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# Assessing the Effectiveness of the National Gender Policy of 2014 in Advancing Women's Participation in Public Administration: The Case Study of the Cabinet Office, Lusaka, Zambia

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**Abstract**

This study assessed the effectiveness of Zambia's National Gender Policy (2014) in advancing women's participation and leadership representation within the Cabinet Office, Lusaka. The research focused on three key objectives: examining institutional and socio-cultural barriers to women's career progression, evaluating the effectiveness of accountability mechanisms in gender mainstreaming, and analysing the impact of institutional gender units and policy implementation on women's representation in leadership positions.

Findings revealed that while most respondents reported moderate career progression and no overt gender-based differences in promotion opportunities, significant barriers persist. These include challenges with work-life balance, limited networking and mentorship opportunities, and a prevailing masculine leadership culture that fosters scepticism toward women's authority. Additionally, institutional constraints such as rigid work schedules, inadequate parental leave, and insufficient childcare facilities hinder women's career advancement. These findings align with broader evidence, including the World Bank (2023) study, which highlights how promotion systems emphasizing continuous service years disadvantage women with caregiving responsibilities.

The study also found that gender mainstreaming policies are generally enforced within the Cabinet Office, and many respondents perceive their departments as inclusive. However, for gender mainstreaming to be more impactful, respondents emphasized the need for stronger leadership commitment, adequate resourcing, and integration of intersectional factors such as age, disability, and socio-economic status.

Finally, the study concluded that enhancing gender equality requires robust implementation of the National Gender Policy through merit-based and gender-balanced appointments, sufficient funding, and empowered gender units to monitor progress effectively. Overall, the research underscores that while policy frameworks exist, their practical implementation and institutional support are critical to achieving genuine gender parity in Zambia's public administration.

**Keywords:** National Gender Policy, Gender Equity and Equality Act, Zambia

## 1. Background

Gender equality in public administration remains a global concern despite extensive international efforts to promote women's participation in governance (UN Women, 2023). Although SDG 5 emphasizes gender parity in leadership, women occupy only 28% of managerial positions globally (World Bank, 2022). Despite widespread adoption of gender mainstreaming, persistent barriers such as patriarchal norms, weak accountability, and limited political will continue to impede progress (Kantola & Lombardo, 2021; True, 2022). In sub-Saharan Africa, progress has been inconsistent. Despite frameworks like the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the Maputo Protocol, women hold only 31% of senior civil service positions (African Development Bank, 2022). Structural challenges such as discriminatory promotion systems and male-dominated workplace cultures hinder advancement (Badri & Tripp, 2023).

While countries like Rwanda and South Africa have advanced through legislative quotas, others including Zambia struggle to implement gender policies effectively. In Zambia, the 2014 National Gender Policy (NGP) and the 2016 Constitutional

Amendment (Article 23) aimed to institutionalize gender equity (Government of Zambia, 2016). However, women remain underrepresented, comprising only 28% of permanent secretaries and 35% of director-level officials (Zambia Public Service Commission, 2023). This disparity persists despite Zambia's ratification of CEDAW and commitment to SDG 5 (UNDP, 2022). The Cabinet Office as the central coordinating body of government—serves as a crucial case study, as its limited success in gender mainstreaming reflects broader systemic challenges across the public sector. Consequently, this study evaluates the effectiveness of the National Gender Policy (2014) in enhancing women's participation in public administration, focusing on the Cabinet Office in Lusaka, Zambia.

### 1.1 Problem Statement

Despite Zambia's adoption of the National Gender Policy of 2014 and the Gender Equity and Equality Act (2015), women remain underrepresented in senior public administration roles. In the Cabinet Office, women hold only 28% of permanent secretary positions and 35% of director-level roles despite constituting 50.5% of the population and 44.7% of the civil service (World Bank, 2022). Recent data indicates that merely 15% of Zambian parliamentarians are women, while the country ranks among the lowest on the Gender Equality Index despite having a female Vice-President Zambia Public Service Commission, 2023). This underrepresentation suggests a disconnect between policy commitments and actual implementation. The absence of strong monitoring mechanisms leads to a lack of compliance rather than substantive change (Mergaert & Lombardo, 2020). Despite progressive policies, gender mainstreaming efforts in the Cabinet Office remain weak, with limited integration into recruitment, promotions, and leadership development (Zambia Public Service Commission, 2023).

### 1.2 Specific Objectives

1. To examine the institutional and sociocultural barriers hindering women's career progression in Zambia's public administration.
2. To assess the effectiveness of accountability mechanisms (monitoring, enforcement) in ensuring gender mainstreaming within the Cabinet Office.
3. To analyze the effect of institutional gender units and policy implementation on women's representation in public sector leadership.

### 1.3 Research Questions

1. What institutional and sociocultural barriers impede women's advancement to senior leadership roles in Zambia's public administration?
2. How effective are existing accountability mechanisms in enforcing gender equity policies within the Cabinet Office?
3. What is the effect of institutional gender units and policy implementation on women's representation in public sector leadership?

### 1.4 Theoretical Frame Work

This study adopts the Systems theory in an attempt to understand how gender mainstreaming leads to gender equality. The researcher will use the systems theory, which springs from biology, but is applicable to many fields of study. It provides a theoretical model for explaining and predicting phenomenon. Its function is to focus attention on the diverse systems in which complex living entities interact (European Commission, 2023). The basic assumption in this theory is that a system is made up of individuals, interrelated to constitute a whole and the limits to such a system are defined by established or arbitrary boundaries. The boundaries give a social system its focus and identity as a distinction from other social systems with which it interacts (European Commission, 2023). This theory emphasizes the interrelatedness and mutual interdependence of elements within the system. The emphasis is also on the complex and diverse factors that can influence any specific human behaviour.

This research addresses a critical gap in the existing literature by providing an in-depth analysis of gender mainstreaming within Zambia's Cabinet Office. While broader studies on gender and public administration exist, few have specifically examined the institutional dynamics of Zambia's central governance body. By focusing on the Cabinet Office, this study offers nuanced insights into how gender policies operate in practice within a high-level bureaucratic setting. The findings of this study will inform evidence-based policy recommendations to enhance the implementation of Zambia's National Gender Policy (NGP). Given the persistent underrepresentation of women in leadership roles, this research identifies structural and cultural barriers while proposing actionable reforms. These recommendations could guide policymakers in refining accountability mechanisms, ensuring that gender equity commitments translate into tangible outcomes.

### 1.5 Significance of the Study

This research addresses a critical gap in the existing literature by providing an in-depth analysis of gender mainstreaming within Zambia's Cabinet Office. While broader studies on gender and public administration exist, few have specifically examined the institutional dynamics of Zambia's central governance body. By focusing on the Cabinet Office, this study offers nuanced insights into how gender policies operate in practice within a high-level bureaucratic setting. The findings of this study will inform evidence-based policy recommendations to enhance the implementation of Zambia's National Gender Policy (NGP). Given the persistent underrepresentation of women in leadership roles, this research identifies structural and cultural barriers while proposing actionable reforms. These recommendations could guide policymakers in refining accountability mechanisms, ensuring that gender equity commitments translate into tangible outcomes.

