



## Women Participation in Local Government Decision-Making: A Case Study in Chilenje Ward Three

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### ABSTRACT

*Women have been excluded from the public sphere for a long period. Their absence, especially from politics, has affected their life enormously. Since political participation increases gender equality and empowerment by promoting women's direct engagement in public decision-making, their participation is very important. Hence, this study assessed women's participation in local government decision-making. The study design was a quantitative method and data was collected using questionnaires. The study employed a descriptive survey combining both the quantitative and qualitative methods. The sample size comprised 110 participants and Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 22) was used to analyze quantitative data while qualitative data was analyzed thematically by employing Microsoft Word to reveal recurring themes from the data. Simple random sampling was used in the study to select women in Chilenje Ward Three while purposive sampling was biased key informants. The first objective was to determine the current status of women's participation in decision-making at Chilenje wards three and the study established that 43 (54%) said very low, 21 (26%) said moderate, 11 (14%) said high, and 5 (6%) said they were not sure. Participants were asked if think women should be involved in decision-making in local government and the study established that 64 (80%) said Yes meaning that women should be involved in decision-making in local government and 16 (20%) said No meaning women should not be involved in decision making at local government. The second objective was to assess the challenges facing women's involvement in decision-making at the local government level in Chilenje wards three the study discovered that 72 (90%) said Yes meaning Women are having problems in participating and decision-making at the local government level and 8 (10%) said No meaning are not Women having problems in participating and decision making at local government level. The third objective was to find out the measures that have been put in place to mitigate the challenges women face in decision-making in Chilenje ward three and the study revealed that Continuous efforts and awareness are essential to achieving greater gender equality in leadership roles in Zambia. It is recommended that all political party representatives interviewed said that their parties, while supportive of women's equality, do not have any policies to advance women's equality among party officials or candidates.*

**Keywords:** *Women, Local government, Decision-making, Chilenje wards, and Empow*

### 1. Introduction

The equal participation of women in local governments and decision-making processes is crucial for the development of gender-sensitive policies and the promotion of sustainable development. Unfortunately, women are underrepresented in local governments worldwide and encounter various barriers, ranging from cultural exclusion to resistance from key political institutions and mechanisms towards achieving gender balance in local administrations (Bulmer, 2010). For example, in communities where women's roles as politicians and decision-makers are not widely accepted, they face significant cultural obstacles when seeking positions in local governments. Additionally, women in local governments often have to overcome institutional barriers. In many cases, political parties dominated by men are reluctant to involve women in their local branches and, consequently, in local politics (Khosla, 2018).

Women participation matters as a core value in open and democratic societies, and increasingly is recognised as a 'right' through global human resource documents. Women participation can be defined as an approach to foster the consultation and active involvement of women in a project, program or

activities (Mikell, 2004). Women have a fundamental right to participate in all political decision making, including peace processes at all levels. Including women in peace processes adds a broader range of perspectives and enhances the ability of peacemakers to address the concerns of a wider range of stakeholders, which has been proven to lead to more sustainable peace. Yet, women are often underrepresented or excluded from official peace processes. Therefore, mediators need to promote understanding among conflict parties of the value of the participation of women.

The participation of women in local government in Zambia is crucial for ensuring the legitimacy of decision-making processes (Bulmer, 2010). When women are involved in local government, it enhances the credibility of the government and ensures that society is fairly represented in elected offices. Additionally, women's participation has a significant impact on the policy agenda by strengthening the consideration of women-related issues in society (Markham, 2013). Every individual has the right to participate in decision-making processes that shape their lives. When women participate on an equal footing with men in local government, it ensures that the female perspective is effectively incorporated into policy decisions.

Globally, there has been a longstanding trend of excluding women from politics. This exclusion is a result of various factors, including structural, functional, and personal obstacles that vary across different social contexts and countries (Bari, 2005). Women face numerous barriers at both the local and global levels when it comes to participating in political processes. Discriminatory laws, institutions, and capacity gaps such as lack of education, social connections, and resources have contributed to the underrepresentation of women as voters and in leadership positions. In most nations, women account for little more than half of the total population. They are particularly important as mothers in the socialization processes of their societies. They significantly advance growth by performing the dual responsibilities of reproduction and production.

