

**Women's representation and participation in local government in Tanzania: the case of
Kinondoni municipal council and Karatu district council.**

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This study analyzed the situation of women's representation in the local government. The aim was to identify how the increased number of women representatives enhances their political participation. Furthermore, the study explored the challenges women face in decision making with the aim of identifying effective intervention for their equal representation and effective participation. A total of 610 respondents were involved, 321 females and 289 males from the three categories. Category one comprised women and men who won or lost from the previous local government elections; category two included ordinary citizens who have stayed for more than 10 years in the two study areas; and, category three involved respondents from civil society organizations (CSOs) and government institutions. Random sampling was used to recruit category two respondents while purposive sampling to identify category one and three respondents. An explorative research design was employed whereas for data collection and analysis, qualitative and quantitative approaches were used. On the qualitative side, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and document review were used as data collection techniques, while on the quantitative side, questionnaires with both open and closed ended questions were used. The findings revealed that there are still few women representatives in the local government. In addition, the 'special seats' mechanism has enhanced women's representation and inspired many women to aspire for leadership positions at the local government level, yet, women's participation in decision making continues to be a challenge. The study shows the majority of women representatives were located in lower leadership positions; have accessed such positions particularly through the special seats and only few have entered through the elected seats representing constituencies, wards and villages. Further, it was revealed that the government, CSOs, and the family have played a very significant role for women's access to local government decision making positions, while the political parties have not played a significant role in enhancing women's representation in the political party leadership and in the local governments in particular. The challenges facing women leaders in accessing leadership positions and in influencing the local government decisions towards their concerns identified were: lack of awareness of different women's issues and needs according to context; women's political and social ideological differences; lack of/ or less experience in exercising power; patriarchal domination in the political institutions; and,

corruption in nomination of candidates that ended up bringing in leaders who are incompetent or who have no confidence. The overall conclusion the study draws is that the success to women's representation, effective participation and gender equality at the local government level can be achieved by incorporating women effectively in addressing the political limitations facing them towards accessing leadership positions; influencing the decision making towards their collective concerns; and, in eradicating the patriarchal, socio-cultural and economic factors that continue to undermine them. The study generally recommends that all the socio-cultural, political and economic factors that continue to limit women's representation and participation must be documented and appropriate measures taken for effective reformation. Additionally, gender mainstreaming must be effectively implemented in political processes.