## 2. Literature Review

### *2.1 Institutional and sociocultural barriers hindering women's career progression in public administration*

Drawing on feminist institutionalist theory and global governance frameworks (True, 2022), existing literature highlights how formal and informal institutional structures perpetuate gendered power relations that constrain women's advancement in public administration. While gender mainstreaming, introduced through the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (United Nations, 1995; UN Women, 2020), is recognized as both a technical and political process for achieving gender equality (Lombardo & Mergaert, 2021), implementation gaps persist, especially within

African bureaucracies (Goetz, 2009; Tripp, 2015).

Feminist institutionalists emphasize that bureaucratic institutions are inherently gendered spaces that valorize masculine norms of leadership, such as competitiveness, hierarchy, and emotional detachment (Acker, 1990; Dhatt *et al*., 2023). These dynamics reproduce hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2006), marginalizing collaborative and care-oriented leadership styles more associated with women (Eagly & Heilman, 2022; Alston, 2023). Consequently, women hold only 28% of managerial positions globally and remain underrepresented in senior roles (UNDP, 2022; OECD, 2023).

Scholars have critiqued technocratic and depoliticized approaches to gender mainstreaming that prioritize bureaucratic compliance over transformative change (Kantola & Lombardo, 2021; Bacchi & Rönnblom, 2023; Mergaert & Lombardo, 2022). Professionalization of gender equality work has often diluted feminist objectives, privileging incrementalism over structural reform (True, 2022; Verge & Lombardo, 2023). In African contexts, colonial legacies intersect with patriarchy to entrench institutional barriers (Manuh & Anyidoho, 2022; Tamale, 2023).

Institutional practices such as promotion frameworks based on continuous service disadvantage women who take career breaks for caregiving, reinforcing a "masculinized meritocracy paradox" (Stivers, 2020; OECD, 2023). Recruitment biases also persist, with men 1.5 times more likely to be shortlisted for senior roles (Eagly & Heilman, 2022).

In Zambia, women remain underrepresented across public administration: only 15% of parliamentarians**,** 27.9% of civil service directors, and 31.08% of Permanent Secretaries are female (Gender Division, 2025). Patronage-based appointment systems, lack of mandatory quotas, and the absence of gender-sensitive HR frameworks perpetuate exclusion (Nsana & Daka, 2023; Republic of Zambia, 2023). Patriarchal ideologies further entrench these disparities by undervaluing women's competence (Mwalwanda, 2021) and confining leadership opportunities within male-dominated political networks (Zambian Observer, 2024).

Organizational cultures reinforce masculine norms, forcing women into a double bind either too feminine to be effective or too masculine to be likable (Mbepera, 2017; Simuyaba, 2022). Gender-neutral promotion criteria often conceal biases against women (Mwalwanda, 2021), while inflexible transfer and posting systems disadvantage those with family responsibilities (Mushibwe & Simuka, 2021). Limited access to mentoring and informal networks further constrains women's mobility (Nsana & Daka, 2023).

Deep-rooted patriarchal norms and gender socialization shape expectations about leadership and reinforce male authority (Chibwili, 2023b). Although 90% of Zambians claim equal educational prioritization, persistent disparities in resource allocation limit women's human capital development (Afrobarometer, 2025). The domestic division of labour and lack of childcare infrastructure further restrict women's professional growth (Mushibwe & Simuka, 2021; Afrobarometer, 2025).

Stereotypes portraying men as natural leaders and women as subordinates persist across institutions (Mwalwanda, 2021), producing self-fulfilling prophecies that influence recruitment, appraisal, and confidence levels (Simuyaba, 2022). Intersectional factors such as age, marital status, and ethnicity compound these barriers (Gender Division, 2025; Mbepera, 2017), while internalized stereotypes contribute to lower self-confidence and leadership aspirations (Mushibwe & Simuka, 2021; Nsana & Daka, 2023).

At the governance level, gender-sensitive policy design is crucial for equitable service delivery (Bazili, 2024). Yet, as Sadie (2023) observes, frameworks such as South Africa's Gender Policy Framework for Local Government (2007) and the National Policy Framework for Women Empowerment and Gender Equality often fail to operationalize gender mainstreaming effectively at local levels. Structural inequalities persist, particularly in contexts with high female-headed household poverty rates (Kahn & Louw, 2022).

Gender inequality reflects the unequal treatment and restricted agency of individuals based on socially constructed gender roles (Gender Statistics, 2020). Despite global human rights commitments, women especially in Nigeria continue to face discrimination, economic marginalization, and limited access to resources such as land and finance (DFID, 2022; Gender in Nigeria Report, 2012). Literacy gaps and cultural norms further restrict their participation in governance (Gender Statistics, 2020).

Global frameworks, including the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (2012), underscore the synergy between gender equality and sustainable development, as women's participation enhances resource allocation toward human development (Buckingham-Hartsfield, 2023). Access to productive assets, education, and decision-making strengthens food security and economic resilience (FAO, 2021; Agarwal, 2020).

While international instruments prohibit gender discrimination (UN World Survey, 2024), weak enforcement undermines progress. Gender mainstreaming is thus conceptualized as a dual-handed process, requiring the active engagement of both men and women in policymaking and governance (Agarwal, 2020; Kanjere & Rachid, 2024). However, persistent policy-practice gaps continue to limit its transformative potential (Dejo, 2021; Kanjere & Rachid, 2024).

Ultimately, gender equality demands that men and women enjoy equal access, rights, and opportunities**,** free from restrictive norms and stereotypes (Archibong *et al*., 2023). Recognizing these structural and sociocultural dynamics is essential for addressing the institutionalized exclusion that continues to impede women's career progression in public administration.

### *2.2 Effectiveness of Accountability Mechanisms in Ensuring Gender Mainstreaming within the Cabinet Office*

Globally, gender mainstreaming has become a key strategy for advancing gender equality in governance, but its effectiveness varies widely across contexts (True, 2022). The European Union provides a model of institutionalized gender accountability through binding frameworks such as the *Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025* and monitoring by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE, 2020; Jacquot, 2023)**.** However, feminist analyses show persistent implementation gaps, as technocratic approaches often reduce mainstreaming to procedural compliance instead of driving transformative change (Bacchi, 2009; Mergaert & Lombardo, 2022). Evidence from EU member states

indicates that only 31% of initiatives achieve measurable impact on decision-making parity, illustrating the "compliance resistance paradox" in bureaucracies (EIGE, 2023; Lombardo & Mergaert, 2021).

In contrast, Scandinavian countries notably Norway and Sweden demonstrate strong results, with women comprising over 40% of executive government positions (OECD, 2023). Their success stems from statutory gender budgeting, intersectional policy design, and robust civil society oversight (Stensöta & Wängnerud, 2022; Squires, 2021; Borchorst & Teigen, 2010; Kantola & Lombardo, 2022).