Millions of women worldwide donate their time for major political parties and for specific candidates. Despite this, the process of governance has historically been dominated by men, and until the twentieth century, women were either completely excluded from or completely absent from the governing process at all levels of national government worldwide. For instance, women did not have the ability to vote in any nation until 1893. The first nation to grant women the right to vote was New Zealand in 1893 (Shvedova, 2015). In the United Kingdom, both the Suffragettes, who took a militant approach, and the Suffragists, who advocated through non-violent means, actively campaigned for women's suffrage. Their efforts led to the passing of the Representation of the People Act in 1918, which granted voting rights to women over the age of 30 who owned property (Markham, 2013). Subsequently, in 1928, this right was extended to all women over the age of 21. In contrast to other countries where only men initially had the right to vote, women in Zambia were granted suffrage at the same time as men due to the country's independence from Britain in 1964 (Shvedova, 2015).

The Republic of Zambia is a member to number of regional and international protocols on gender equality and women's empowerment like the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Maputo Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention on the Rights of Children, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Ministry of Gender and Child Development, 2014). The country has enacted various pieces of legislation to ensure the effective mainstreaming of gender in all sector policies, laws, plans, programs, projects, and outputs. The aim is to ensure equitable distribution and access to national resources among women and men, girls and boys, and people with disabilities. These pieces of legislation include, among others, the 2016 Constitution of Zambia, Gender Equity and Equality Act No. 22 of 2015, and the National Gender Policy (Phiri, 2019).

According to Shvedova (2015), the National Gender Policy recognizes the need for special measures, such as legislation, to address gender discrimination and promote the advancement of marginalized individuals. In relation to decision making, the policy aims to enhance women's involvement in decision-making processes in both the public and private sectors. One specific measure suggested is the implementation of a quota system for the allocation of seats during local and parliamentary elections, as a means to create platforms for women's participation (Ministry of Gender and Child Development, 2014).

Women hold an equal presence in regional bodies, with 50% of the parliamentary seats in the African Union (Phiri, 2022). Notably, Gertrude Mongella served as the inaugural president of the Pan African Parliament, and in July 2012, Nkosazana Dhlamini-Zuma of South Africa assumed leadership of the African Union Commission. Furthermore, at the local level, women occupy nearly 60% of local government positions in Lesotho and Seychelles, 43% of positions in Namibia's local councils or municipal assemblies, and over one-third of seats in local government in Mauritania, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Uganda (). In countries such as Botswana, Cape Verde, Lesotho, South Africa, and Senegal, women even outnumber men in voting, although the overall male voting rates in countries surveyed by Afro-barometer appear to be about 5% higher (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2014).

The overall state of women political representation in Zambia is concerning, with the country failing to meet continental and international benchmarks laid out in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), and the South African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development. Although women make up 50.5% of Zambia's population as well as the majority of voters, they remain systematically underrepresented in politics (Phiri, 2022). Despite this overall pattern of marginalization, women's parliamentary representation has increased incrementally since the early 1990s, when the country reverted to multiparty democracy after twenty-seven years of one-party rule. During the first democratic elections held in 1991, women won 7% of the seats, this percentage increased to 14% in 2006 and 17% in 2016. By 2016, women also held 40% of positions in the executive cabinet (ibid).

Yet women's political representation once again decreased following the most recent August 2021 election, with women now holding 13% of parliamentary seats and 21% of cabinet positions. Women's representation in local government has remained steady at 8% (Electoral Commission of Zambia, 2022). This most recent decrease in women's political representation was driven by several factors, including violence ahead of the polls and the challenges that candidates in rural areas faced in verifying the academic credentials needed to run for political office. In Zambia, violence has often

increased in the past ahead of crucial elections that led to a change of government, as happened in both 2011 and 2021. In both years, women's political representation decreased (Dahlerup, 2011).

Women's underrepresentation in Zambian politics has had a negative effect on women's policy influence and gender-related development priorities, such as girls' education and women's financial inclusion. In a context of relative political exclusion, Zambian women's organizations have played a crucial role in pushing for gender equality reforms. The Non-governmental Gender Organization's Coordinating Council (NGOCC), an umbrella body that includes 103 groups from all of Zambia's ten provinces, has been particularly influential (Dahlerup, 2011). These civic actors have jointly lobbied legal reforms on women and girls' political rights, monitored the implementation of laws and policies on political inclusion, and facilitated women's political participation through community mobilization initiatives, capacity-building for women aspirants, advocacy targeting political parties, and campaigns seeking to raise public awareness of the importance of voting for women. Yet despite their efforts, Zambian women's organizations operate on limited budgets that are financed entirely by external donors, which translate into low staff numbers, sustainability challenges, and limited capacity to reach more remote areas. The women's parliamentary caucus has also tried to make positive contributions to gender equality reforms, but it often lacks visibility and influence due to its limited financial and technical capacity (Geisler, 2016).

