor, showing weak institutional capacity-building mechanisms. Cultural and traditional barriers were reported by 36% of respondents as major obstacles, with 28% emphasizing that gender norms and societal expectations discourage women's involvement in leadership. Only 2% said men always supported women's participation, while 42% said such support occurred only sometimes. Education levels were also significant, with 46% linking low educational attainment to reduced leadership engagement. Although 72% of respondents acknowledged that gender mainstreaming initiatives exist, 46% stated they had never benefited from them, and only 34% felt communication of such programs was moderate. The study concluded that despite policy progress, persistent cultural beliefs, limited resources, and inadequate institutional support remain the primary barriers. It recommended enhancing mentorship, financial empowerment, and gender-sensitive policy enforcement to strengthen women's representation in local governance.

1. Introduction

Globally, women face deeply entrenched and multidimensional barriers to participating in local government structures. These barriers arise from social, political, economic, and institutional factors, and vary in severity across different regions and countries (UN Women, 2021; IPU, 2023) [1, 2]. Patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes remain pervasive in many societies, often framing women as caregivers rather than decision-makers. This perception contributes to the exclusion of women from political leadership roles (UN Women, 2021; IPU, 2023) [1, 2]. furthermore, Political parties often act as gatekeepers to political participation, controlling nominations and campaign resources. Many parties exhibit limited internal democracy, placing women in non-viable constituencies or at the bottom of candidate lists, hindering their chances of success (IDEA, 2019; IPU, 2023) [3, 2].

A lack of financial resources severely limits women's ability to compete in elections. Economic disparities and restricted access to campaign funds make it difficult for women to finance political activities (UNDP, 2020) [4].

Female politicians frequently face physical threats, online harassment, and reputational attacks, which serve to discourage or

silence their political engagement (IPU, 2021) [5]. Women often have limited access to political training and mentorship opportunities, reducing their knowledge of governance processes and affecting their confidence to participate (UN Women, 2022) [6].

The First-past-the-post electoral systems favour incumbents and are less likely to support new female candidates. Weak enforcement of gender quotas further limits women's political representation (World Bank, 2021; WEF, 2023) [7, 8]. Countries such as Rwanda, Bolivia, and Nepal, which have strong gender quota systems, exhibit significantly higher women's representation in local government. Despite progress, women still hold only 26.5% of parliamentary seats globally (WEF, 2023) [8].

Despite legal reforms across Africa, women's participation in local governance remains limited. Countries like Rwanda and South Africa have seen progress through quota systems, yet cultural norms, political resistance, and lack of access to resources persist as barriers (Tripp *et al*., 2009; Nzomo, 2018; Goetz & Hassim, 2003) [9, 10, 11].

In many African communities, traditional norms discourage women from leadership roles, reinforcing male dominance in governance (Osei-Afful, 2020) [12]. Although gender quotas exist in some African nations, implementation is often weak or symbolic, with women lacking real power (Bauer, 2012) [13]. Women have Limited access to political funding, campaign platforms, and public visibility further hinders women's political participation (Domingo *et al*., 2015) [14]. Reports from Kenya, Nigeria, and Uganda highlight the prevalence of political violence targeted at women, discouraging their involvement (Oloo, 2021) [15].

As of 2024, women hold approximately 15% of parliamentary seats in Zambia (World Bank Gender Data Portal, 2024; National Assembly of Zambia, 2024). Following the August 2021 election, women's political representation in parliament decreased to 13% (EU Delegation to Zambia, 2023; IPU Parline, 2021), and their representation in cabinet positions stands at 21% (EU Delegation to Zambia, 2023). In local government, women's representation has remained low, reported at around 8% for elected councilors in 2021, and only 10% of elected Mayors or Council Chairpersons were women (EU Delegation to Zambia, 2023; Gender Links, 2021). These figures highlight a persistent underrepresentation of women in Zambian political leadership, despite their constituting over 50% of the population and the majority of voters (EU Delegation to Zambia, 2023).

In Zambia, constitutional provisions such as those in the 2016 Constitution aim to support women's political participation. However, local government remains male-dominated due to persistent structural and societal challenges (Constitution of Zambia, 2016; NGOCC, 2021 [17]).

The first-past-the-post electoral system and party dynamics limit opportunities for women, favouring incumbents and failing to prioritise gender balance (Mulenga, 2020) [18].

Zambian women face significant financial and educational limitations that reduce their capacity to compete in local elections (Phiri, 2022) [19]. Cultural beliefs about women's roles hinder their political participation, especially in rural communities (NGOCC, 2021) [17].

The absence of structured political mentorship limits women's preparedness and leadership development (Chileshe, 2019) [20]. Kabwe Municipal Council provides a relevant case study due to its urban setting and the ongoing efforts to improve gender inclusion in governance. Examining barriers faced by women in this context can provide insights into broader patterns in Zambia's local government system.

1.1 General Objective
To examine the barriers affecting women's participation in local government structures.

1.1.1 Specific Objectives
1. To identify the institutional and structural barriers affecting women's participation in decision-making processes at Kabwe Municipal Council.
2. To assess the socio-cultural and economic factors limiting women's involvement in local governance in Kabwe.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of existing gender mainstreaming strategies in promoting women's participation in Kabwe Municipal Council.

1.2 Theoretical Framework
This study is grounded in feminist theory, a critical framework for analyzing gender inequality and the systemic marginalization of women across society. Feminist theory is a diverse and evolving body of thought that aims to understand and challenge gender inequality. It critically examines how gender shapes social structures, power dynamics, individual experiences, and cultural norms. (Lober judith 2001). At its core, feminist theory aims to understand and challenge patriarchal structures that perpetuate these imbalances, ultimately striving for comprehensive gender equality. Key proponents like bell hooks (2015), Sylvia Walby (1990), and Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) have contributed to its development, highlighting the deeply ingrained gendered power dynamics and limiting gender stereotypes that hinder women's progress. The theory also allows for the identification of subtle and overt institutional biases and unequal access to crucial political networks and mentorship opportunities that disadvantage women.

Feminist theory is particularly relevant to examining the significant underrepresentation of women in local government structures, such as the Kabwe Municipal Council. Feminist analysis helps to unveil the underlying causes of this disparity by deconstructing gender stereotypes that hinder women from seeking political office and identifying institutional biases within local governance systems. It also acknowledges the financial constraints disproportionately affecting women's participation in political campaigns and the detrimental impact of violence and harassment against women in politics. By considering these multifaceted barriers, feminist theory provides a robust lens through which to understand the complex challenges women face in political spheres.

Employing this framework for the study of Kabwe Municipal Council directly informs the research objectives. It enables the identification of prevalent gender stereotypes, scrutiny of institutional obstacles, assessment of network accessibility, investigation of financial limitations, and exploration of lived experiences of discrimination.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Institutional and structural barriers affecting women's participation in decision-making processes in Municipal Council

This thematic area represents a crucial deep dive into the objectives of the study, aiming to meticulously investigate the formal and informal institutional and structural arrangements that either deliberately or inadvertently hinder women's effective engagement in the decision-making processes of the Kabwe Municipal Council. Moving beyond generalized observations prevalent in broader political science literature, this research prioritizes a granular, context-specific analysis. Globally, the understanding of women's underrepresentation in politics is enriched by foundational works like Matland (1998) and Caul Kittilson (2006), which illuminate the systemic influences of electoral systems and party structures. Matland (1998, p. 6) argues that "the rules of the game, particularly the electoral system, have a profound effect on the representation of women." This theme also aligns with global advocacy for gender-responsive governance and ethical conduct, principles championed by bodies such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016), and the critical analysis of resource allocation through the lens of gender budgeting, as discussed by Budlender *et al*. (2002), who note that gender budgeting "involves examining the gender-differentiated impact of government revenues and expenditures" (p. 7).

Regionally, while the specific African context is not detailed in the provided text, this thematic area implicitly acknowledges and will draw upon the shared experiences and policy frameworks within the continent and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, recognizing how similar structural impediments to women's political empowerment manifest across diverse local government landscapes. The very core of this thematic area is, however, deeply rooted in the local context of Kabwe, Zambia. This necessitates a detailed examination of Zambia's local government electoral framework, including specific regulations governing candidate eligibility, local campaign financing dynamics, the precise demarcation of electoral wards within Kabwe, and the historical evolution of these structures and their gender-specific impacts.

Furthermore, the research will rigorously scrutinize the internal operational dynamics of the Kabwe Municipal Council itself, encompassing the composition and mandates of key committees, the scheduling and accessibility of council meetings, the flow and equitable distribution of information among all council members, and the extent of women councilors' representation in leadership positions within the council's hierarchy. Crucially, the investigation will extend to informal norms and practices that subtly yet powerfully shape interactions and decision-making within the council, such as the prevalence of informal male caucus meetings or the reliance on established social networks for information dissemination and influence, which can act as significant, less visible barriers. Eagly and Carli (2007) describe this complex navigation as a "labyrinth" of interconnected obstacles. The presence and enforcement of any codes of conduct or ethical guidelines within the council, and whether these adequately address issues of gender bias and harassment, are also vital structural considerations. Finally, an examination of the administrative arm of the Kabwe Municipal Council, including the gender composition of its leadership and staff, and the integration of gender perspectives into its operational procedures and policy development processes, will provide a more holistic understanding of the institutional landscape. Analyzing the budgetary processes at the local level to determine their gender responsiveness and whether they allocate resources to address the specific needs and priorities of women in the community is another critical aspect of understanding structural inclusion or exclusion.