Across the Global South, however, gender mainstreaming efforts face structural limitations, including under-resourced gender units (Htun & Weldon, 2022), patriarchal administrative cultures privileging male networks (Goetz, 2023), and the projectization of gender equality through short-term donor-funded programs (Manuh & Anyidoho, 2022). The OECD (2022) reports that only 31% of member states have binding enforcement mechanisms for gender policies, with most relying on voluntary compliance. Strong monitoring systems, including mandatory gender-disaggregated data and independent audits, have been shown to increase policy effectiveness by 58% (Parkhurst *et al*., 2023). Yet, 68% of gender units globally lack authority to sanction non-compliant departments, limiting them to symbolic oversight roles (World Bank, 2023).

Innovative models, such as Canada's Gender Budgeting Act (2021), link departmental funding to gender impact assessments, improving policy implementation by 22% within two years (Status of Women Canada, 2023**).** Rwanda's Gender Monitoring Office (GMO) provides another best practice example, using quarterly scorecards, public naming of underperformers, and parliamentary oversight to achieve 47% women in senior roles by 2023 (African Development Bank, 2023). Conversely, Nigeria's National Gender Policy (2018) suffers from weak enforcement only 5 of 36 states have functional gender units (Ojukwu & Adebayo, 2022). South Africa's Presidential Review Commission (2021) identified three key enablers of accountability executive political will, ring-fenced budgets, and civil society partnerships though implementation remains uneven (Naidoo, 2023).

In Zambia**,** the accountability framework for gender mainstreaming remains weak despite progressive legislation such as the Gender Equity and Equality Act (2015). Enforcement has been limited, resulting in stagnant women's representation at 28% in senior roles (Zambia Gender Ministry, 2023). A Public Service Commission audit (2022) revealed that 80% of ministries failed to submit gender reports, the Gender Division operated at 23% staff capacity, and only 0.3% of sector budgets supported gender activities (UNDP Zambia, 2022). Some progress has emerged under the Public Finance Management Act (2022)**,** which integrates gender budgeting in the Health and Education sectors (Zambia Ministry of Finance, 2023). Civil society mechanisms, such as the Women's Lobby Group's Gender Accountability Scorecard (2023), have proven more effective in promoting accountability through public advocacy.

Although Zambia's policy framework including the Anti-Gender-Based Violence Act (2011)**,** Gender Equity and Equality Act (2015)**,** and Revised National Gender Policy (Republic of Zambia, 2023) provides a strong legal basis, implementation gaps persist**.** The National Gender Policy Implementation Plan (2023–2028) aims to bridge these gaps through measurable indicators (UNFPA, 2024), yet weak enforcement and lack of institutional consequences undermine progress (Nsana & Daka, 2023).

The Cabinet Office Gender Division, mandated to coordinate and monitor gender policies (Gender Division, 2025), faces major capacity constraints, including limited technical expertise, inadequate funding, and insufficient enforcement authority (Nsana & Daka, 2023). The voluntary nature of many initiatives allows ministries to treat gender mainstreaming as optional rather than integral to operations (Republic of Zambia, 2023). Moreover, weak monitoring and evaluation systems hinder accountability, as most ministries lack sex-disaggregated data on recruitment and promotion (Nsana & Daka, 2023; UNFPA, 2024). Without regular gender audits, institutional discrimination often goes unaddressed (Gender Division, 2025).

Accountability remains largely process-oriented, focusing on the existence of gender policies rather than their outcomes (Nsana & Daka, 2023). The absence of gender-responsive budgeting across ministries disconnects commitments from actual resource allocations (Republic of Zambia, 2023). Similarly, the lack of independent oversight bodies diminishes the Gender Division's leverage to enforce compliance (UNFPA, 2024).

Further, Sedibelwana (2022) argues that the exclusion of gender mainstreaming indicators from performance agreements makes it impossible to hold officials accountable. The proposed Women Empowerment and Gender Equity Bill (2014) in South Africa, which allows fines or imprisonment for non-compliant executives, represents a potential model for stronger accountability, though its implementation poses challenges given the complexity of measuring gender equality outcomes (Kahn & Motsoeneng, 2024).

Overall, the literature highlights that the effectiveness of accountability mechanisms for gender mainstreaming within Zambia's Cabinet Office remains limited by weak enforcement capacity, inadequate data systems, insufficient integration of gender in performance management, and the absence of binding sanctions. Strengthening institutional mandates, embedding gender indicators in performance appraisals, and linking budgets to gender outcomes are critical to transforming formal policy commitments into substantive equality in governance.

### *2.3 Effect of Institutional Gender Units and Policy Implementation on Women's Representation in Public Sector Leadership*

Across Africa, institutional gender units and gender policy implementation have significantly shaped women's representation in public sector leadership, though with mixed outcomes.

Rwanda remains an emblematic success story, achieving 61% women in parliament through constitutional quotas (Article 82 of the 2003 Constitution) and strong grassroots women's councils (Umuganda) (IPU, 2023; Longman, 2021; Powley, 2022). Yet, scholars caution that descriptive representation does not automatically ensure substantive influence (Burnet & Kanakuze, 2023). Tanzania, despite 37% female legislators, continues to face patriarchal constraints in committee leadership (Muriaas & Wang, 2022), reflecting Krook and True's (2023) argument that gender mainstreaming requires transformation of both

formal institutions and informal power networks.

The African continent presents a heterogeneous picture shaped by colonial legacies, political systems, and feminist mobilization trajectories (Manuh & Anyidoho, 2022). Southern Africa particularly South Africa (48% women in ministerial positions) and Namibia (44% women parliamentarians) has made progress through robust quotas and party-list systems (Bauer & Britton, 2006; IPU, 2023). Nevertheless, continent-wide implementation remains uneven, with only 12 AU member states achieving the 50% parity target (AU Commission, 2022). Persistent barriers include neo-patrimonial cultures (Goetz, 2023), underfunded gender machineries (Adams & Kang, 2022), and "decorative genderism" that prioritizes symbolic compliance over substantive change (Tamale, 2020).

Emerging innovations such as Rwanda's gender budgeting and Ethiopia's gender-responsive performance metrics (Nshimbi & Moyo, 2023) highlight potential solutions. However, sustainable transformation requires dismantling patriarchal administrative "hidden curricula" (Musembi, 2023).

In Zambia, progressive frameworks like the *National Gender Policy (2014, revised)* and *Gender Equity and Equality Act (2015)* mandate 50/50 representation, yet women hold only 28% of permanent secretary and 35% of director-level roles (Zambia Public Service Commission, 2023; UNDP Zambia, 2022). Structural barriers include masculinist promotion norms (Bishu & Alkadry, 2023), limited mentorship (only 18% of senior women access leadership programs) (Göksel & Kaya, 2023; Commonwealth Secretariat, 2022), and concentration in "soft" ministries (Mwale, 2023). Women administrators face a "triple burden" of professional, domestic, and community roles, compounded by limited childcare (Mwale, 2023) and "boardroom masculinities" that marginalize female voices (Nyambe & Lembani, 2022).