Overall, the obstacles to women's representation in Zambia can be divided into three categories: structural barriers, legislative and policy challenges, and barriers related to electoral procedures and electoral processes (Electoral Commission of Zambia, 2022). Zambia's patriarchal society represents a major structural barrier, traditionally assigning more power and resources to men than women. The resulting inequalities affect women's access to education, job opportunities, and career progression, which directly impact the skills and resources needed for political mobilization especially in a country where politics are heavily monetized. Patriarchal norms also lead women voters to discriminate against women candidates in elections, in general, female candidates often face insults and ridicule (Geisler, 2021).

A second set of challenges stems from the weaknesses in the legal and policy framework as well as the poor implementation of existing laws. The male political leadership in Zambia lacks commitment to implementing the country's progressive constitutional provisions on inclusive governance (Bulmer, 2010). Decision-making structures within political parties are dominated by older men, particularly from the dominant ethnic regions. While some political parties are in the process of developing gender equality plans, women continue to be excluded as these plans have yet to be adopted and implemented by the respective parties (Zambia National Women's Lobby, 2016). For instance, mandatory quotas for women have not been implemented by Zambian parties. Although the two main parties, the PF and the UPND, have announced a goal of ensuring 40% female representation in key internal structures, they have been unsuccessful in achieving this goal in practice. In the 2021 election, only one woman ran for presidency under the New Heritage Party, receiving 0.17% of the vote and placing seventh out of sixteen candidates (Dahlerup, 2011).

Furthermore, women are disadvantaged by electoral procedures overseen by the electoral management body, the police, and the department responsible for issuing national identity and voter cards. One example of this is the failure of the police to effectively address election-related violence, particularly violence perpetrated by members of the ruling party. This creates a climate of fear for female voters in the lead-up to and during elections (Chibuta, 2016). Additionally, challenges such as long distances to polling stations, inadequate election infrastructure (especially for those with physical disabilities), hurried distribution of national identity cards, and a lack of civic education further hinder women's ability to vote on election day.

In this environment, women who have made a contribution to local and national government typically have particular characteristics. They typically have supportive male allies within their households and political factions, have made the decision to challenge patriarchal norms, and some are tempted to use unconventional campaigning strategies similar to their male counterparts, such as giving away money and goods to voters (Electoral Commission of Zambia, 2022). Additionally, they tend to be well-educated, wealthy, skilled at mobilisation, and to have previously held influential positions in civil society, business, or government. On the other hand, young women and individuals with impairments have the greatest political disadvantage. Fresh prospects have emerged as a result of the 2021 election, which handed power to a party founded and governed by ethnic minority communities (Phiri, 2022).

### ***1.1.1 Statement of Problem***

For the past few centuries, among other things, democracy seek to ensure equal opportunity for both gender and to develop the institution system that is democratic, fair and equal, but the paradox is that women have been left behind in participation at the local government decision making in all sectors including education, environment, health care, socially and resource allocation (Tripp, 2003). Zambia is currently faced with the struggle for equal participation of all people in the political process of the country. In addition to that, Zambia women are judicial equal, but in practice inequality continue to exist in political, social, economic and cultural life, official statistics, parliamentary debates and public opinion expressed through the mass media and other public forum indicate that there is limited women participation in politics.

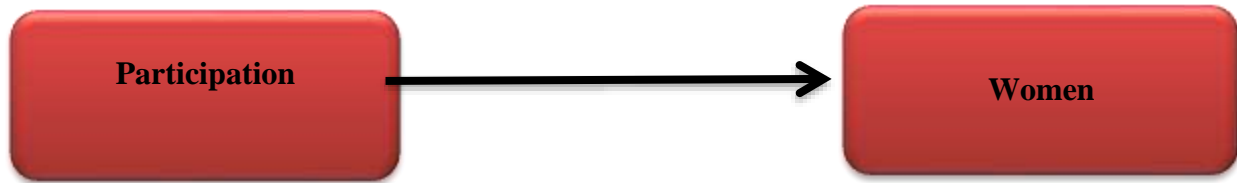
Despite having a gender policy in place to preserve and enhance gender parity, it is crucial to ensure representation in key positions of power across local and national domains. Unfortunately, there is still a glaring omission in the lack of examination of the challenges, implications, and female participation in decision-making at the local government level. For instance, the number of women who took part in Chilenje constituency during general election in 2021 had 3 women out of 20 participants (Electoral Commission of Zambia, 2022). This study explores the depth and breadth of women's participation in local government decision-making in an effort to identify the underlying causes of the situation.

