

Bridging the Gap: Enhancing Political Commitment for Gender Mainstreaming in Bungoma County

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Abstract

One would have expected that with the new constitution ushering in the Devolution governments, it would have given avenues for an effective implementation of inclusive and comprehensive approaches and policies to narrow the gap of gender inequality. Despite there being several ministries in the county government and an office of women representative in the national assembly, women are still underrepresented and some of the primary issues affecting them yet to be addressed. This has denied a number of women equal opportunities and treatment in both private and public service. Even with the Constitution of Kenya (CoK) calling for the implementation of the two-thirds gender rule, political parties have not done anything leaving the assemblies and executive both in national and county government not constitutionally established. Bungoma County is not spared in the institutional ill in ensuring the implementing of gender mainstreaming across the Ministries. It is commendable that some policies have been suggested before but the influence of policy framework on the implementation of gender mainstreaming has not yet been evident. There is inadequate understanding of institutional factors that cause county government an area of interest in line with gender mainstreaming. This study sought to address that through analyzing the influence of political goodwill on gender mainstreaming in selected Bungoma County government ministries, Kenya. The study recommends the political leadership of the Bungoma County government immediately reevaluate and fortify its commitment to gender mainstreaming in light of these findings. The perception of support for gender equality is encouraging, and some political figures are perceived as proponents of gender mainstreaming; however, these positive developments should not overshadow the urgent need for increased inclusivity in decision-making procedures and the implementation of gender mainstreaming policies. Political leaders must make a stronger and more visible commitment if they are to close the gap between policy and practice.

Key Words: *Gender Mainstreaming, Political Goodwill, Women, Bungoma County, Devolution government*

Introduction

There are several approaches towards gender mainstreaming such as; gender equity, family planning, women empowerment, and use of effective and sustainable means to promote gender mainstreaming, (African Development Bank, 2011). Some of these challenges include; a lack staff awareness across various organizations, poor use of organizational resources, a dominance of patriarchy systems and a poor attention to existing policies to implement gender mainstreaming. These shall feature in the following three-part assessment of how gender mainstreaming has been handled internationally, regionally and locally. It is also important to mention that this research will give attention to the place of women in gender mainstreaming and only focus on this one sex.

According to Dawson, (2005), the importance of gender mainstreaming for the women of Britain is to allow them to be a great beneficiary of the Sustainable Development Goals. They have to be included in the millennial development plans so that men do not take up all the great jobs and positions that come with it. The European Commission, (2012) agrees that women need to be involved in political decision making, economic strategizing and other matters of public interest. In 1999, the UK Parliament was the 25th in the world with the greatest number of seats for women, (O' Conell, 2013) however, this was still a slow progress.

Among the challenges noted by (Dawson, 2005) in implementation of gender mainstreaming were; a lot of males dominated political units, fewer women attempting to vie for political seats and a lack of will by the government to bring in more women to the leadership positions. Lovett & Kelly, (2011) added an extra reason for poor implementation of gender mainstreaming being a failure to practice policy. Their argument was based on a poor representation of the ethnic minorities who occupied just a few seats in parliament.

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The French parliament set up policies on gender equality from the 1970s, (Lepinard, 2015) and instituted them into the social, political and economic lives of French citizens. Lepinard, (2015), continues that, at least 12 laws on gender equality have been passed in France between 1972 and 2014. However, the challenge of a lack of government will across various regimes in France has made it difficult to maintain these laws and make them effective, (European Parliament, 2015). There have been reported cases of violence against women by men in power such as the scandal that surrounded former president Nicholas Sarkozy, (European Parliament, 2015). This has discouraged women from attempting to lead or vie for seats in France with only just a handful emerging. France has however attempted to create effective organizations to sustain gender equality such as, the Observatory of Parity (OP) formed in 1995, (Council of the EU, 2012). Its mission is to ensure that there is a fair approach to gender representation among the French institutions including governance and economic decision making.