To comprehensively address this multifaceted thematic area, a robust mixed-methods approach will be paramount, effectively integrating both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. This approach will begin with thorough documentary analysis. Researchers will meticulously review Zambia's Local Government Act, electoral laws and regulations, Kabwe Municipal Council by-laws, rules of procedure, and any internal codes of conduct or ethical guidelines to understand the formal frameworks. Furthermore, analyzing past and present council minutes, committee meeting records, and budget documents will shed light on formal decision-making processes, resource allocation, and historical representation patterns. Data from the Electoral Commission of Zambia regarding past local government elections in Kabwe, including gender-disaggregated candidate lists, voter turnout, and ward demographics, will provide crucial quantitative insights.

Beyond documents, key informant interviews (KIIs) will be a central qualitative methodology. Interviews will be conducted with a diverse range of stakeholders, including current and former women and men councilors, council leadership (e.g., Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Committee Chairs), and key administrative staff (e.g., Town Clerk, heads of departments) within the Kabwe Municipal Council. These interviews aim to elicit rich insights into both formal structures and the nuanced, often unstated, informal dynamics that influence decision-making, the challenges faced by women councilors, and perceptions of gender bias. Further KIIs will involve local political party representatives in Kabwe to understand their candidate selection processes, the level of support provided to women candidates, and how internal party structures might impact women's entry into local politics. Engagement with local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and women's rights advocates working on governance and gender issues in Kabwe will offer external perspectives on existing barriers and potential advocacy strategies. Finally, interviewing community leaders, traditional authorities, and women from diverse wards within Kabwe will provide valuable grassroots insights into their perceptions of women's leadership and the accessibility of local governance structures from the community's perspective.

To complement individual interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) will be highly effective. FGDs with women councilors will provide a platform for them to share collective experiences, discuss common challenges, articulate coping mechanisms, and collaboratively explore perceptions of gender dynamics within the council. Similarly, FGDs with women from various wards in Kabwe will help gauge their awareness of council processes, their interactions with councilors, and their specific community priorities, revealing potential disconnects or areas of unmet needs. Direct observation will offer another layer of insight; attending public council meetings and, where permission is granted, committee meetings, will allow researchers to gain

firsthand understanding of meeting dynamics, participation patterns, power relations, and the practical enforcement of rules and procedures. If feasible and within the project's scope, administering structured surveys could provide quantitative data. A survey directed at all councilors (men and women) could gather statistical information on their perceptions of institutional support, the prevalence of informal barriers, and the perceived effectiveness of current policies designed to promote gender equality. Similarly, a public perception survey with a representative sample of Kabwe residents could quantify public attitudes towards women's leadership and the accessibility of local government.

Based on the proposed robust methodological framework, several key findings are anticipated, offering a comprehensive understanding of the impediments to women's political participation in Kabwe. Concerning formal legal and structural barriers, the research is expected to identify specific provisions within Zambia's local government electoral framework that may inadvertently or directly disadvantage women candidates, such as disproportionately high nomination fees, overly complex eligibility criteria, or challenges related to ward demarcation that do not consider gender dynamics. A significant finding will likely be the confirmation of the absence of legislated gender quotas at the local level, a common factor contributing to low representation. The study may also reveal that while codes of conduct exist within the Kabwe Municipal Council, their enforcement mechanisms are weak, particularly concerning gender bias or harassment. Furthermore, the analysis of council budgets is expected to demonstrate that the Kabwe Municipal Council's budgetary processes are not consistently gender-responsive, leading to an under-allocation of resources for women's specific needs and priorities within the community.

Regarding informal institutional and structural barriers within the Kabwe Municipal Council, the research is likely to confirm the prevalence and influence of informal male caucuses where critical decisions are pre-determined before formal council meetings, effectively marginalizing women's input. This often leads to significant information asymmetries, where crucial information is disseminated primarily through established informal networks, inadvertently excluding women from vital pre-decision-making discussions. The study will likely document deeply ingrained cultural and social norms within the council that subtly, or at times overtly, undermine women's authority, credibility, and contributions. Practical barriers related to meeting scheduling and accessibility are also anticipated findings, where meeting times, durations, or locations may disproportionately disadvantage women councilors, particularly those balancing public office with significant caregiving responsibilities. Quantitative data is expected to highlight the persistent underrepresentation of women in key leadership positions within the council's hierarchy and its most influential committees. Moreover, the research may reveal that the administrative arm of the council lacks sufficient gender expertise or consistent integration of gender perspectives into its operational procedures and policy development, leading to a broader institutional neglect of gender considerations.

At the party-political level in Kabwe, findings are likely to reveal insights into how local party structures and nomination processes may implicitly or explicitly favor men

over women, despite stated party policies on gender equality. There may also be evidence suggesting that women candidates receive less financial and logistical support from their parties during local elections compared to their male counterparts, further hindering their electoral success. Ultimately, these pervasive barriers are expected to collectively result in reduced influence of women councilors on policy formulation, resource allocation, and overall decision-making within the Kabwe Municipal Council. Consequently, the research is anticipated to demonstrate that the council's policies and programs do not adequately address the specific needs and priorities of women in the Kabwe community, a direct consequence of their limited effective participation and influence within the local governance structures. By illuminating these multifaceted barriers, the research will provide a robust evidence base for developing targeted interventions and actionable policy recommendations aimed at fostering greater gender equality and women's political empowerment within the Kabwe Municipal Council.

2.2 Socio-cultural and Economic Factors Limiting Women's Involvement in Local Governance

This comprehensive thematic area serves as a dedicated exploration of Objective Two, focusing on the intricate interplay of deeply ingrained socio-cultural norms and prevailing economic realities that demonstrably impede women's capacity for active and effective participation in local governance, specifically within the unique context of Kabwe, Zambia. Drawing upon a wealth of global scholarship on patriarchal structures and gender stereotypes, including foundational works by Tripp (2004) and Krook (2009), this research transcends general observations to scrutinize the specific manifestations of these pervasive societal norms within the Zambian milieu and, more acutely, within the Kabwe community itself. Globally, the understanding of women's political marginalization consistently highlights how societal expectations regarding women's primary roles, often reinforced by long-standing cultural traditions and religious institutions, severely circumscribe their engagement in the public sphere. The concept of the "double burden"—where women disproportionately shoulder both productive labor (paid work) and the vast responsibilities of reproductive labor (unpaid care work) is a universally acknowledged impediment that limits their time, energy, and financial resources available for political engagement (Franceschet *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, the substantial economic implications of contesting elections, encompassing direct campaign costs and the often-unaccounted-for opportunity cost of lost income during political campaigning, are recognized as significant universal hurdles, although their severity and impact can vary considerably across different socio-economic contexts (Schwindt-Bayer, 2006).

From a regional perspective, particularly within Africa and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), this thematic area implicitly acknowledges the commonalities in socio-cultural and economic challenges confronting women. Across many African societies, robust patriarchal traditions and deeply entrenched gender roles continue to shape societal expectations, often resulting in significant income disparities that disproportionately affect women. The prevalence of informal economies across the region means that women are frequently concentrated in

precarious, low-paying work, and their limited access to formal economic opportunities, secure land tenure, and vital credit facilities is a widespread regional issue, directly compromising their financial autonomy and, by extension, their capacity for robust political engagement. This regional lens informs the understanding of how broader societal structures can be replicated and amplified at the local level.

Crucially, the analytical lens then narrows intensely to the local context of Kabwe. This involves a meticulous investigation into the specific prevailing attitudes towards women in leadership roles within the Kabwe community. The research will explore how traditional gender roles, particularly concerning the division of labor within households, directly impact women's availability and overall capacity to dedicate time and energy to public life. It will critically examine the extent to which local community leaders, including traditional authorities and other influential figures in Kabwe, either actively reinforce or, conversely, courageously challenge these entrenched traditional gender roles. Understanding the specific influence of local cultural traditions, prevalent religious beliefs, and customary laws in shaping perceptions of women's public participation and leadership in Kabwe is paramount to a comprehensive understanding of the barriers. Beyond generalized economic observations, this thematic area will undertake a highly nuanced analysis of the economic factors unique to Kabwe's landscape. This includes a detailed exploration of the specific economic activities and entrepreneurial opportunities available to women in Kabwe, their existing levels of access to crucial productive resources such as secure land ownership, formal credit facilities, and other vital assets that underpin economic empowerment. The direct and indirect impact of Kabwe's local economic structures on women's ability to engage in political life will be meticulously mapped. The specific financial implications of contesting local elections within Kabwe will be rigorously examined, considering typical campaign costs (including transport, publicity materials, and community engagement) and the significant potential loss of income incurred when women divert their time and energy from income-generating activities to political campaigning. The research will specifically highlight how these financial burdens disproportionately affect women due to their often more precarious and less secure economic positions. Furthermore, the study will meticulously investigate the level of social capital and access to influential networks that women in Kabwe possess, comparing it with that of their male counterparts. These networks are critically important for mobilizing political support, accessing vital resources, and gaining endorsements, and their deficiency places women at a considerable disadvantage in the political arena. A particularly vital element of this thematic area is understanding the intersectionality of these socio-cultural and economic factors. The research will explicitly recognize and analyze how these various dimensions of disadvantage might differentially affect women based on their age, marital status, educational attainment, socio-economic standing, and other intersecting social identities within the specific Kabwe context. This intersectional analysis is crucial for providing a far richer, more accurate, and ultimately more actionable picture of the complex, overlapping, and compounded barriers that women encounter in their pursuit of local governance involvement.