## 1.2. Conceptual Framework

First and foremost, a conceptual framework is an analytical tool with several variations and contexts (Maxwell, 2009). It can be applied in different categories of work where an overall picture is needed and it is used to make conceptual distinctions and organize ideas. Strong conceptual frameworks capture something in a research study

**Independent Variables**

**Dependent Variable**



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework in Figure 1, illustrates the relationship between dependent variable and independent variable. The dependent variable is participation while the independent variable is women. In this study, the researcher examined the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variable. The conceptual framework was further designed to capture the relationship between independent variable and dependent variable and highlighted the formulated hypothesis which stated that:

**H<sub>0</sub>** – There is no significant relationship between participation and women

**H<sub>1</sub>**- There is a significant relationship between participation and women

## 2.6 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework offers several benefits to research study. This is because it provides the structure upon which a researcher may define his/her work philosophically, epistemologically, methodology and analytically (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). A theoretical framework for this study was anchored on the Feminist Theory.

Mikel (2004) defines feminism as a collective of social theories, political movement and moral philosophies, largely motivated by or concerned with the women liberation. Most feminist are largely concern with social, political and economic inequalities between men and women. The approach movement originates in western countries in 1960 and began to spread in other parts of the world in 1970s. By that time, it had gained momentum at the international level, it had witnessed by major world events celebrating the role of women in development. These took place during the Mexico conference in 1975 which launched the United Nations Decade for Women (Dambel, 2012).

It is further argued that feminism is a belief in social, political and economic equality of sexes and the movement organization around the belief that gender should not be the pre-determinants shaping the person's social identity or social political or economic rights (Ruth, 2019) Politically, the approach aims to spur women into action to change their conditions and recover their fully rights. For this, they have to be involved in political and social action in the perspective; feminism seeks to build strong women's organization that can be effective advocates of social change and gender inequality. Accordingly, feminist movement calls for treating men and women on an equal opportunity in all sphere of life (Dambel, 2012).

Feminism has been waging an uncompromising struggle against all discriminatory laws and practices that have shackles women and continue to keep them in an inferior economic and social status. Therefore, feminist researcher has challenge dominance paradigm and began to rewrite the history of Africa society to restore women to their rightful place in a process of African development (Sow, 2014). This approach was very useful in this study because it guided the researcher to take into account long term and short-term causes for women oppression and discrimination in all spheres such as in political arena at local government level and hence bring about clear understanding of the study (Zaleza, 2016).

According to Ngaiza and Koda (2013) in the third world feminist theoretical framework, women are viewed, first, as a reserve labor force for the capitalist system. Second, it is claimed that women tend to occupy relatively lower positions in a social production claim. Third, the theory claims that education and sexist traditions in capitalist societies are primary reinforcement mechanism for social inequalities and key instrument for solidifying the social class structure. Finally, the theory persists that the education delivered to women under capitalist relation of production tends to provide them with relatively inferior knowledge and skills which ultimately limit the scope and extend of their participation in the management of their respective economies and societies. These factors, individually or in combination tend to marginalize the role of women in typical third world country.

By utilizing feminist theory, both researchers and activists can effectively analyze and recognize the fundamental power dynamics, structural barriers, and cultural norms that propagate gender disparities in the involvement of women in decision-making processes within local government in Zambia. This theoretical framework serves as an essential tool for comprehending and challenging these inequalities, and it offers valuable insights into strategies that can promote women's empowerment, representation, and influence in decision-making. Ultimately, the implementation of feminist theory can play a significant role in the development of policies and interventions aimed at cultivating gender equality and inclusive governance in Zambia.

## 2. Material and method

The researcher employed a descriptive survey combining both the quantitative and qualitative methods. Priority was given to quantitative (numeric) data. This informed the qualitative (text) data collection and analysis which sought to explain and elaborate on the quantitative results obtained. The rationale for this approach is that quantitative data and their subsequent analysis provided a general understanding of the research problem whilst qualitative data and their analysis refined and gave detailed explanation of the statistical results by exploring participant's views in more depth (Creswell, 2003). A chi-square design was used for testing relationships between categorical variables.