The states of Asia have been labelled to be non-responsive to women's right with India taking lead, (Rizvi, 2012). These are followed by states in Africa, (Zegeye, Teshome & Musoma, 2018) which hardly have enough female representations in political governance. The UNDP, (2008) proposes that India needs to involve more women in disaster management plans especially since India is prone to floods. The organization goes further to state that women have better nursing and emergency skills compared to men and can naturally mitigate disasters. This view by the UNDP is upheld by, (The Rwandan Correctional Service, 2013) that looks at the place of female nurses in prisons where inmates give births. The argument is that, naturally, women take better care of the babies that inmates procreate while incarcerated.

Bimer & Alemeneh (2018), Ethiopia has established and adopted a number of national, regional, and international human rights instruments that clearly define procedures to address women's oppression and marginalization. Ethiopia has also implemented a variety of policies to combat gender discrimination in several areas. Ethiopia, for example, has an education and training policy that supports gender equality and has a long-term goal of bringing about social transformation through education. Ethiopia has ratified a number of international treaties aimed at promoting, protecting, and fulfilling the human rights of persons and groups in addition to domestic laws. Ethiopia ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1993, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 1993, the International Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1981, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 in this regard (UN, 2006).

The African National Congress, (2014) appreciated the importance of gender equality in South Africa in the event of the celebrations of National Women's Day. South Africa by the accounts of, (Sibanda, 2015) is highly a male dominated sphere when it comes to political governance. Gender equality in South Africa has been demeaned by violence against women with some who try out for leadership positions being put to shame or threatened, (Erlank, 2005). The South African government however tried to initiate a bill that would protect women from gender inequality, (Sinbanda, 2015) which they termed as the WEGE bill. It touched on Act 2000, Number 4 of the constitution which spoke of a prohibition against any practice that belittled any gender, (Erlank, 2005). However, poor government will to implementation led to a slow effect of the bill on the women of South Africa.

Kenya has had numerous cases of violence against women, (Wambui, 2013) including that of slapping of politicians on live television such as that of between former Nairobi Governor, Evans Kidero and former Nairobi Women Representative Rachael Shebesh. Wambui, (2013) continues to identify the chaotic scenes that have marred the County Government leaderships where MCAs throw furniture at each other. Women therefore have had the roughest time being leaders in Kenya and the saddest part of it is that, so few of them ever make it to governmental positions, (African Development Bank, 2011).

There have been a few efforts made by both the Ministry of Devolution and Planning and that of Labour, Social Security and Services to make the situation better for women. The Ministry of Devolution and Planning, (2016) has integrated laws that foster capacity building and the inclusion of women in political decision making at the County levels. The Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Services, (2016) has in turn set up laws that take care of the minorities and vulnerable groups so as to protect women from gender inequality. The only issue that has been outstanding in these laws has been implementation as they continue to be trampled upon by politicians. It is due to the above discussion that this research will be carried out.

Chepkemboi & Mbirithi (2023) found that the majority of respondents moderately agreed that the County Government of Mombasa had leadership support for gender mainstreaming. Additionally, there was a weak but positive correlation between political commitment and the implementation of gender mainstreaming in Mombasa County. Chepkemboi & Mbirithi (2023) concluded that there was a higher and positive correlation between policy functionality and the implementation of gender mainstreaming in Mombasa County. Participants agreed that there were policies in place to promote gender equality and respect for diversity.

Literature Review

The institutions take their lead from the government which they serve, (Bryan & Varat, 2008) and therefore, do what their leaders do. They are led by whatever method the person in power will choose to exercise while in power. In as much as they should follow

a leader and take direction from him, there is a noticeable lack of awareness on gender-based rules at the institutions, (Erlank, 2005). There are many instances that call for a proper guidance on gender equality and respect for the opposite sex in the institutions but they are just assumed to be known by everyone, (O'Connell, 2013).