To thoroughly unravel the intricate and often overlapping layers of socio-cultural and economic constraints, a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods approach will be systematically applied. This methodology prioritizes gaining in-depth understanding through rich qualitative data, while also incorporating targeted quantitative insights to provide broader context and validate observations. The cornerstone of this approach will be extensive Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). These interviews will be strategically conducted with a diverse array of individuals possessing unique insights into Kabwe's local socio-cultural norms and economic realities. This includes current and former women and men councilors in Kabwe, who can offer firsthand accounts of navigating these constraints within the political sphere. Local political party officials will be interviewed to understand how party structures and selection processes interact with prevailing community norms. Traditional leaders and respected elders within Kabwe will be crucial sources, as custodians of cultural traditions, they can articulate prevailing attitudes towards women in leadership and the evolving interpretations of gender roles. Religious leaders from various denominations in Kabwe will provide perspectives on the influence of religious beliefs and teachings on women's public roles and community expectations. Engagement with local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and women's rights advocates is paramount, as they often possess a profound understanding of grassroots challenges and advocacy efforts. Local business owners and economists in Kabwe will contribute vital insights into the specific economic opportunities available to women, as well as the systemic economic barriers they face. Finally, individual women and men from diverse socio-economic backgrounds across the Kabwe community will offer varied, lived experiences regarding gender roles, daily economic struggles, and how these factors directly impinge upon political participation.

Complementing the individual depth of KIIs, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) will serve as a powerful tool for exploring shared experiences, collective perceptions, and social dynamics within specific demographic groups. FGDs will be meticulously organized with women from different socio-economic strata in Kabwe – including, for example, market traders, small-scale entrepreneurs, formal sector employees, and women in precarious employment or unemployment. These discussions will delve into their daily economic struggles, the significant burden of unpaid care work, their access to financial resources, and how these factors cumulatively limit their time, energy, and overall capacity for political engagement. Separate FGDs with broader community members (both men and women) from different wards will be conducted to explore deeply ingrained attitudes towards women in leadership, the practical implications of traditional gender roles within households, and general community expectations regarding women's public lives. Furthermore, dedicated FGDs with aspiring or unsuccessful women candidates from past local elections in Kabwe will provide invaluable, practical insights into the tangible financial implications of campaigning, the personal sacrifices involved, and the specific challenges of mobilizing political support amidst prevailing socio-cultural and economic pressures.

Case studies of individual women who have either attempted to or successfully engaged in local governance in

Kabwe will provide rich, narrative data. These in-depth accounts will illustrate the specific challenges they encountered, the strategies and coping mechanisms they employed, and the personal and societal costs and benefits of their political journeys. This could involve tracing their pathways from community activism to seeking political office. Where logistically feasible and ethically appropriate, direct observation of community meetings, traditional gatherings, and local economic activities (such as vibrant market scenes) within Kabwe could offer invaluable contextual insights into subtle gender interactions, power dynamics, and the observable division of labor within the community. Finally, a carefully designed, limited quantitative survey administered to a representative sample of women and men in Kabwe could provide statistical backing for qualitative observations. This survey could gather data on perceptions of gender roles, access to specific economic resources (e.g., prevalence of land ownership among women, rates of access to formal credit), perceived average campaign costs, and the extent and availability of social support networks. This would allow for a quantitative dimension to the qualitative findings, highlighting prevalence and scale.

Based on the application of these rigorous methodologies, the research is anticipated to yield several highly significant and actionable key findings concerning the socio-cultural and economic constraints on women's local governance involvement in Kabwe. Regarding socio-cultural norms, the findings are expected to unequivocally reveal the pervasive influence of traditional patriarchal attitudes that often relegate women primarily to domestic roles, leading to a strong, widespread community perception that politics is inherently a male domain. The research is expected to meticulously detail how the unequal division of labor within households, with women disproportionately shouldering the vast burden of unpaid care work (childcare, elderly care, household chores), severely restricts their available time, energy, and mental bandwidth for sustained public and political activities. Furthermore, findings will likely indicate that while some progressive community leaders may genuinely advocate for women's increased participation, traditional leaders and other influential figures in Kabwe, often due to their ingrained positions within patriarchal structures, may implicitly or even explicitly reinforce conventional gender roles, thereby contributing to an often unsupportive or even subtly hostile environment for women aspiring to or engaged in public life. The study will also illuminate how specific cultural traditions and predominant religious beliefs prevalent in Kabwe may contribute to negative stereotypes about women's leadership capabilities or impose social restrictions on their public visibility and outspokenness.

Concerning economic constraints, the research is anticipated to highlight significant and persistent income disparities between men and women in Kabwe, with a substantial proportion of women concentrated in precarious, low-wage, and often informal sector jobs with minimal security or benefits. Findings will likely confirm women's limited access to crucial productive resources within Kabwe, including widespread challenges in securing formal land ownership (often due to customary laws or patriarchal inheritance patterns), obtaining credit from formal financial institutions (due to lack of collateral or credit history), and accessing other vital assets essential for economic

empowerment and independent financial standing. The financial implications of contesting local elections in Kabwe will emerge as a particularly formidable barrier; the study will likely provide concrete evidence demonstrating that campaign costs are often prohibitively high for most women, especially those in precarious economic situations. This financial burden is compounded by the significant risk of income loss due to time diverted from income-generating activities during intensive political campaigning. This inherent economic precarity will be shown to be a major deterrent for women considering or pursuing political office. Furthermore, the research is expected to uncover that women in Kabwe often possess lower levels of social capital and less access to influential networks compared to their male counterparts. These informal networks, often built through traditional male spaces and economic activities, are critically important for mobilizing political support, accessing crucial resources, and gaining endorsements, effectively placing women at a considerable disadvantage in the political arena.

Crucially, the study will provide a nuanced understanding of the intersectionality of these socio-cultural and economic factors. For instance, it will illustrate how a young, unmarried woman with limited education from a low-income household, already burdened by extensive caregiving responsibilities, faces a uniquely compounded set of barriers compared to an older, more educated woman with an established independent income and pre-existing social networks. The findings will highlight how these intersecting identities create varied, specific, and often reinforcing forms of exclusion, necessitating tailored interventions. Ultimately, the research will paint a comprehensive and detailed picture of how these deeply intertwined socio-cultural expectations and economic realities collectively create a formidable and complex barrier, effectively limiting women's political aspirations and significantly impeding their ability to effectively engage in and influence local governance within the Kabwe Municipal Council.

2.3 Effectiveness of Existing Gender Mainstreaming Strategies in Promoting Women's Participation in Municipal Council

This thematic area forms the crucial third pillar of our inquiry, demanding a rigorous and contextually sensitive evaluation of the presence, implementation, and actual effectiveness of gender mainstreaming strategies explicitly designed to enhance women's participation within the Kabwe Municipal Council. Moving beyond a general understanding of gender mainstreaming principles, as widely articulated by the United Nations (1995) and prominent scholars like Mama (2003), this section delves into a critical analysis of any explicit gender policies or initiatives adopted and implemented either directly by the Kabwe Municipal Council or by relevant national government bodies that have specific application to local governance in Zambia. From a global perspective, the concept of gender mainstreaming emerged as a transformative strategy for achieving gender equality, marking a significant shift from standalone "women-in-development" projects to a more integrated approach. This approach advocates for embedding gender perspectives across all policies, programs, and institutional structures. The UN's Beijing Platform for Action (1995) solidified this

commitment, emphasizing that gender equality isn't merely a "women's issue" but a fundamental prerequisite for truly democratic and equitable governance. However, extensive global experience, as meticulously documented by scholars like Goetz (2007), consistently reveals a pervasive gap. The rhetoric of gender mainstreaming frequently outpaces its practical reality. Significant challenges persist in its effective operationalization, including issues related to insufficient resource allocation, limited technical capacity, and a lack of robust accountability mechanisms. Goetz (2007, p. 7) aptly describes this as a "troubling disjuncture between the promise of gender mainstreaming and the reality of its implementation." This thematic area will draw critically upon these global lessons to frame and inform its granular assessment of the situation within Kabwe.

