PHOTO: USAID

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP ASSESSMENT

Kenya

The women's political participation and leadership (WPPL) assessment in Kenya—one of the eight-country pilot under USAID's Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance Learning, Evaluation, and Research II activity—uses the latest iteration of USAID's WPPL Assessment Framework. The assessment investigates the barriers to and opportunities for expanding WPPL in Kenya along socio-cultural, institutional, and individual dimensions. Women are underrepresented in elected office despite comprising about half of the electorate. WPPL is hindered by patriarchal structures, poor implementation of supporting laws and regulations, and poorly understood affirmative action policies. The assessment findings and recommendations are derived from a desk review of relevant literature and documents, a questionnaire survey of 63 politicians, and 28 key informant interviews and nine focus group discussions with politicians, civil society, and media across Kenya. Relevant stakeholders can use the Kenya WPPL Assessment Report to identify priority areas in which their investments in programs and initiatives to support WPPL are likely to have the greatest and most meaningful impact.

FINDINGS

BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

- Violence against women, intimidation, and harassment—which includes technology-facilitated gender-based violence or online harassment, verbal harassment, and physical assault and aggression—disincentivizes WPPL. This violence is perpetuated by institutions that do not seek to protect women and poor enforcement of existing laws.
- Gender stereotypes create a backlash against women who challenge gender norms and practices and limit women's time for political activity due to their gendered household roles.
- Affirmative action is misunderstood—men politicians treat it with overt hostility, and it is perceived as a permanent measure rather than a temporary measure to increase women's representation.
- Instead of adequate support, political parties offer women assistant positions in the party hierarchy, with no role in recruiting women candidates and no training or support for both successful and unsuccessful candidates after an election.
- There is a lack of collaboration among women across sectors, which limits information flow, support of women for one another, and links between women in political and civil society spheres. As many female politicians launched their careers in civil society, this is an important link to strengthen.
- The media excludes women candidates because they often have little time and limited skills to effectively engage with the media.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

- Despite misunderstandings, affirmative action is a viable tool to nurture women's leadership: affirmative action seats have been pivotal in launching an era of women in leadership. The ongoing government-initiated Multi-Sectoral Gender Working Group provides an opportunity for actors in WPPL to rally support from donors and civic actors.

- Candidate training activities by civil society organizations (CSOs) and women's organizations are supporting women to develop skills to win elections and be effective political leaders. There is additional in-kind support to women candidates and politicians, including campaign merchandise such as posters and billboards.

Figure 1: Perception of equality of opportunity between women and men to take on positions of leadership in political parties

"DO WOMEN HAVE THE SAME OPPORTUNITY AS MEN TO TAKE ON POSITIONS OF POLITICAL LEADERSHIP?"

Legend: ■ No ■ Yes
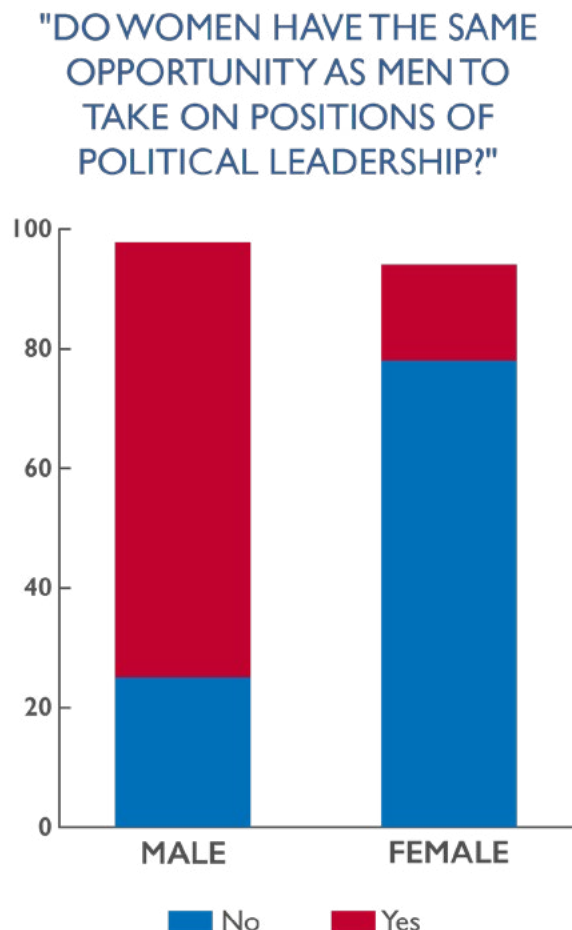
SELECTED RECOMMENDATIONS

SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS

- Donor programming should engage men as critical actors on WPPL to help achieve the two-thirds affirmative action principle through structural behavior change.
- CSOs should implement awareness campaigns to address the influence and impact of misogyny and political violence on gender equality and women's political rights and demonstrate the importance of women's participation in politics targeting voters.
- Donors should work with CSOs to train media actors in gender sensitivity.

INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS

- The Government of Kenya, in partnership with pertinent institutions and women's and feminist organizations, should carry out a formal review of the various elections and political party acts and consider revisions to better support women's access to public office.
- Donor programming should both support political parties to promote internal democracy and develop more transparent and fair practices and meaningfully promote the participation of women members through training, as well as develop rigorous monitoring capacity within pertinent bodies for non-compliance of political finance laws that support women.
- The Government of Kenya should create caregiving structures in parties and institutions to facilitate women's ability to have families and participate in politics.

INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

- CSOs and political parties should provide sustained training for women on topics including campaign skills, negotiation, and strategic communications. This could include training and mentoring by seasoned women politicians for newer candidates and officials.
- CSOs and international partners should support existing networks of women in politics and facilitate regional or global meetings for women to share challenges and best practices.
- Donor programming that supports women's economic empowerment can have crossover effects promoting political empowerment both by increasing women's confidence and skills and helping them to earn the resources they need to be competitive in politics.