Such ignorance has led to continuous cases of sexism against women at the workplace including an increased bias against gender mainstreaming, (Melissa, 2015). Most institutions affirm the core values, mission and vision for their employees. They tend to forget the gender-based rules and policies that also affect the daily interaction among the employees and managers. Lepinard, (2015) finds that, there are many reasons to clarify the institutional stand against gender inequality in an effort to affirm gender mainstreaming. He continues that gender mainstreaming is not an easy process but is contributed to by smaller steps of implementing gender equality, gender respect and taking affirmative action. His view is echoed by, (Rizvi, 2012) who finds that, a little respect for women goes a long way in securing a future for gender mainstreaming.

The more institutions practice a habit of reminding their workforce about the respect of gender and affirm these and such ideals in their workforce, the better for gender mainstreaming, (Erlank, 2005). Sensitization of the institutions towards a consideration of valuing gender equality contributes a lot towards gender mainstreaming, (Zegeye, Teshome, & Musema, (2018). The World Bank, (2010) finds that, there are very few women represented in positions of leadership across various African countries. There are reasons that have been attributed to this and one keeps on showing up, a poor approach to gender mainstreaming. The UNDP, (2008) agrees with this view as it also lays out its plan on how to get more women into positions of power in the institutions.

The argument that it poses is that, gender mainstreaming helps achieve a holistic development for the country as more women are employed in higher institutional positions. Sibanda, (2015) is of the view that, there are few women in leadership as a result of only a few been given a chance to lead for the purpose of making a show to the public. In the end, no further steps are made to have more women occupy higher positions in the government.

This has been the norm that many institutional leaders have employed to further the lie that they are observing gender equality and gender mainstreaming at the institutions. This take by Sibanda has been supported by, (Ryan, 2007) who approaches the argument by adding that, so long as a woman or two is seen in a seemingly high position, men can take over the rest of the higher seats.

Lovett & Kelly, (2011) are of the view that, when there are fewer women in positions of power, even justice becomes tough to get when cases are reported to courts. There is a kind of sexism that goes against the behaviour of women victimizing themselves as offended as an attempt to punish or get men punished. The sexist ideology is also challenged by, (Lepinard, 2015) who does not advocate for sexist means to administer justice rather a mixture of both men and women in positions of justice and the judiciary itself. Gender mainstreaming holds the importance of ensuring that women are given higher positions and also continue to earn more beyond a mere show to the public, (Melissa, 2015).

Many are the times when the perpetrators of political crimes against women have gone unscathed for their crimes, (UN Women, 2014). Some notable examples by UN Women, (2014) include; Political violence against women in South Africa, India, Nepal and Pakistan. This was supported by a lack of support from the police and judiciary and negatively impacted on the confidence of women to participate in politics and institutional leadership. This finding by the UN Women, (2014) is supported by, (O'Connell, 2013) while trying to document the instances of politically generated violence against women across Europe.

The damning issue is that, the punishments laid out on the perpetrators of these vices have been challenged by their power and influence over society, (Council of the EU, 2012). These perpetrators have used threats, murder, force and even the sacking of institutional employees, specifically the women to have their way, (UN, Women, 2014).

Through their abilities to use their influence to escape punishment, women have suffered even more with every new regime. The Standard Group, (2020) documents the time when Evans Kidero, the then Nairobi governor slapped Rachael Shebesh and so did Mike Mbuvi while in office. There were never any serious corrections against the two political entities and the matter soon disappeared from the media and no one followed up on punishments afterwards. By the accounts of, (UN Women, 2014) there is no instance at all when a male politician is required to abuse a female politician to solve institutional issues.

The more the bodies of authority refuse to reward meaningful punishment to perpetrators of gender-based violence, the less of a deterrence there will be in the institutions, (Dawson, 2005). The employees, management and society but large has a duty to show respect and consideration to the contribution of women even when having disagreements, (Carlen, 2013). Only in not being dubious about rewarding punishment to enemies of gender mainstreaming, will there be a more serious approach in the protection of women in the institutions.