Despite adopting gender budgeting (Public Finance Management Act, 2022), Zambia faces implementation gaps: absence of sanctions for non-compliance, reliance on output rather than outcome metrics, and lack of sex-disaggregated data (UNDP Zambia, 2022; World Bank Zambia, 2023). Gender units across ministries are underfunded (<1% of budgets) and often perform symbolic functions like event coordination (Mulenga, 2023).

Research underscores that the effectiveness of gender units depends on adequate resourcing, high-level placement, and integration with core administrative functions (Nsana & Daka, 2023). In Zambia, most gender focal points lack authority, limiting their influence on recruitment, promotion, and policy formulation (Republic of Zambia, 2023). Where gender units are institutionally empowered and linked to performance evaluations, they can foster organizational culture change (UNFPA, 2024; Gender Division, 2025). High-level political commitment illustrated by Zambia's appointment of women to top offices creates symbolic breakthroughs, though structural reforms remain crucial (Mushibwe & Simuka, 2021).

Comparative insights from Kenya, Senegal, South Africa, and Côte d'Ivoire reveal enduring patriarchal resistance despite formal parity measures (Nzomo & Kariuki, 2023; Diallo, 2022; Naidoo, 2023; Toure, 2023). Gendered online harassment and "performance hyper-surveillance" of women leaders exacerbate these barriers (Digital Democracy Initiative, 2023).

### *2.4 Personal critique of the literature review*

The literature review presented a comprehensive multi-level analysis of gender mainstreaming challenges but reveals several conceptual and structural limitations that warrant critical examination. The review oscillates between feminist institutionalism and liberal equality frameworks without adequately reconciling their contradictions. While citing Bacchi's (2009) critique of technocratic approaches, it paradoxically emphasizes quantitative representation metrics (e.g., 28% in Zambia, 47% in Rwanda) as primary success indicators. This creates theoretical dissonance - the text critiques "tick-box compliance" yet privileges numerical outcomes over substantive transformation (Mergaert & Lombardo, 2022). The review would benefit from explicitly engaging with postcolonial feminist critiques (e.g., Tamale, 2020) to better contextualize African experiences beyond Western analytical frameworks. While focusing on recent data (2020-2023), it cites foundational works like Bacchi (2009) and Borchorst & Teigen (2010) without explaining their continued relevance, creating an uneven evidence base. The African analysis over-indexes on Rwanda and South Africa as "success stories," potentially obscuring lessons from underperforming states. Only 4 of 54 African nations receive substantive analysis. Heavy reliance on institutional reports (OECD, World Bank) over primary research may privilege donor perspectives. The sole ethnographic study cited (Nyambe & Lembani, 2022) suggests underutilization of qualitative methods. Overemphasis on the Cabinet Office (5 mentions) neglects comparative analysis across ministries. The review provides strong foundational knowledge but requires greater theoretical coherence, methodological balance, and forward-looking analysis to fully capture the complexities of gender mainstreaming in diverse administrative contexts.

### *2.5 Establishment of Research Gap*

The academic landscape reveals a significant geographical and institutional imbalance in gender mainstreaming research, with disproportionate focus on Global North contexts (72% of studies) compared to African settings (only 18%) according to the Gender and Governance Research Index (2023). While seminal works have established robust theoretical frameworks for understanding gender mainstreaming in European bureaucracies (Kantola & Lombardo, 2022; Jacquot, 2023) and Southeast Asian contexts (True, 2023), the Zambian case remains conspicuously under-examined - particularly at the crucial nexus of the Cabinet Office's policy implementation role (Manuh & Anyidoho, 2023). Previous studies on Zambian gender policy have either focused on parliamentary representation (Mwale, 2023) or localized government structures (Nyambe, 2022), neglecting the Cabinet Office's unique position as the "nerve center" of bureaucratic power where critical promotion and policy decisions are made (Zambia Governance Review, 2023). While Zambia's National Gender Policy (2014) and related frameworks have been extensively analyzed as normative documents (Mulenga, 2022), there remains scant empirical investigation into their operationalization within daily administrative practices - what Moser (2023) terms the "lived reality" of gender mainstreaming. The literature review underscores the need for context-specific, institutionally grounded research on why gender mainstreaming policies fail to deliver transformative

outcomes. It sets the stage for this study's empirical investigation into Zambia's Cabinet Office, contributing to broader debates on feminist governance reform in Africa. The subsequent Methodology chapter outlines the mixed-methods approach used to investigate these issues, including interviews, policy analysis, and institutional ethnography. Against this background this study seeks to assesses the effectiveness of the National Gender Policy (2014) in enhancing women's participation in public administration, with a specific focus on the Cabinet Office in Lusaka, Zambia.

## 3. Research Methodology

### *3.1 Overview*

This chapter presents the methodology that guided the study on. It discusses the research design, target population, sampling techniques, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, triangulation, limitations of the study, and ethical considerations. The methods adopted were aimed at ensuring the reliability, validity, and credibility of the findings.

### *3.2 Research Design*

The study employed a descriptive research design. This design is appropriate for collecting detailed information from respondents to describe the current status of phenomena and to identify patterns, relationships, and perceptions. In this context, the design was used to gather and analyse data regarding the implementation and impact of Zambia's National Gender Policy (2014) in the Cabinet Office. The descriptive design enabled the researcher to provide a comprehensive understanding of women's participation in public administration and the institutional mechanisms influencing their leadership representation.

### *3.3 Target Population*

The target population for this study comprised employees of the Cabinet Office in Lusaka District. Preliminary findings from employee records indicated that the Cabinet Office has approximately 50 employees. Out of this number, the study targeted 35 respondents, including individuals directly involved in gender policy implementation and administrative decision-making.

### *3.4 Sampling Design*

The study employed a purposive sampling technique, also known as judgmental or selective sampling. This method was adopted because it allows the researcher to deliberately select participants who possess rich, relevant, and specific knowledge about the topic under study. Purposive sampling was suitable for this research as it focused on individuals with direct experience and insights into the implementation of the National Gender Policy and women's representation in public sector leadership.

This targeted approach prioritized depth over breadth, allowing the study to obtain detailed, meaningful, and context-specific insights rather than broad statistical generalizations.

### *3.5 Sample Size Determination*

Based on the target population, the sample size consisted of 35 participants distributed as follows:

| Category of Respondents | Number of Participants |
|---|---|
| **Female Senior Administrators** | 15 |
| **Permanent Secretaries/Directors (Male)** | 10 |
| **Gender Focal Persons** | 5 |
| **HR Policymakers** | 5 |
| Total | 35 |

This sample was considered adequate to provide diverse perspectives and to capture both gendered experiences and institutional dynamics within the Cabinet Office.