At the regional level, particularly within Africa and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), gender mainstreaming has seen widespread adoption in national policy frameworks. This adoption is often a direct response to international commitments and regional protocols, such as the influential SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, which compels member states to integrate gender perspectives into their governance structures. Consequently, many African countries have developed national gender policies and gender mainstreaming guidelines intended for public institutions. Yet, consistent challenges emerge in the implementation at the local government level. These often include chronic limitations in technical capacity among local officials, inadequate financial resources dedicated to gender initiatives, weak or inconsistent political will from local leadership, and deeply entrenched patriarchal cultures that actively resist genuine transformative changes in gender dynamics. This thematic area will implicitly compare Kabwe's experiences with these broader regional trends, identifying not only commonalities in the struggles faced but also unique divergences specific to its local context.

The most intensive focus, however, remains squarely on the local context of Kabwe, Zambia. This requires a deeply granular investigation into the practicalities of gender mainstreaming as it unfolds within the Kabwe Municipal Council. Specifically, the research will meticulously examine the existence of any explicit gender policies or initiatives that have been formally adopted by the Kabwe Municipal Council itself, or those national policies that have specific mandates and applications at the local governance level in Zambia. A critical component involves assessing the presence and functional efficacy of any designated gender focal points or established gender units within the Council's administrative structure. This scrutiny will extend to understanding their mandated responsibilities, the adequacy of their resources (both financial and human), and their actual influence within the broader administrative hierarchy. A key area of profound importance is the extent to which gender considerations are genuinely integrated into local development plans and, crucially, into the Council's budgetary allocations for the Kabwe district. This goes beyond mere rhetorical inclusion in policy documents; it demands an analysis of tangible resource allocation, demonstrating whether stated commitments translate into meaningful financial provisions for gender equality initiatives. Furthermore, the research will investigate the provision and quality of any gender sensitivity training or capacity-building programs offered to both councilors and

administrative staff, assessing not only participation rates but, more importantly, the perceived impact and any observable behavioral changes resulting from such training. The very core of this analysis will critically evaluate the operationalization of these gender mainstreaming strategies. This involves understanding precisely how these strategies are translated from lofty policy documents into concrete, actionable steps on the ground. It requires an assessment of the actual resources (financial, human, technical) specifically allocated for their implementation, moving beyond theoretical commitments to practical investment. Equally vital is the examination of the mechanisms currently in place for monitoring and evaluating their impact on women's participation, their influence in decision-making processes, and the overall lived experience of women within the Council. Beyond institutional perspectives, this thematic area will delve into the perceptions and lived experiences of women councilors and women administrators within Kabwe themselves regarding the effectiveness of these gender mainstreaming efforts. This involves capturing their firsthand perspectives on whether these strategies have led to tangible and noticeable improvements in their levels of active participation, their ability to genuinely influence decision-making, and the overall gender-sensitivity and inclusivity of the institutional environment. The analysis will also meticulously consider the persistent challenges and limitations that impede the effective implementation of gender mainstreaming in Kabwe. These potential hurdles include internal resistance from within the institution, such as bureaucratic inertia or subtle, pervasive gender-blind practices; a lack of sustained political will or inconsistent financial commitment from council leadership or higher levels of government; or a fundamental mismatch between the adopted strategies (which might be "off-the-shelf" solutions imported from other contexts) and the specific socio-cultural nuances and institutional realities of Kabwe. By rigorously examining the existing landscape of gender mainstreaming in Kabwe, this section aims to move beyond a superficial assessment of policy adoption, delving deeply into the harsh realities of its implementation and its actual, measurable impact on fostering genuine gender equality in local governance.

To conduct a truly rigorous and insightful assessment of gender mainstreaming in Kabwe, a qualitative-driven mixed-methods approach will be systematically employed. This methodology prioritizes gaining an in-depth understanding of implementation realities through rich qualitative data, while strategically leveraging quantitative insights to provide broader context and validate emerging observations. The foundational element of this approach will be extensive documentary analysis. This includes a meticulous review of all relevant national gender policies, the specific provisions within the Local Government Act that pertain to gender, and any dedicated gender policies, strategies, or action plans formally adopted by the Kabwe Municipal Council. This scrutiny will extend to council by-laws, strategic plans, and annual reports, searching for explicit mentions of gender mainstreaming or specific gender-related initiatives. A crucial and robust component will be a gender-responsive budget analysis (informed by methodologies from Budlender et al., 2002) of Kabwe Municipal Council's budgets over recent fiscal years. This will assess whether stated commitments to gender equality are genuinely translated into tangible resource allocations

across different departments and programs, tracing specific funds allocated for gender units, training, and women-specific initiatives. Furthermore, training curricula, attendance registers, and evaluation reports for any gender sensitivity or capacity-building programs offered to councilors and staff will be examined to gauge their content, reach, and perceived utility. Internal reports and minutes of council and committee meetings will also be reviewed for discussions, decisions, and progress reports related to gender mainstreaming initiatives, the functioning of gender focal points, and the status of women's participation.

Complementing documentary analysis, extensive Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) will be a central pillar of data collection, aimed at capturing nuanced perspectives. Interviews will be conducted with council leadership and management, including the Town Clerk, heads of departments, and other senior administrative staff within the Kabwe Municipal Council responsible for policy implementation and resource allocation. These interviews will aim to ascertain their understanding of gender mainstreaming principles, their perceptions of implementation challenges, and the depth of their commitment to its operationalization. In-depth interviews will also be conducted with individuals formally designated as gender focal points or staff within any existing gender units, to understand their specific mandates, the resources available to them, the challenges they face, and their perceived effectiveness in truly integrating gender perspectives across the Council's work. Both women and men councilors will be interviewed to gather their personal perceptions and lived experiences regarding the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming efforts. This will allow for the exploration of whether they feel these strategies have genuinely improved women's participation, their ability to influence decision-making, and the overall gender-sensitivity of the institutional environment. Relevant national government officials from the Ministry of Gender or pertinent local government ministries/departments in Lusaka will also be interviewed to gain insights into the broader policy oversight and support for gender mainstreaming at the local level in Zambia. Crucially, local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and women's rights organizations actively working on gender and governance issues in Kabwe will be engaged, as they often provide invaluable external perspectives on the "rhetoric versus reality" of gender mainstreaming initiatives from an accountability standpoint.

Furthermore, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) will provide a powerful platform for exploring shared experiences, collective perceptions, and group dynamics. FGDs will be meticulously facilitated with women councilors to explore their common experiences with gender mainstreaming initiatives, discuss their shared perceptions of effectiveness, identify key implementation gaps from their vantage point, and collaboratively brainstorm potential improvements and solutions. Separate FGDs with a mixed group of council staff (both male and female) will be conducted to gauge their collective understanding of gender mainstreaming, their experiences with any related training, and their perceptions of how gender considerations are or are not integrated into their daily operational procedures. Direct observation will offer another layer of invaluable, firsthand insight. Researchers will observe formal council meetings to note how gender issues are discussed (or, indeed, omitted

from discussion), who speaks, who listens, and whether gender-sensitive language or practices are evident in the proceedings. This provides crucial insights into the "live" institutional culture and power dynamics. Finally, a carefully designed, concise targeted quantitative survey administered to a larger group of councilors and relevant staff could provide statistical backing for qualitative observations. This survey could quantitatively assess their awareness of gender mainstreaming policies, their participation in training, and their perceived effectiveness of specific initiatives using a Likert scale, providing a broader statistical overview of perceptions and attitudes across the Council.

Based on the application of these rigorous and multi-faceted methodologies, the research is anticipated to yield several highly significant and actionable key findings concerning the state of gender mainstreaming within the Kabwe Municipal Council. Firstly, regarding policy presence versus actual robustness, the research will likely confirm the existence of gender-related policies or broad commitments within national frameworks applicable to local government (e.g., within the National Gender Policy or specific sections of the Local Government Act), and there may even be explicit mentions of gender within Kabwe Municipal Council's own strategic documents. However, a significant finding is expected to be that these commitments are largely lacking in detailed implementation strategies, measurable targets, or specific accountability mechanisms. This suggests a predominant pattern of rhetorical commitment rather than genuinely actionable policy instruments. Secondly, concerning the operationalization of gender units or focal points, it is highly probable that while these structures might exist formally on paper within the Council, they are often critically under-resourced (both financially and in terms of human capital), possess insufficient authority or technical expertise, and frequently find themselves marginalized within the Council's broader administrative hierarchy. Their mandates may be unclear or overly broad, leading to struggles in genuinely influencing mainstream planning and budgetary processes.