The literature indicates that there's a significant lack of awareness regarding gender-based rules in institutions, as pointed out by Erlank (2005) and O'Connell (2013). While some studies highlight the benefits of reminding workforce about the respect of gender (Erlank, 2005; Zegeye, Teshome, & Musema, 2018), there's a dearth of research on effective strategies to increase this awareness

and sensitization in the context of Bungoma County. Lepinard (2015) and Rizvi (2012) argue that gender mainstreaming isn't just about implementing gender equality but requires respect for women and affirmative action. However, many institutions overlook these aspects. Research could focus on how to make gender mainstreaming more comprehensive and effective. The World Bank (2010) and UNDP (2008) highlight the low representation of women in leadership positions in African countries. Further research could delve into the barriers that women face in reaching these positions and strategies to overcome these barriers. Sibanda (2015) and Ryan (2007) highlight that the presence of a few women in high positions is often tokenistic and does not reflect real gender mainstreaming. It would be important to study why this tokenistic approach persists and how it can be replaced by a genuine commitment to gender mainstreaming.

Methods

The study used the theory of Liberal Feminism, which cropped up in the United States in the late 1800s, (Meghan, 2014). It was a venture of proponents such as, Mary Wollstonecraft, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and John Stuart Mill who all argued for suffrage, that is, the right of women to vote in political elections, (Meghan, 2014). According to Bimer & Alemeneh (2018), liberal feminism contends that disparities between men and women are not based on biology, which fundamentally denotes different reproductive processes. Women should therefore be granted the same rights as men, including equal access to education and work. This theory argues that, women are belittled by the society because of their lesser roles in the family which have denied them an opportunity to grow intellectually, financially and politically. Therefore, they deserve the right to utilize the same services as men, including educational attainment, financial gain and political participation, (Meghan, 2014). It is only through the meeting of these three fundamental aspects; financial, educational and political that women can have a level playing field with men in society, (Meghan, 2014).

The research was conducted in Bungoma County, a region that offers a fertile ground for investigating the challenges and opportunities associated with gender mainstreaming. According to Knoema (2021), Bungoma County is divided into 9 constituencies, 45 County ward assemblies, 85 locations, and 83 sub-locations, forming a representative sample for data collection. Bungoma County is characterized by a semi-urban environment and has lagged in economic development compared to more urbanized areas like Nairobi. This economic context is particularly pertinent as it offers unique challenges to gender mainstreaming initiatives. The county grapples with a high unemployment rate among women aged 18-55 years, highlighting the urgency of implementing gender-responsive policies (Knoema, 2021). Furthermore, the underdevelopment of the region suggests that there may be additional institutional issues that could affect gender mainstreaming, making the county a compelling case study. The socio-cultural fabric of Bungoma County is equally crucial for this study. Like many regions in Kenya, Bungoma is not immune to the pervasive influence of patriarchal norms and traditions. These deep-rooted beliefs often find their way into institutional cultures, becoming a significant barrier to effective gender mainstreaming. Investigating how patriarchy-based institutional culture affects gender mainstreaming policies in a setting that may already be predisposed to gender biases can provide valuable insights. Moreover, Bungoma County has not been as extensively researched as other regions like Nairobi when it comes to gender mainstreaming. This research gap further underscores the need for this study, as it will contribute not only to the academic discourse but also offer data-driven insights that could be instrumental in policy formulation and implementation at the county level.

The target population was from Bungoma County, Kenya. Five out of nine County Ministries were purposively selected that is, the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Road, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Gender. The Office of the Chair of Gender Affairs Committee at the Bungoma County Assembly and the Office of the Bungoma County Women representative also formed part of the target population. The total target population was 2500 employees of the above listed Ministries and office of interest to this study. They were composed of both male and female employees. They were people within the age of majority in Kenya (above 18 years).