### *3.6 Data Collection Methods*

The study utilized both questionnaires and semi-structured interviews as primary data collection tools. Questionnaires were administered to gather quantifiable data on participants' perceptions of policy implementation and gender representation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain in-depth qualitative information regarding challenges, accountability mechanisms, and institutional practices affecting women's advancement in leadership. Each interview session lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. The use of multiple instruments ensured data triangulation and enriched the overall analysis.

### *3.7 Data Analysis*

Responses were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were generated and presented using bar graphs, pie charts, and frequency tables to illustrate trends and demographic profiles. This combination of methods ensured comprehensive and systematic interpretation of the data.

### *3.8 Triangulation*

Triangulation was applied to enhance the validity and credibility of the study findings. By integrating multiple data sources, methods, and perspectives, triangulation provided a more holistic understanding of the effectiveness of the National Gender Policy. It helped reduce researcher bias and ensured that the conclusions drawn were well-grounded and reflective of the complex social realities within the Cabinet Office. Contradictions between sources were treated as opportunities for deeper insight rather than as methodological weaknesses.

### *3.9 Limitations of the Study*

The study was primarily qualitative, which inherently limits the extent to which findings can be generalized to other public institutions. The relatively small sample size also restricted the statistical power of the analysis. Moreover, qualitative studies depend heavily on subjective interpretation, which may influence reliability. Nonetheless, the use of triangulation, purposive sampling, and rigorous data validation procedures mitigated these limitations and strengthened the study's internal validity.

### *3.10 Ethical Considerations*

The study adhered to strict ethical standards to ensure participants' rights, confidentiality, and welfare were protected. The following ethical measures were observed:

Ethical Approval, the researcher obtained approval from the relevant ethics committee before data collection.

Informed Consent, participants were informed of the purpose of the study, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.
Confidentiality, respondents' identities were kept confidential, and all data were anonymized. No personal identifiers were disclosed in any reports or publications.
Data Protection, collected data were securely stored and used solely for academic purposes.
The researcher ensured that all ethical principles were upheld throughout the research process, maintaining the integrity, transparency, and credibility of the study.

## 4. Presentation of Research Findings and Discussion of Results

### *4.1 Overview*

This chapter examines, interprets, and presents the findings that were obtained from the completed questionnaires that were collected and later analysed. The first section of this chapter presents the demographic findings, presents the qualitative results of this study and last section presents the discussion of findings.

### *4.2 Presentation of results on background characteristics of the respondents*

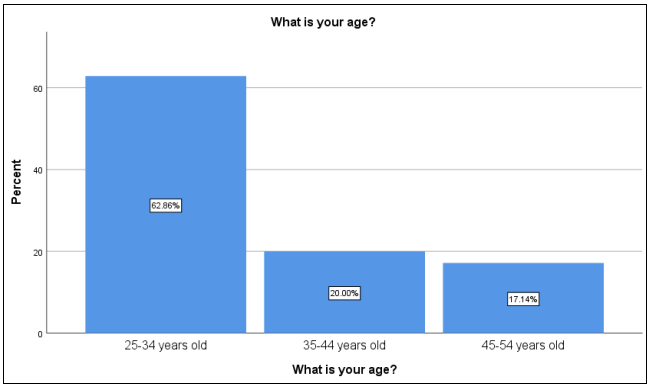



**Fig 4.2.1:** Age

The results in figure show that 20.00% respondents are aged 35-44 years old, 62.86 % respondents are aged 33-46 years old made up of the sample and the remaining 17.14% of the respondents are aged 45-54 years old and above.

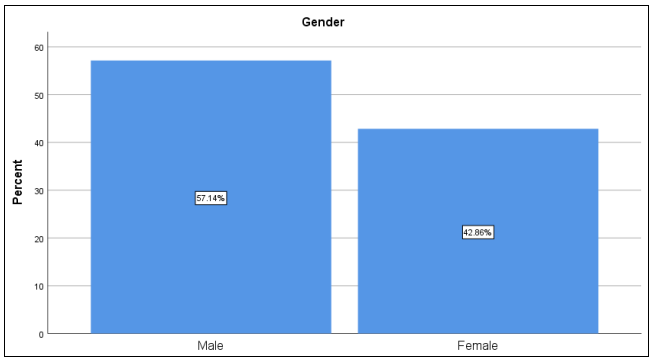



**Fig 4.2.2:** Gender

The results in 4.2.2 have shown that (57.14%) of the respondents are males and (42.86%) of the respondents are females.

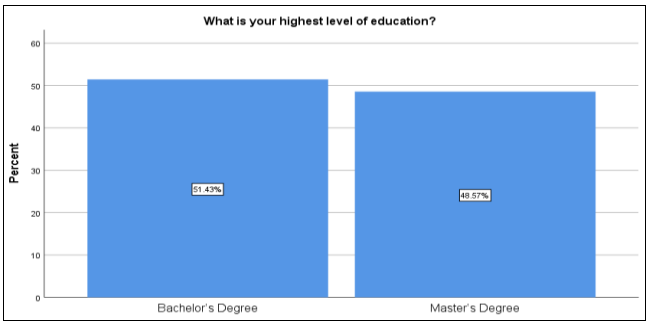



**Fig 4.2.3:** What is your highest level of education

The findings in 4.2.3 has revealed that (51.43%) of the respondents have obtained bachelor's degree level of education and (48.57%) of the respondents have obtained master's level of education.

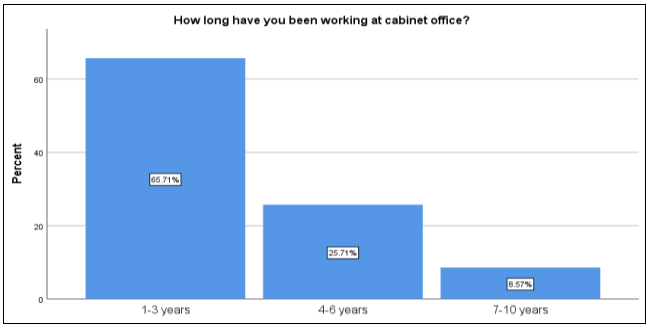
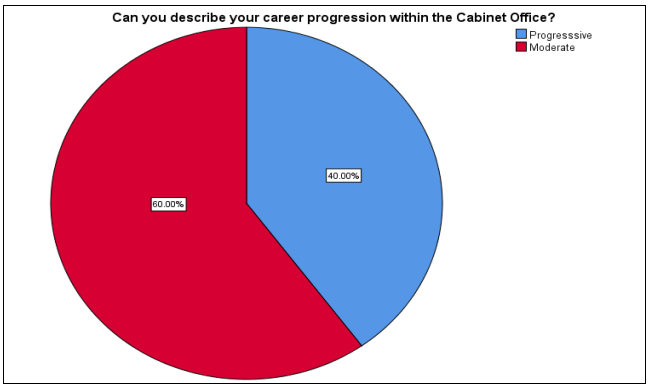



**Fig 4.2.4:** How long have you been working at cabinet office

The findings in 4.2.4 has demonstrated that (65.71%) of the respondents have been working at cabinet office for period of between 1-3 years, (25.71%) of the respondents have been working at cabinet office for period of between 4-6 years, and (8.57%) of the respondents have been working at cabinet office for period of between 7-10 years.