The target population is defined as all the individuals the researchers are interested in studying who have specific characteristics in common (Macnee, 2008). The target population involved women aged between 18 to 40 years in Chilenje Ward Three and Plan International Zambia which empowers women in Kabwata Constituency. The group was picked because they have a better understanding of factors that influence career choices, hence they are deemed to be the information-rich for the study and they provided valuable and required information on the subject matter.

The sampling technique refers to the part of the study that indicates how respondents were selected to be part of the sample and were not selected haphazardly but chosen systematically. Simple random sampling was used in the study to select women in Chilenje Ward Three while purposive sampling was biased Plan International Zambia. As the name indicates, simple random sampling is nothing but a random selection of elements for a sample (Creswell, 2013). The sampling technique was implemented where the target population was considerably large. According to Coyne (1997), the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for the study in depth.

A sample size is a smaller group or a subset of a group of interest that is studied in research (Macnee & McCabe, 2008). To select the number of women to participate in the study, the researcher established the total number of women in Chilenje Ward Three to be 500. Therefore, the following formula by Cochran, (1963) was used to come up with the sample size for women.

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

Whereas: N= Target population

n=Total sample size

e = Desired margin error

N=, desired margin error (0.05)

$n = 500 / 1 + 500(0.05)^2 = 222$  women

In the study, out of the 222 women that were selected from Chileje Ward Three, the researcher picked 100 women. The choice of 100 respondents was influenced by the rule of the central theory which states that a random sample equals or greater than 100 is able to provide a normal distribution on the characteristics of the population under consideration (Blalock, 1972). The study also selected 10 key informants from Plan International Zambia. Therefore, the total sample size for the study had 110 participants. This is because of limited resources and the time factor for the researcher to collect data from a sample size bigger than the one used.

## 3. Results and Discussion

Participants were asked if they are aware of the term decision making and the study discovered that 26 (33%) said Yes meaning they aware of the term decision making, 39 (49%) said they are not aware of the term decision making and 15 (19%) said they don't know. Orasanu and Connolly (1993) define it as a series of cognitive operations performed consciously, which include the elements from the environment in a specific time and place. Narayan and Corcoran-Perry (1997) consider decision making as the interaction between a problem that needs to be solved and a person who wishes to solve it within a specific environment.

Participants who said Yes were asked if they are involved in any decision-making and the study revealed that 20 (77%) said Yes meaning they are involved in any decision making and 6 (23%) said No meaning they are not involved in any decision making. Sweetman (2005), argued that although women form a very important group in the society, their participation in decision making position is still very limited. Very few women participate in decision making although most of them have de jure right to be part of the process. I practice they continued to be under represented at every level and many barrier still stand between them (UN, 1992)

Participants were asked if think women should be involved in decision making at local government and the study established that 64 (80%) said Yes meaning that women should be involved in decision making at local government and 16 (20%) said No meaning women should not be involved in decision making at local government. According to UNRISD (2005) women, as the conventional primary caretakers of children, often have a more prominent role than men in advocating for children, resulting in a "double dividend" in terms of the benefits of women's representation. Female representatives not only advance women's rights, but also advance the rights of children. In national legislatures, there is a notable trend of women advancing gender and family-friendly legislation. Participants were asked how society view Woman who participate in decision making and the study discovered that 28 (35%) said they are strong woman, 16 (20%) said they are hardworking woman and 36 (45%) said they are arrogant woman.

Participants were asked how they rate the level of women's representation in local government decision-making and the study established that 43 (54%) said very low, 21 (26%) said moderate, 11 (14%) said high and 5 (6%) said they were not sure. Another reason provided by Mosha (2004) is the system of political election which is male dominance, and do not give a balance and equal chance between contestants in terms of resources. Thus, marginalizing women who most of them, lack money to run election campaigns. Traditions and culture discriminate women as weak creatures in the society, low level of education and political awareness among many women. Double roles of women to carry effectively the family and leadership roles are said to be among the main obstacles for women to enter or leadership position, specification at local government levels.

Participants were asked if women have problems in participating and decision making at local government level and the study discovered that 72 (90%) said Yes meaning Women are having problems in participating and decision making at local government level and 8 (10%) said No meaning are not Women having problems in participating and decision making at local government level. A study by Pearce (2000) postulates that indigenous political system which had continuously undermined and disadvantaged women political participation in all spheres except home: They argue that women place is in the kitchen, some societies in Africa see women as tool for their leisure/entertainment while other see as labor force which doesn't require payment, income or any kind of authority in the society. Even in ancient Greek women were not counted as citizen or population, this means that long before Christ women were undermined and oppressed by the political system.