Thirdly, the analysis of local development plans and budgets is expected to reveal a pattern of superficial integration of gender considerations. This could manifest as vague, generic statements on gender equality within documents without corresponding specific programs, initiatives, or dedicated resource allocations. It may also indicate a pervasive "gender-blind" approach to budgeting and planning, where the specific needs and priorities of women and men are not systematically analyzed or addressed in resource distribution. Fourthly, concerning training and capacity building, while some gender sensitivity training might indeed be conducted, findings are likely to indicate that such efforts are often sporadic, lack comprehensive follow-up, or are not sufficiently tailored to the unique practical challenges and specific socio-cultural contexts of Kabwe's local governance. Consequently, participants (both councilors and staff) may express that the training has had limited tangible impact on their day-to-day practices, their decision-making, or on the overall institutional culture. Fifthly, a crucial and compelling finding is anticipated to be that women councilors and administrators in Kabwe themselves perceive current gender mainstreaming efforts as largely ineffective in bringing about tangible improvements in their levels of participation, their ability to genuinely

influence decision-making, or the overall gender-sensitivity of the institutional environment. They may articulate a feeling that policies remain at a superficial, symbolic level, failing to address underlying power imbalances, informal barriers, or deeply entrenched patriarchal attitudes.

Finally, the research will likely identify several pervasive implementation challenges that undermine gender mainstreaming efforts. This could include clear evidence of resistance from within the institution, manifesting as passive resistance, a lack of genuine buy-in from key decision-makers, or a deep-seated gender-blindness that makes it difficult for some officials to even perceive the relevance or necessity of gender mainstreaming. A lack of sustained political will and consistent financial commitment from both council leadership and higher levels of government will likely be a significant contributing factor, as gender mainstreaming initiatives are often perceived as "add-ons" rather than integral to core functions. Furthermore, some adopted strategies might be generic, "off-the-shelf" solutions that are not adequately tailored to the specific socio-cultural norms, economic realities, or the particular administrative capacities of the Kabwe Municipal Council, rendering them less effective in practice. Lastly, the absence of robust systems to track progress, collect gender-disaggregated data consistently, and hold departments accountable for gender mainstreaming targets will likely emerge as a significant finding, directly contributing to a profound lack of evidence for actual impact and sustained change. In essence, this thematic area is expected to reveal a significant and persistent gap between the rhetoric of gender mainstreaming and its lived reality in the Kabwe Municipal Council. The findings will underscore the urgent need for more nuanced, contextually aware, adequately resourced, and systematically monitored approaches to achieve genuine gender equality and women's meaningful participation in local governance. This research will provide the necessary evidence base to bridge that gap.

2.4 Research Gaps

The critical evaluation of the existing literature illuminates several key research gaps that this focused study on the Kabwe Municipal Council is strategically positioned to address and contribute meaningfully to the body of knowledge. These gaps highlight the limitations of existing broad stroke analyses and underscore the imperative for granular, context-specific inquiry. Firstly, there is a compelling need for in-depth, context-specific empirical research that meticulously examines the precise institutional and structural barriers that impede women's effective participation in the decision-making apparatus of the Kabwe Municipal Council. Much of the existing literature on institutional barriers, as noted, often draws from Western democratic contexts or offers broad national overviews, potentially overlooking the unique informal governance mechanisms, power dynamics, and specific organizational cultures prevalent in Zambian local government, and particularly within Kabwe (Goetz, 2007; Matland, 1998). This research should move beyond broad generalizations about local government in Zambia and delve into the specific rules, procedures, organizational culture, and informal power dynamics operating within the Kabwe context. A detailed understanding of the Council's internal committee structures, budgetary processes, and information flow, specifically as they impact women, remains

underexplored in this particular setting.

Secondly, there is a significant gap in the detailed understanding of the localized socio-cultural norms, traditional practices, and economic constraints that uniquely shape women's involvement and influence in local governance within the Kabwe community. While African political participation literature broadly addresses socio-cultural and economic factors (Tripp, 2004; Krook, 2009; Franceschet et al., 2012), it often lacks the granular detail specific to a particular Zambian urban/pre-urban context like Kabwe. Qualitative research methods that capture the lived experiences, perceptions, and nuanced challenges faced by women aspiring to and serving in the Kabwe Municipal Council are particularly needed to fill this gap. This includes understanding the specific manifestations of patriarchal attitudes, the division of labor within households, and the financial implications of political engagement as they play out in the daily lives of women in Kabwe (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Schwindt-Bayer, 2006). Thirdly, a critical research gap exists in the systematic and rigorous evaluation of the effectiveness of any existing gender mainstreaming policies and strategies within the Kabwe Municipal Council. While gender mainstreaming is a widely adopted concept globally and regionally (United Nations, 1995; Mama, 2003), its actual implementation and impact often fall short of rhetoric (Goetz, 2007). Empirical studies are required to assess the extent to which gender perspectives are genuinely integrated into the Council's operations, the resources (financial and human) specifically allocated to gender equality initiatives, and the tangible impact of these efforts on women's participation, influence, and experiences within the Council. The specific challenges of implementation, such as resistance from within the institution or lack of sustained political will in the Kabwe context, require focused investigation.

Finally, a broader research gap lies in the comparative analysis of women's experiences and gender mainstreaming efforts across different municipal councils within Zambia. While this study focuses on Kabwe, understanding how the identified barriers and the effectiveness of mainstreaming strategies vary across councils with differing socio-economic and cultural profiles (e.g., more rural vs. more urban, different dominant ethnic groups, varying economic bases) could yield invaluable insights and identify best practices for promoting gender equality in local governance at the sub-national level. This comparative dimension, while not the primary focus of this study, highlights a broader area for future research that this specific Kabwe study will contribute towards (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016). Addressing these identified research gaps through targeted empirical investigation in the Kabwe Municipal Council will not only contribute to a more nuanced and contextually relevant understanding of the barriers women face but will also provide crucial evidence to inform the development of more effective and sustainable strategies for fostering a truly inclusive and gender-equitable local governance system in Kabwe.

3. Research Design

The study adopts a mixed-methods case study design to capture both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of women's participation in local government structures. This design is appropriate because it allows for triangulation of data, thereby enhancing the credibility of the findings

(Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

3.1 Target Population
All women working in the Kabwe Municipal Council

The target population for this study will comprise key stakeholders involved in or affected by women's participation in the Kabwe Municipal Council. This includes: administrative staff, elected officials, head departments and other females working at Kabwe municipal council.

3.2 Sampling design
A Purposive stratified sampling method will be used for the survey.

Elected Women Councilors. Women currently serving as councilors at Kabwe Municipal Council.

Aspiring Women Candidates.ad

3.3 Sample Size Determination
A sample of 50 women working in the Kabwe municipal council, using a purposive stratified sampling.

The sample size for this study will be determined using **Yamane's (1967) formula**, which provides a simplified method for calculating an appropriate sample size based on a known population and a desired precision level. The formula is expressed as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:
- n = required sample size
- N = total population size
- E = margin of error (level of precision), usually set at 0.05 for a 95% confidence level

$$50 = \frac{N}{1 + 0.0025N}$$

$$50(1 + 0.0025N) = N$$

$$50 + 0.125N = N$$

$$50 = N - 0.125N$$

$$50 = 0.875N$$

$$N = \frac{50}{0.875}$$

$$N = 57.14$$

3.4 Data Collection Methods
Primary Data will be collected using structured questionnaires.

Primary data is original, first-hand information collected directly by the researcher for a specific research purpose or project. It hasn't been used or published before.

3.5 Data Analysis
The collected survey data will be analyzed using statistical software (e.g., SPSS or STATA) to generate descriptive statistics such as means, frequencies, and standard deviations. This will help in summarizing the demographic profile of respondents and their perceptions.

4. Findings and Results
4.1 Demographic Information of Respondents
The majority of respondents fall within the 35–44 age group (48%), indicating that mid-career adults constitute the largest segment involved in or affected by local governance in Kabwe. The 25–34 age group represents 32%, reflecting younger adults' participation, while the 45–54 age group accounts for 20%, suggesting relatively fewer older participants. Majority of participants hold either a diploma (34%) or a degree (30%), reflecting a strong representation of undergraduate qualifications. Additionally, 20% of respondents hold a master's degree, while 16% have a PhD, suggesting that a notable proportion of participants possess advanced academic qualifications, which could influence their understanding and engagement with issues of local governance and gender mainstreaming. The largest group of respondents has 7–10 years of service (15%), followed closely by those with 4–6 years (13%) and 1–3 years (12%) of experience. Notably, 10% of respondents have served for more than 10 years, suggesting a balanced mix of relatively new, mid-career, and experienced council staff, which provides diverse perspectives on institutional practices and gender mainstreaming within the Council. The majority of women are administrative staff (36%), followed by department heads (24%) and women in other positions (24%). Only 16% of women hold elected official positions, highlighting a significant underrepresentation of women in key decision-making roles within the Council.
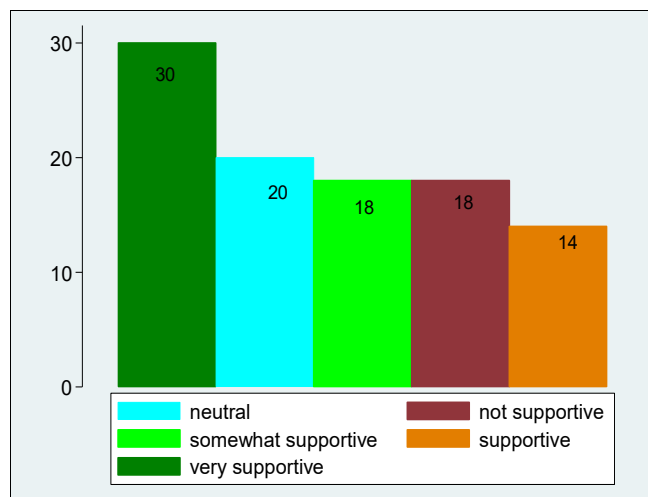
4.2 Institution and Cultural Barriers