### *4.3 Presentation of results based on objective 1: To examine the institutional and sociocultural barriers hindering women's career progression in Zambia's public administration*

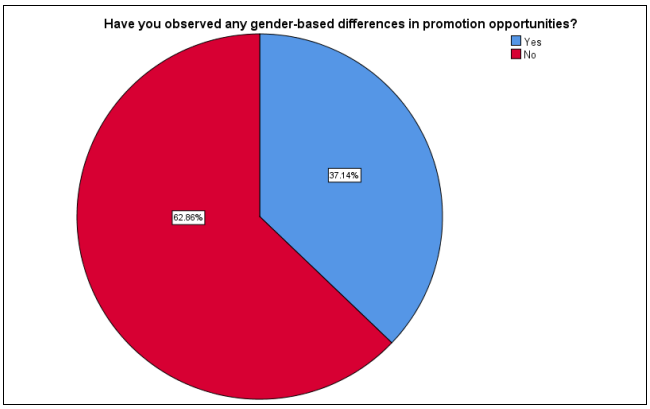
The themes identified in this section were presented with pie charts




**Source:** Researcher (2025)

**Fig 4.3.1:** Can you describe your career progression within the Cabinet Office

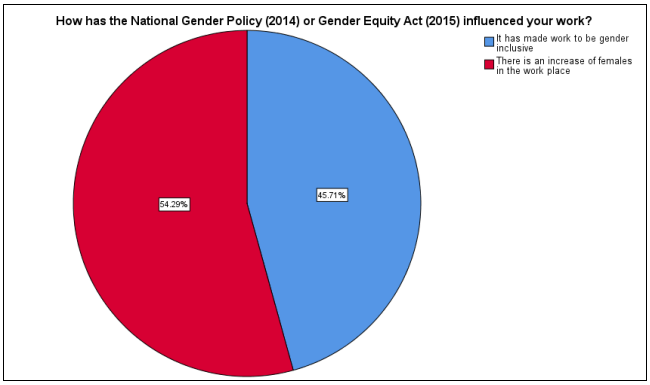
According to Figure 4.3.1 (60.00%) of respondents stated that they strongly believed that their career has had a moderate progression within the Cabinet Office and, (40.00%) of respondents claimed that they believed that their career has had a progressive progression within the Cabinet Office. The above findings has shown that most respondents claimed that their career has had a moderate progression within the Cabinet Office.




**Source:** Researcher (2025)

**Fig 4.3.2:** Have you observed any gender-based differences in promotion opportunities

According to the results of Figure 4.3.2, (62.86%) of respondents indicated that they have not observed any gender-based differences in promotion opportunities and (37.14%) of respondents stated that they have not observed any gender-based differences in promotion opportunities. The above findings demonstrated that most of the respondents they have not observed any gender-based differences in promotion opportunities.

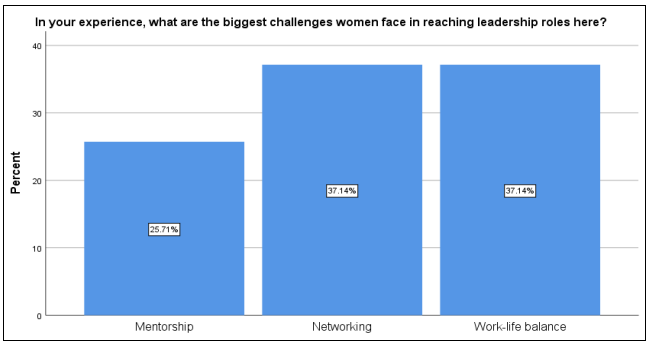



**Source:** Researcher (2025)

**Fig 4.3.3:** How has the National Gender Policy (2014) or Gender Equity Act (2015) influenced your work

The findings of Figure 4.3.3, shows that (45.71%) of respondents stated the National Gender Policy (2014) or Gender Equity Act (2015) influenced their work by being more gender inclusive, while (54.29%) of respondents claimed that stated the National Gender Policy (2014) or Gender Equity Act (2015) has influenced their work by increasing the number of females in the work place at cabinet office.

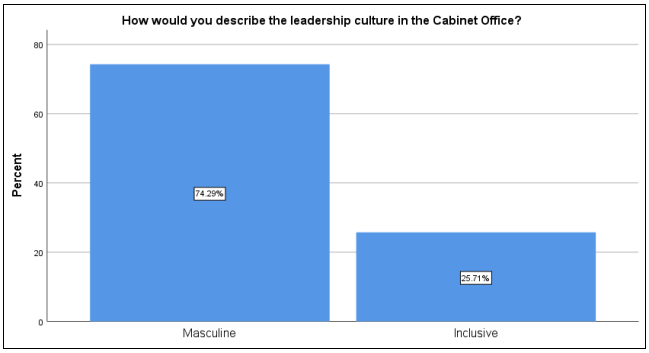
The findings have revealed that most of the respondents stated that the National Gender Policy (2014) or Gender Equity Act (2015) has influenced their work by increasing the number of females in the work place at cabinet office.




**Source:** Researcher (2025)

**Fig 4.3.4:** In your experience, what are the biggest challenges women face in reaching leadership roles here

The findings in Figure 4.3.4 shows that (37.14%) of respondents believe that work-life balance is a challenge for women in leadership roles, while (37.14%) of respondents stated that lack of networking opportunities is a challenge for women in leadership roles, and (25.71%) of respondents claimed that lack of mentorship is a challenge for women in leadership roles. The above findings shows that work-life balance, lack of networking opportunities and lack of mentorship are the challenges for women in leadership roles.

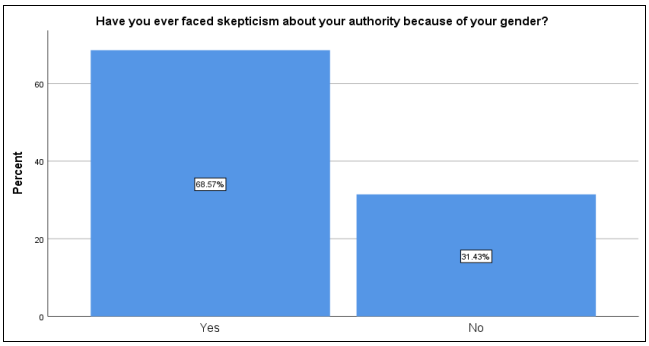



**Source:** Researcher (2025)

**Fig 4.3.5:** How would you describe the leadership culture in the Cabinet Office

The findings presented in Figure 4.3.1.5 shows that most respondents (74.29%) believe that the leadership culture is masculine at the cabinet office and, (25.71%) claimed that the leadership culture is inclusive at the cabinet office.