Participants were asked what are the challenges facing women in decision making at local government level and the study revealed that 10 (13%) said lack of effective government action, 19 (24%) said lower levels of female employment and education, 27 (34%) said corruption and patronage-based political system and 24 (30%) said violence during elections. These results are consistent with Paswan, 2017). Who stated that women are still marginalized faces many barriers when it comes to fully exercising their political rights. They have been underrepresented in politics and struggled to participate meaningfully in government decision making (Ibid).

Kauzya (2008) also observed that there are many more discriminatory and gender bias practices which work against promotion of women leadership in local government. For example, if labor market are segmented and discriminate against women with most of the in concentrated in low-pay jobs such as casual labor in agriculture or in domestic work, women will not develop the necessary confidence to participate in competition for leadership position in local governments even when the laws institutionalizes their representation. Due to the heavy workloads in the families which are reserved for women e.g. preparing meals and looking after children the women have little time to dedicate to pursuit leadership empowerment? When there is increased violence against women, they get conditioned and resign to being exploited and abused and get the courage to seek leadership position (Kauzya, 2008).

Participants were asked if husbands or society support women when participating in decision making or politics at your ward and the study established that 15 (19%) said Yes meaning Husbands or society support women when participating in decision making or politics at your ward and 65 (81%) said No meaning Husbands or society don't support women when participating in decision making or politics at your ward. In a similar study by Acharya and Gentle (2006) sought to study the effectiveness of women's representation in community forest user groups in Nepal and revealed that women's representation in decision making bodies had increased but women did not get support from likeminded individuals and organizations, which significantly impeded their substantial representation. Subsequently, some of them had to withdraw from the position and some were sacked and replaced by male members.

Bashevkin, (2009) argued that women face numerous obstacles in achieving representation in governance. Their participation has been limited by the assumption that women's proper sphere is the "private" sphere. Whereas the "public" domain is one of political authority and contestation, the "private" realm is associated with the family and the home Bashevkin, 2009). By relegating women to the private sphere, their ability to enter the political arena is curtailed.

Participants were asked what strategies should be developed or adopted by the Government to increase women participation in decision making at local government level and the study revealed that 15 (19%) said gender-responsive electoral systems, 28 (35%) said awareness and advocacy in local government level, 20 (25%) said inclusive decision-making processes and 17 (21%) said support for women's in local government level. A study by Mikel (1997) awareness of the women involvement in government decision making should be given priority including cultural aspects as an obstacles, preparation for election competition and campaigns, improve their knowledge and skills, supporting them financially. Broad based public awareness programme on the duties, rights and obligations of all citizens in polity is required. This will help spell out the rights of women as provided for in the basic law of the land and other bodies. Civic awareness should also be a continuous undertaking not just a temporary activity for elections. This will enhance civic competence on competitive politics and elections issues and increase women's effective

The background information of the respondents focused on sex, age, level of education as well as occupational status of the respondents. Their ages ranges from 18 years to 34 years and above. The fact of the matter is that the study seeks to assess women participation in local government decision-making

It's important to note that the status of women in decision-making varies across different sectors and regions in Zambia. Some urban areas may have made more progress in this regard compared to rural areas. Additionally, the situation may have evolved since my last update, so it is advisable to consult more recent sources or reports from organizations like UN Women or local NGOs for the latest information on the status of women in decision-making in Zambia. Bennett (2006) findings are very relevant with respect to the women's movement because women's rights movements not only have remained independent of others, but the woman activists have been diverted from women's issues to attend to others. Political ideologies, caste, ethnic and class issues have often been divisive among women (Falch, 2010); and the women's constituency has always remained limited and weak.

It can be observed that there have been positive outcomes associated with the increased representation of women in decision-making positions, challenges and barriers still exist. Achieving full gender equality in leadership roles requires ongoing efforts to address systemic issues related to bias, discrimination, and unequal opportunities. Nonetheless, the progress made so far demonstrates the importance and value of promoting gender diversity in decision-making positions across various sectors of society

Continuous efforts and awareness are essential to achieving greater gender equality in leadership roles in Zambia. For the most current information, please consult official government sources and reports from organizations working on gender equality in Zambia. According to Mosha (2004), some of the obstacles for women to enter into political arena and perhaps take leadership role are institution obstacles, patterning to representation in leadership and decision making organ. Also, included is the failure in fulfillment of agreed contracts on women chances in leadership. Few, leadership chances are provided to women in political parties in Zambia and consequently conflict a male dominance system of those political parties.