Source: Primary Data

Fig 1.1: Figure 4.5 Are You Aware Of Any Programs At Kabwe Municipal Council That Actively Encourage Women Participation In Decision Making
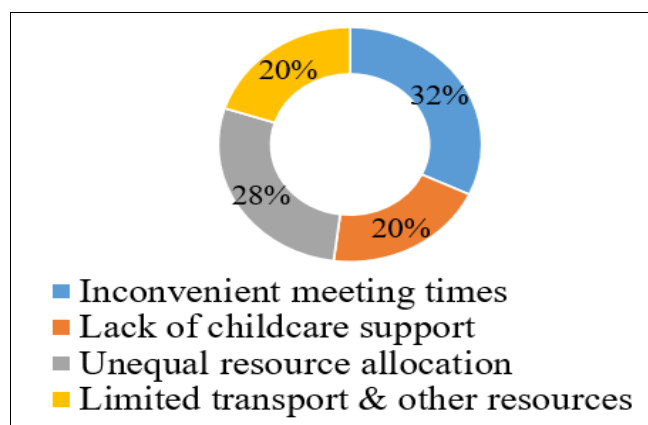
The results indicate that 72% of respondents are aware of such programs, while 28% are not. These findings suggest that the Council has made some efforts to implement initiatives targeting women engagement in governance. However, as highlighted in the literature, mere awareness of programs does not necessarily translate into effective participation, as sociocultural norms, economic constraints, and limited institutional support often continue to restrict women influence in decision-making processes (Goetz, 2007; Tripp, 2004).

Source: Primary Data

Fig 1.2: How do Council's Formal Policies Such as Recruitment and Promotions Impact Women Involvement in Decision Making
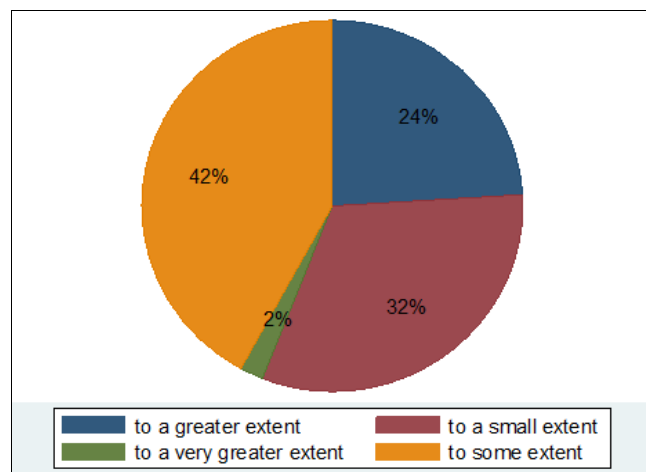
The results indicate that 30% of respondents consider these policies very supportive, 20% view them as neutral, 18% see them as somewhat supportive, another 18% perceive them as not supportive, and 14% regard them as supportive. These findings suggest that although formal policies are in place, structural and practical challenges continue to limit women effective participation, aligning with literature that highlights how institutional barriers and socio-cultural constraints restrict women influence in local governance (Franceschet *et al*., 2012; Tripp, 2004; Schwindt-Bayer, 2006).

Source: Primary Data

Fig 1.3: How do Structural Factors Such as Meeting Time, Childcare Support and Resource Allocation Limit Women's Participation in Council Decision Mailing Process

The results indicate that 32% of respondents cited inconvenient meeting times, 28% pointed to unequal resource allocation, 20% highlighted lack of childcare support, and another 20% noted limited transport and other resources. These findings suggest that, even where formal policies exist, practical structural barriers continue to limit women's effective involvement, supporting literature that emphasizes how time constraints, limited resources, and caregiving responsibilities hinder women political engagement (Franceschet *et al*., 2012; Schwindt-Bayer, 2006; Tripp, 2004).

Source: Primary Data

Fig 1.4: To What Extent are Women Represented in Decision Making Process

The results indicate that 42% of respondents believe women are represented to some extent, 32% to a small extent, 24% to a great extent, and only 2% to a very great extent. These findings suggest that women representation in council decision-making remains limited and uneven, reflecting literature that highlights the persistent structural, socio-cultural, and economic barriers that constrain women full participation in local governance (Tripp, 2004; Franceschet *et al*., 2012; Schwindt-Bayer, 2006).
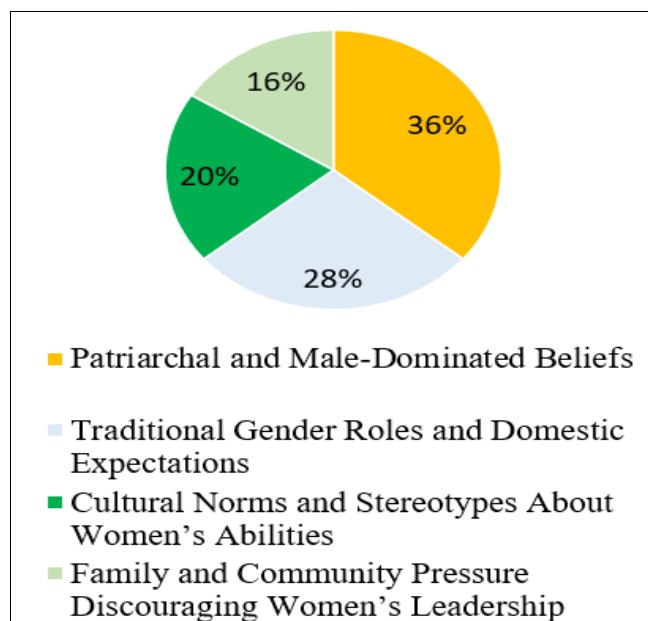

Source: Primary Data

Fig 4.5: Do you Believe the Council is Doing Enough to Ensure Women's Voices are Included in Policy Making? Why Or Why Note

The results indicate that 18 respondents believe the Council is not doing enough, 12 feel women's concerns are often sidelined in final decisions, 10 think women are still underrepresented, and another 10 acknowledge efforts but believe more has to be done. These findings suggest that, despite some initiatives, the Council's efforts are perceived as insufficient, aligning with literature that highlights how institutional barriers, patriarchal norms, and limited practical implementation of gender policies continue to restrict women's meaningful influence in local governance (Goetz, 2007; Tripp, 2004; Franceschet *et al*., 2012).
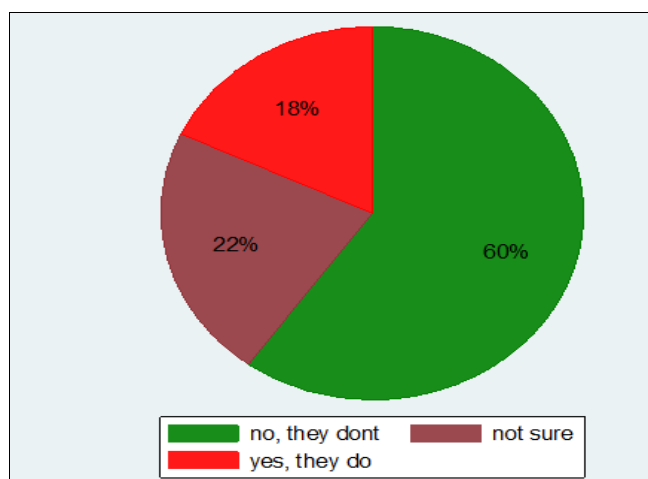
4.3 Social-Cultural and Economic Factor

Fig 1.6: Describe Specific Cultural Norms or Social Expectations in Kabwe that Discourage Women from Leadership Roles
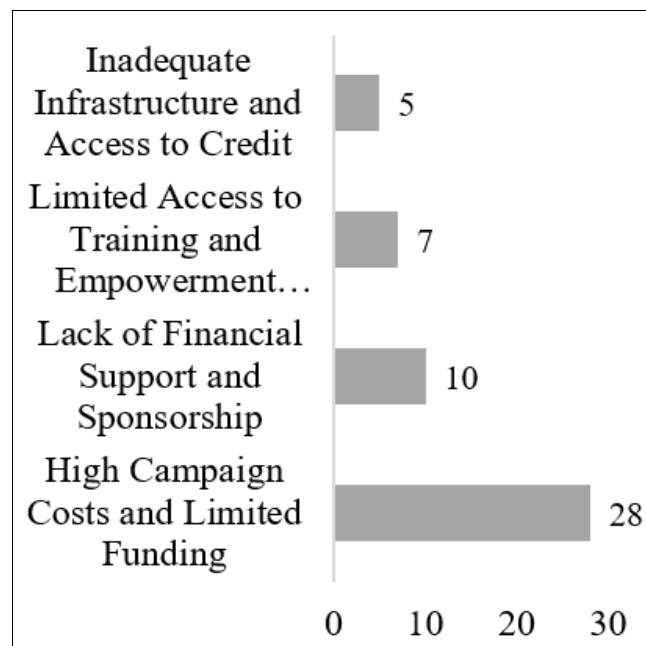
The results indicate that 36% of respondents identified patriarchal and male-dominance beliefs as the main barrier, 28% pointed to traditional gender roles and domestic expectations, 20% mentioned cultural stereotypes about women's abilities, and 16% cited family and community pressure. These findings suggest that deeply rooted socio-cultural norms continue to limit women's participation in leadership and decision-making positions.