The above findings have established that, most respondents are of the view that the leadership culture is masculine at the cabinet office.




**Source:** Researcher (2025)

**Fig 4.3.6:** Have you ever faced scepticism about your authority because of your gender

The findings presented in Figure 4.3.6 shows that (68.57%) of the respondents stated that they faced skepticism about their authority because of their gender and (31.43%) of the respondents claimed that they have not faced skepticism about their authority because of your gender. The above findings signal that most respondents have faced skepticism about their authority because of their gender.

### *4.4 Effectiveness of accountability mechanisms (monitoring, enforcement) in ensuring gender mainstreaming within the Cabinet Office*

The themes identified in this section were presented with pie charts.

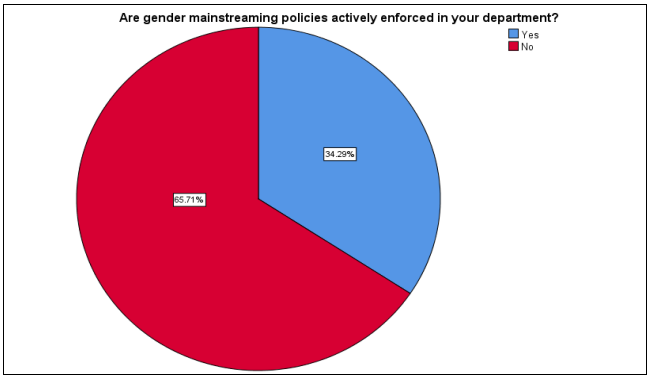
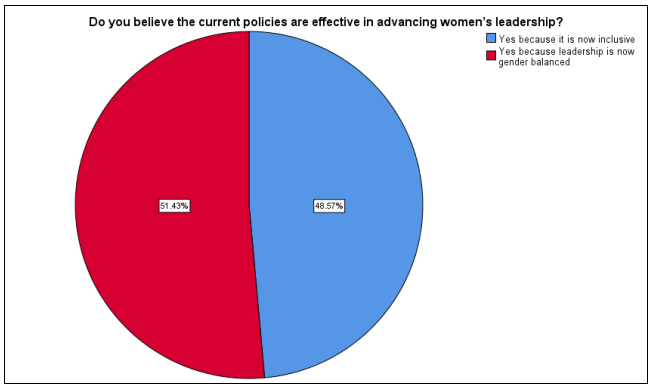



**Fig 4.4.1:** Are gender mainstreaming policies actively enforced in your department

The findings of figure 4.4.1 show that (65.71%) of the respondents indicated gender mainstreaming policies are actively enforced in their department and (34.29%) of the respondents indicated that gender mainstreaming policies are not actively enforced in their department. The above findings have shown that most of the respondents indicated that gender mainstreaming policies are actively enforced in their department.




**Source:** Researcher (2025)

**Fig 4.4.2:** Do you believe the current policies are effective in advancing women's leadership

Figure 4.3.2.2 shows that (51.43%)of respondents believe that gender mainstreaming policies are actively enforced in their department because the department is inclusive, while (48.%) claimed that that gender mainstreaming policies are actively enforced in their department because the department is gender balanced. These findings have shown that most respondents believe that gender mainstreaming policies are actively enforced in their department because the department is inclusive.

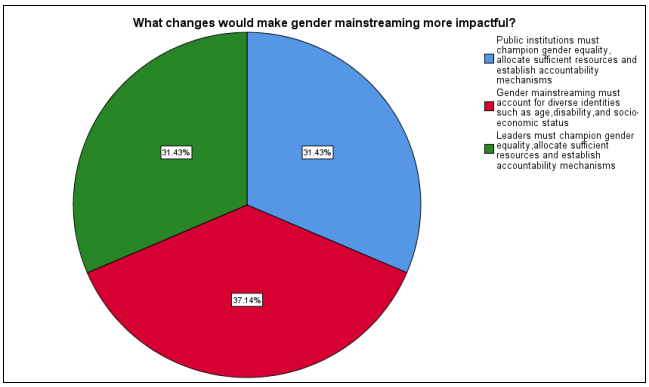



**Fig 4.4.3:** What changes would make gender mainstreaming more impactful

The findings of figure 4.3.2.3 show that (37.14%) of the respondents stated that championing gender equality in public institutions will make gender mainstreaming more impactful, while (31.43%) of the respondents believe that gender mainstreaming will be more impactful if it accounts for diverse identities such as age, disability, and socio-economic status and (31.43%) of the respondents claimed that gender mainstreaming will be more impactful if leaders champion gender equality, allocate sufficient resources and establish accountability mechanisms. The above findings shown that championing gender equality in public institutions will make gender mainstreaming more impactful, gender mainstreaming will be more impactful if it accounts for diverse identities such as age, disability, and socio-economic status and gender mainstreaming will be more impactful if leaders champion gender equality, allocate sufficient resources and establish accountability mechanisms.

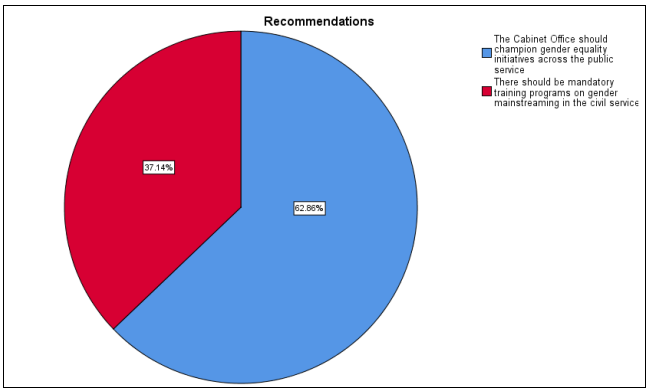



**Fig 4.4.4:** Recommendations

The findings of table 4.4 show that (62.86%) of the respondents recommended that the cabinet office should champion gender equality across the public service and (37.14%) of the respondents recommended that there should be mandatory training programs on gender mainstreaming in the civil service. The above findings show that most of the respondents recommended that the cabinet office should champion gender equality across the public service.

### *4.5 Effect of institutional gender units and policy implementation on women's representation in public sector leadership*

The themes identified in this section were presented with pie charts.