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#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendation

The study aimed at assessing women participation in local government decision-making.

The first objective was to determine the current status of women participation in decision making at Chilenje wards three and the study established that 43 (54%) said very low, 21 (26%) said moderate, 11 (14%) said high and 5 (6%) said they were not sure. Participants were asked if think women should be involved in decision making at local government and the study established that 64 (80%) said Yes meaning that women should be involved in decision making at local government and 16 (20%) said No meaning women should not be involved in decision making at local government. According to UNRISD (2005) women, as the conventional primary caretakers of children, often have a more prominent role than men in advocating for children, resulting in a "double dividend" in terms of the benefits of women's representation

The second objectives to assess the challenges facing women involvement in decision making at local government level in Chilenje wards three the study discovered that 72 (90%) said Yes meaning Women are having problems in participating and decision making at local government level and 8 (10%) said No meaning are not Women having problems in participating and decision making at local government level. A study by Pearce (2000) postulates that indigenous political system which had continuously undermined and disadvantaged women political participation in all spheres except home: They argue that women place is in the kitchen, some societies in Africa see women as tool for their leisure/entertainment while other see as labor force which doesn't require payment, income or any kind of authority in the society. Even in ancient Greek women were not counted as citizen or population, this means that long before Christ women were undermined and oppressed by the political system.

Furthermore the study concerning challenges encountering women in local government decision making reveals the similar challenges as mentioned above by the Women and Gender Development Policy (2000) and national strategy for gender development are the same, and in order to overcome these challenges, it is very important to consider strategies mentioned by respondents in this study since they're the ones who facing the inequalities problems day in and day out.

The third objective was to find out the measures that have been put in place to mitigate the challenges women face in decision-making in Chilenje ward three and the study revealed that Continuous efforts and awareness are essential to achieving greater gender equality in leadership roles in Zambia. For the most current information, please consult official government sources and reports from organizations working on gender equality in Zambia.

Women are still inadequately represented in the decision-making process at all levels, despite affirmative actions taken by the Government in the past years, women face numerous obstacles in achieving representation in governance. Their participation has been limited by the assumption that women's proper sphere is the "private", gender inequality within families, inequitable division of labor within households, and cultural attitudes about gender roles further subjugate women and serve to limit their representation in public life. Societies that are highly patriarchal often have local power structures that make it difficult for women to combat. Thus, their interests are often not represented. Even once elected, women tend to hold lesser valued cabinet ministries or similar positions.

Moreover other empirical studies provide other strategies to overcome or reduce some of the challenges. The respondents and both Women and Gender Development Policy (2000) and national strategy for gender development, mentioned the following strategies to be applied in order to meet the quality and health sector. Promoting networking and coalition building with other entities both within political parties and outside the party on issues of common concern, promoting awareness of the women, provisions of financial support, sensitizing women and men to abandon harmful traditional practices such as FGM, early marriages and widow's inheritance, motivate women's and men's participation in budgeting, planning and management of resources to ensure that both of them benefit, Ensure gender-based resources allocation at all levels, capacity building of the National Gender Machinery, Gender Desks, Civil Societies and CBOS, Institutions at Regional and District levels, Establish and strengthen gender committees at Ministerial, Regional, District, Ward and Village/street levels

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#### 5. Recommendations

It is important to appreciate that, there are other areas that need to be addressed. The study therefore makes the following recommendations;

1. It is recommended that all political party representatives interviewed said that their parties, while supportive of women's equality, do not have any policies to advance women's equality among party officials or candidates.

2. The study recommends that the Municipal Assembly should develop sensitization programs as well as organize training sessions for community members especially women to educate them on the need for their full involvement in the entire governance process since most of them are unaware of their potentials in harnessing resources for development.
3. The study therefore, recommends that policy makers both at the national level and local level should widen the decentralization process to increase the power and involvement of community members particularly women in the process.

### 6.3 Further Research

The study was limited in many areas due to time and financial constraints. The researcher however suggests the following areas for future research work:

- Assessing the role of Non-Governmental Organizations in promoting women's participation at the local government

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