Fig 1.7: Do Women in your Community have Equal Access to Financial Resources Necessary for Political Participation Like Campaign and Training
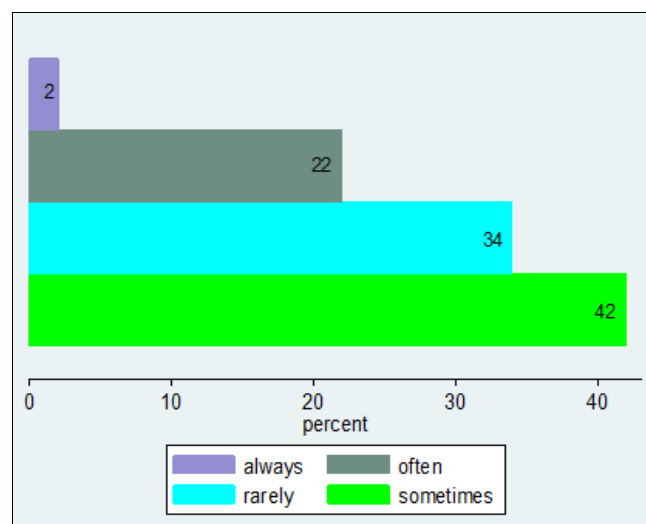
60% of respondents believe women do not have equal access, 22% are not sure, and only 18% agree that women have equal access to such resources. These findings highlight that financial constraints remain a major barrier to women's involvement in local governance.

Fig 1.8: What Economic Challenges Such as Campaign Cost and Training do Women Face when Trying to Engage in Local Governance
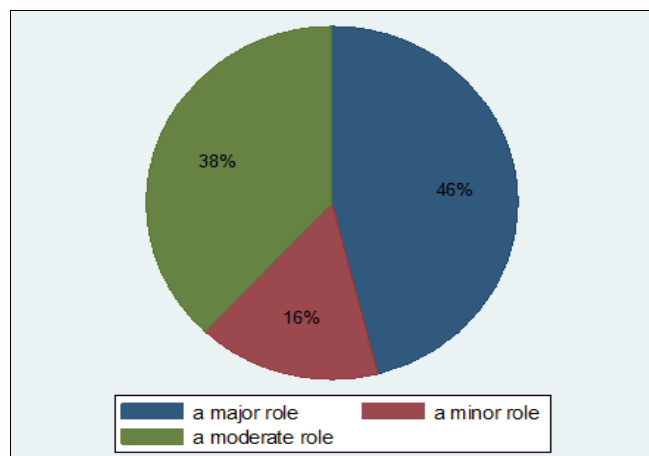
Majority of respondents (28) identified high campaign costs and lack of funding as the main challenge, followed by limited access to training and empowerment opportunities (7), lack of financial support and sponsorship (10), and inadequate infrastructure and access to credit (5).

Fig 4.9: In your Experience do Men in your Community Support Women Involvement in Local Decision Making
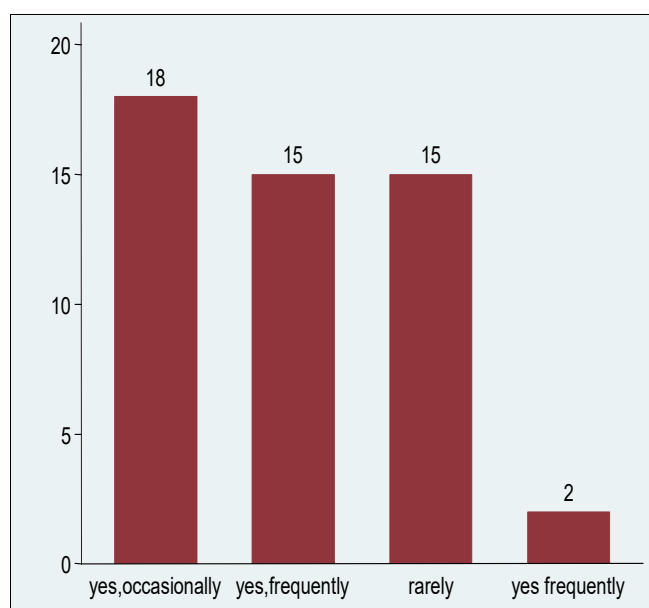
The results show that 42% of respondents believe men sometimes support women's participation, 34% feel men rarely offer support, 22% indicate that men often do, while only 2% report that men always support women's involvement. These findings suggest that while some men show occasional encouragement, consistent and genuine support remains limited.

Source: Primary Data

Fig 4.10: What Role does Education Levels Play in Limiting Women Involvement in Local Governance in Kabwe

46% of respondents believe education plays a major role, 38% view it as a moderate role, while 16% consider it a minor factor. These findings suggest that limited educational attainment remains a significant barrier to women's participation in decision-making processes, as it affects confidence, leadership capacity, and access to information.
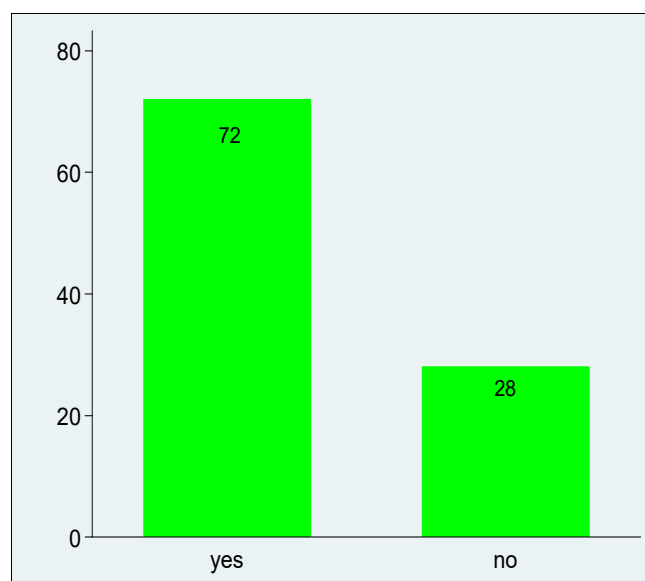

Source: Primary Data

Fig 4.11: Have your Observed or Heard of Instances where Women Involved in Local Governance in Kabwe Faced Gender Based Harassment, Intimidation or Violence

18 respondents said such incidents occur occasionally, 17 indicated they occur frequently, while 15 noted they rarely happen. These results suggest that gender-based harassment and intimidation remain prevalent challenges for women in local governance, creating a hostile environment that discourages participation and limits women's effectiveness in leadership.
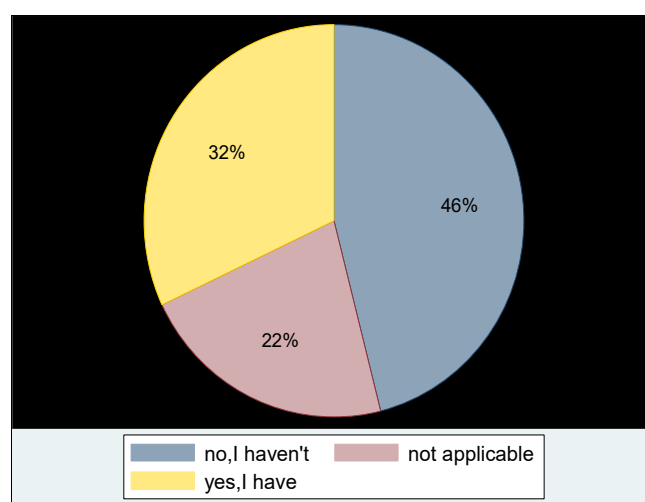
4.4 Gender Mainstreaming Strategies

Source: Primary Data

Fig 4.12: Has Kabwe Municipal Council Implemented Gender Mainstreaming Initiatives

The results indicate that 72% of respondents believe such initiatives have been implemented, while 28% think otherwise. This suggests that a majority recognize the council's efforts to promote gender inclusion, though a notable minority remain skeptical, reflecting literature that emphasizes the gap between the existence of gender policies and their effective operationalization in local governance (Goetz, 2007; Mama, 2003).
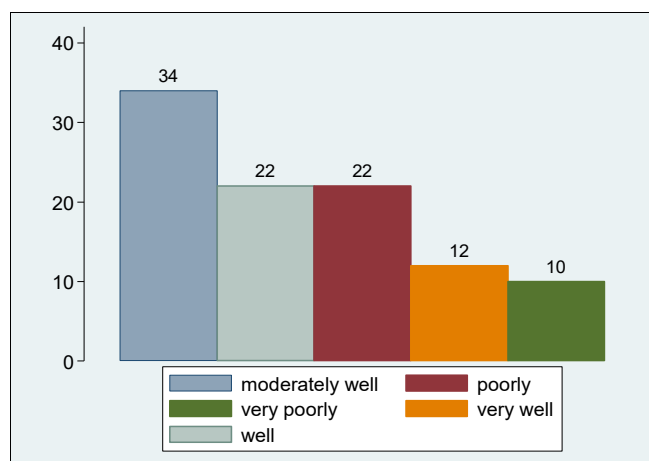

Source: Primary Data

Fig 13: Have you Ever Benefited from Any of These Programs or Initiatives

The results indicate that 46% have not benefited, 22% reported the question as not applicable, and only 32% have actually benefited. This suggests a significant gap between the existence of gender initiatives and their actual reach or

impact, aligning with literature that highlights challenges in translating gender policies into tangible benefits for women in local governance (Goetz, 2007; Mama, 2003).