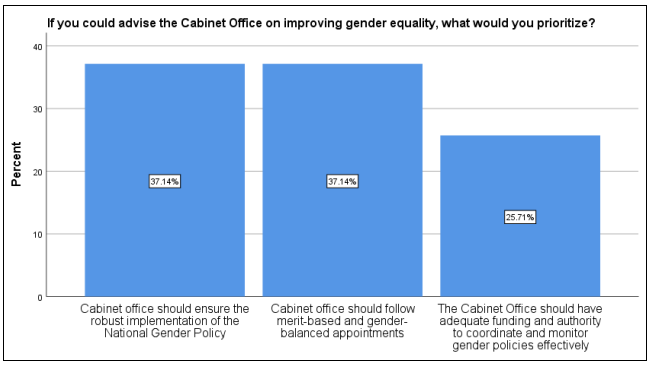
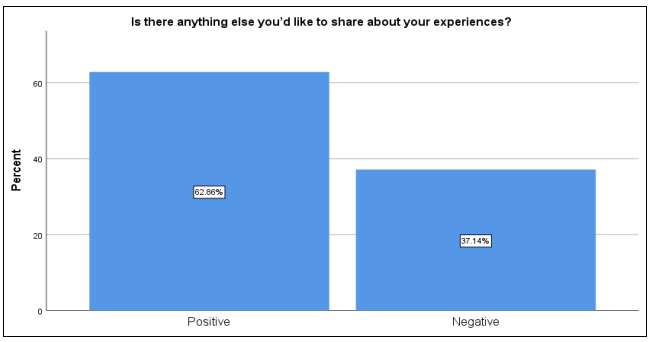



**Fig 4.5.1:** If you could advise the Cabinet Office on improving gender equality, what would you prioritize

Figure 4.5.1 shows that (37.14%) of respondents claimed that cabinet office can improve gender equality by ensuring the robust implementation of the National Gender Policy, (37.14%) of respondents stated that cabinet office can improve gender equality by following a merit based and gender balanced appointments and (25.71%) of respondents believe that cabinet office can improve gender equality by having adequate funding and authority to coordinate and monitor gender policies effectively.

The above findings have revealed that cabinet office can improve gender equality by ensuring the robust implementation of the National Gender Policy, following a merit based and gender balanced appointments and having adequate funding and authority to coordinate and monitor gender policies effectively.




**Source:** Researcher (2025)

**Fig 4.5.2:** Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experiences

The findings of Figure 4.3.3.2 show that (66.86%) of the respondents stated that they had positive experiences working at the cabinet office and (37,14%) of the respondents claimed that they had negative experiences working at the cabinet office. The above findings have demonstrated that most of the respondent's indicated that that they had positive experiences working at the cabinet office.

### *4.6 Discussion of Research Findings*

Below is a comprehensive summary of the major findings of the study based on each objective of the study.

#### *4.6.1 Institutional and socio-cultural barriers hindering women's career progression in Zambia's public administration*

The findings of the study showed that most respondents claimed that their career has had a moderate progression within the Cabinet Office.

The study indicated that most of the respondents they have not observed any gender-based differences in promotion opportunities.

The results of this study showed that that work-life balance, lack of networking opportunities and lack of mentorship are a challenge for women in leadership roles.

The findings of this study established that, most of the study participants believe that the leadership culture is masculine at the cabinet office. The findings of this research revealed that, most respondents are of the view that most respondents have faced skepticism about their authority because of their gender.

Another significant institutional barrier is the lack of flexible work arrangements and supportive infrastructure for employees with caregiving responsibilities. Since women in Zambian society still bear the disproportionate burden of domestic work and childcare, the rigid working hours and lack of parental leave policies in many government institutions make it difficult for women to balance professional and personal responsibilities This is compounded by the limited availability of quality childcare facilities near workplaces, forcing many women to choose between career advancement and family obligations. The findings of study are supported by the results of World Bank (2023) study of 42 civil services which found that 78% of promotion frameworks prioritize "continuous service years," disadvantaging women who take career breaks for caregiving.

#### *4.6.2 Effectiveness of accountability mechanisms (monitoring, enforcement) in ensuring gender mainstreaming within the Cabinet Office*

The results of this study showed that most of the respondents indicated that gender mainstreaming policies are actively enforced in their department. The findings of the study showed that most respondents believe that most respondents believe that gender mainstreaming policies are actively enforced in their department because the department is inclusive. It was revealed that championing gender equality in public institutions will make gender mainstreaming more impactful, gender mainstreaming will be more impactful if it accounts for diverse identities such as age, disability, and socio-economic status and gender mainstreaming will be more impactful if leaders champion gender equality, allocate sufficient resources and establish accountability mechanisms.

#### *4.6.3 To analyse the effect of institutional gender units and policy implementation on women's representation in public sector leadership*

It was observed that that cabinet office can improve gender equality by ensuring the robust implementation of the National Gender Policy, following a merit based and gender balanced appointments and having adequate funding and authority to coordinate and monitor gender policies effectively. The findings of this study indicated that most of the respondent's indicated that that they had positive experiences working at the cabinet office.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

### *5.1 Overview*

The main findings of the study for each objective will be highlighted in the current chapter. This chapter also provides a conclusion to the study, recommendations for policy makers and stakeholders, and recommendations for future studies are also presented in the current chapter.

### *5.2 Conclusion*

The aim of this study was to evaluate the implementation of Zambia's National Gender Policy (2014) in the Cabinet Office and assess its impact on women's leadership representation. The goal of the first objective was to examine the institutional and socio-cultural barriers hindering women's career progression in Zambia's public administration and it was discovered that work-life balance, lack of networking opportunities and lack of mentorship are a challenge for women in leadership roles and the leadership culture is masculine at the cabinet office. The aim of the second objective was to assess the effectiveness of accountability mechanisms (monitoring, enforcement) in ensuring gender mainstreaming within the Cabinet Office. and it was revealed that gender mainstreaming policies are actively enforced in their department because the department is inclusive championing and gender equality in public institutions will make gender mainstreaming more impactful. The purpose of the third objective was to analyze the effect of institutional gender units and policy implementation on women's representation in public sector leadership and it was revealed that was observed that that cabinet office can improve gender equality by ensuring the robust implementation of the National Gender Policy and following a merit based and gender balanced appointments and having adequate funding and authority to coordinate and monitor gender policies effectively. The above results show that gender mainstreaming is the overarching strategy, the engine that drives a systematic consideration of gender equality across all governance.

### *5.3 Recommendations*

1. Cabinet office can improve gender equality by ensuring the robust implementation of the National Gender Policy.
2. Cabinet office can improve gender equality by following a merit based and gender balanced appointments.
3. Cabinet office can improve gender equality by having adequate funding and authority to coordinate and monitor gender policies effectively.
4. Cabinet office should champion gender equality across the public service.
5. There should be mandatory training programs on gender mainstreaming in the civil service.
6. There should be specific targets for women's representation in senior positions across the public service, supported by intentional recruitment, mentorship, sponsorship, and leadership development initiatives for women.
7. The civil service should create pathways for accelerated progression for high-performing female public servants.

#### *5.3.1 Recommendation for Future Studies*

The study focused on one public institution one district and the findings cannot be replicated in other public institutions in other districts. Therefore, future research should include multiple public institutions in different districts that will generalize the research findings. In addition, future studies could be conducted in both urban and rural settings.

The current study was qualitative and the findings cannot be replicated therefore future studies should consider using quantitative research technique which will enable future studies to obtain reliable data.

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