Source: Primary Data

Fig 4.20: How Well are Gender Mainstreaming Initiatives Communicated to and Understood by all Staff and Elected Officials at Kabwe Municipal Council

34% believe the initiatives are communicated moderately, 22% think they are communicated well, another 22% perceive communication as poor, 12% rate it very well, and 10% consider it very poor.

Table 4.1: What role should women themselves play in strengthening their representation at the council level

Role Women Should Play in Strengthening Representation	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Engage in Leadership and Skills Training	10	20.00	20.00
Build Strong Networks and Alliances	9	18.00	38.00
Advocate and Speak Up for Equal Opportunities	8	16.00	54.00
Mentor and Support Other Women	7	14.00	68.00
Actively Contest and Participate in Leadership Roles	9	18.00	86.00
Pursue Education and Empowerment for Self-Confidence	7	14.00	100.00
TOTAL	50	100.00	

Source: Primary Data

The results indicate that 20% believe women should engage in leadership and skills training, 18% emphasize building strong networks and alliances, 16% advocate speaking up for equal opportunities, 14% highlight mentoring and supporting other women, another 18% support actively contesting and participating in leadership roles, and 14% recommend pursuing education and empowerment to build self-confidence. These findings suggest that a combination of personal development, advocacy, and active participation is considered essential for enhancing women's representation, aligning with literature emphasizing capacity building, networking, and empowerment as critical pathways for increasing women's political influence (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Franceschet *et al*., 2012.

4.5 Discussion of Results

The findings from this study provide compelling evidence of the multifaceted barriers that continue to limit women's participation in local governance within Kabwe Municipal Council. The demographic analysis indicates that the majority of respondents are aged between 35 and 44 years, with substantial professional experience of 7 to 10 years. This suggests that experienced and qualified women are available and potentially capable of taking on leadership roles. Despite this, the results show that their involvement in decision-making remains constrained, highlighting that experience alone is insufficient to overcome entrenched socio-cultural, economic, and structural barriers. These findings resonate with existing literature, which emphasizes that while individual capacities are necessary, they cannot fully offset broader institutional and societal constraints (Tripp, 2004; Krook, 2009; Franceschet *et al*., 2012). Similarly, the educational profile of respondents reveals a strong academic background, with many holding diplomas, degrees, and higher degrees. However, these qualifications have not consistently translated into meaningful participation in council decision-making. This aligns with Eagly and Carli (2007), who argue that education enhances empowerment but does not eliminate the barriers posed by patriarchal norms, limited networks, or structural inequalities.

Structural constraints were identified as a major limiting factor for women's involvement. Respondents highlighted inconvenient meeting times, inadequate childcare support, limited access to transport, and unequal resource allocation as significant impediments to participation. These findings underscore the extent to which organizational structures and operational practices can inadvertently disadvantage women. This is consistent with the literature on gender and local governance, which notes that formal institutional arrangements, when designed without consideration of women's specific needs, perpetuate exclusion (Franceschet *et al*., 2012; Schwindt-Bayer, 2006). Cultural norms also emerged as a critical barrier. Respondents identified pervasive patriarchal beliefs, entrenched gender roles, and expectations of domestic responsibilities as discouraging women from leadership. These results echo findings from Tripp (2004) and Krook (2009), who highlight that socio-cultural expectations often constrain women's political ambitions, even when formal opportunities exist. Male support for women's participation was reported as limited, with most respondents indicating that men rarely or only sometimes support women's engagement in decision-making. This reflects the persistent influence of informal patriarchal networks that shape access to power and reinforce gendered exclusions (Matland, 1998; Goetz, 2007).

Economic constraints were another significant theme in the findings. Respondents reported that limited access to financial resources, high campaign costs, and inadequate sponsorship or training opportunities restrict women's political engagement. These challenges confirm prior studies indicating that economic empowerment is closely linked to political participation, and women without independent financial means face disproportionate barriers (Franceschet *et al*., 2012; Eagly & Carli, 2007). Access to financial resources was particularly limited, with 60% of respondents

reporting that women do not have equal access to the resources needed for campaign activities or training, while high campaign costs were cited as the primary economic challenge. This finding highlights the intersection of financial constraints with structural and cultural barriers, creating compounded disadvantages that prevent women from participating fully in local governance.

Regarding gender mainstreaming initiatives, the findings indicate a gap between policy existence and effective implementation. While 72% of respondents confirmed that Kabwe Municipal Council has implemented gender mainstreaming initiatives, only 32% reported having benefited from these programs. This suggests that while policies are formally in place, their reach and impact are limited. Awareness and communication of these initiatives were moderate at best, with just 12% indicating that programs are very well communicated. This aligns with Goetz (2007), who notes that gender mainstreaming often suffers from "implementation gaps" where the rhetoric of equality is not matched by tangible action. Respondents' perceptions of the council's internal policies further reinforce this observation. While some respondents saw these policies as supportive, the majority were neutral or negative, indicating that the policies may be insufficiently operationalized or poorly implemented. Training and development programs for women aspiring to decision-making roles were rated as average or poor by most respondents, reflecting the literature that suggests capacity-building efforts, when sporadic or poorly contextualized, have limited effect (Budlender *et al*., 2002; United Nations, 1995).

Women's representation in decision-making roles was perceived as limited. Only a small proportion of respondents reported that women are represented to a great or very great extent, while the majority indicated representation is to some extent or a small extent. Furthermore, respondents reported that women's concerns are often sidelined in final decisions, highlighting a disconnect between formal inclusion and actual influence. These findings resonate with Franceschet *et al*. (2012) and Schwindt-Bayer (2006), who argue that numerical representation alone does not guarantee substantive participation or impact in governance processes.

Respondents suggested that women can strengthen their representation through leadership and skills training, building networks and alliances, mentoring other women, advocating for equal opportunities, actively contesting positions, and pursuing education for empowerment.

5. Conclusion
it is evident that women's participation in decision-making processes at Kabwe Municipal Council is significantly hindered by a range of institutional, structural, socio-cultural, and economic barriers. Institutionally, the findings indicate that while gender mainstreaming policies exist, their implementation and communication are inconsistent. For instance, only 22% of respondents believed gender initiatives are well communicated and understood, while a larger portion rated them as only moderately understood (34%) or poorly understood (22%). Furthermore, recruitment and promotion policies were not perceived as wholly supportive, with only 30% indicating these policies were "very supportive" and a notable 20% remaining neutral. These gaps in institutional support reflect structural weaknesses in the council's gender inclusion framework.

Socio-cultural and economic factors also play a prominent role in limiting women's involvement. A majority of respondents (60%) reported that women lack equal access to financial resources necessary for political engagement, such as campaigning and training. Cultural expectations around domestic responsibilities and time constraints were seen as major challenges by 44% of participants, and 38% cited them as significant. Additionally, 46% of respondents believed that education levels play a major role in limiting women's involvement, highlighting a systemic issue of unequal access to skills and qualifications. These socio-economic constraints are compounded by cultural perceptions that discourage women from leadership roles, with many respondents observing only partial or poor representation of women in decision-making positions.

As for the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming strategies, the results reveal mixed outcomes. While 72% acknowledged that Kabwe Municipal Council has implemented gender mainstreaming initiatives, only 33% of participants reported benefiting from such programs, and 47% stated they had not. This suggests a disconnect between policy and practice. Additionally, 38% rated training and development opportunities as merely average, while 32% considered them poor, indicating a need to enhance program accessibility and impact.

The study finds that institutional inefficiencies, structural limitations, deeply rooted socio-cultural norms, and economic inequalities are collectively impeding women's full participation in governance at Kabwe Municipal Council. Gender mainstreaming strategies, though present, require stronger execution, clearer communication, and targeted support to be truly effective. Without deliberate institutional reform, increased resource allocation, and active cultural transformation, meaningful gender equity in local governance will remain out of reach.

6. Acknowledgement

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