The research specifically follows a descriptive study design, a methodology well-suited for examining in-depth the phenomenon of gender mainstreaming without manipulating the variables (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The descriptive research design was useful for investigating these variables because it involved; passive observations and face-to-face interviews were conducted to gauge the level of political goodwill, the influence of patriarchy-based institutional culture, and the robustness of the existing policy framework. This helped to understand the intricacies of organizational culture as an intervening variable. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to employees within the selected county departments. These questionnaires were designed to quantitatively assess the variables, such as the level of awareness and understanding of existing gender mainstreaming policies, both implemented and unimplemented.

The study employed Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26 for a robust and comprehensive analysis of the collected data. The quantitative data were analyzed using various statistical measures, including means and percentages. These techniques were used to summarize the central tendencies and distribution of responses, offering a quantitative insight into the prevalence of particular views or experiences among the study participants. The researcher ensured that all participants are informed

of their right to participate and even withdraw halfway, the researcher ensured that participants are only those who have consented taking part on the research and that they were aware why the research is being conducted. All results were kept confidential and only released to the relevant body of authority being Mount Kenya University. The study was conducted in compliant to study site rules and all document were shown before conducting the study

Results

The objective of this study aimed to analyze the influence of political goodwill on gender mainstreaming in selected Bungoma County government ministries. The survey had the following questions;

4.2 Political Goodwill and Gender Mainstreaming

4.2.1 The Political Leadership and Gender Mainstreaming.

Table 1: The political leadership and gender mainstreaming.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	12	6.9	6.9	6.9
	Agree	14	8.0	8.0	14.9
	Undecided	1	.6	.6	15.5
	Disagree	44	25.3	25.3	40.8
	Strongly Disagree	103	59.2	59.2	100.0
	Total	174	100.0	100.0	

Source, Researcher (2023)

From the responses on the statement, the political leadership in Bungoma County government is committed to gender mainstreaming, 6.9% selected strongly agree, 8% selected agree, 0.6% were undecided, 25.3% selected disagree while 59.2% selected strongly disagree. On the scale only a small proportion of respondents seem to perceive a strong commitment towards gender mainstreaming from the political leadership. Combined, that's only 14.9% of respondents who agree to some degree with the statement. In contrast, a substantial majority of respondents disagree with the statement. A total of 84.5% of respondents disagree to some degree with the statement. A very small proportion (0.6%) were undecided. The data clearly shows a significant lean towards disagreement with the idea that the political leadership in Bungoma County government is committed to gender mainstreaming. Based on the responses, there seems to be a prevailing sentiment among respondents that the political leadership in Bungoma County government lacks a strong commitment to gender mainstreaming.

4.2.2 Political Will and Gender Mainstreaming Policies

Table 2: Political Will and Gender Mainstreaming Policies

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	15	8.6	8.6	8.6
	Agree	17	9.8	9.8	18.4
	Undecided	2	1.1	1.1	19.5
	Disagree	56	32.2	32.2	51.7
	Strongly Disagree	84	48.3	48.3	100.0
	Total	174	100.0	100.0	

Source, Researcher (2023)

From the responses on the statement, there is political will to enforce gender mainstreaming policies in Bungoma County government, 8.6% strongly agreed, 9.8% agreed, 1.1 were undecided, 32.2% disagreed while 48.3% strongly disagreed. The combined total of respondents who either 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree' with the statement is 18.4%, indicating a relatively low perception of political will to enforce gender mainstreaming policies in the Bungoma County government. On the other hand, those who 'Disagree' or 'Strongly Disagree' total 80.5%, a significant majority, suggesting a prevalent sentiment that the political will to

enforce gender mainstreaming policies in Bungoma County government is lacking. A minor 1.1% remain 'Undecided', suggesting that almost all respondents have a firm opinion on this matter. The perception among a majority of respondents is that there is a lack of political will in the Bungoma County government to enforce gender mainstreaming policies. This sentiment is held by a significant majority (80.5%) of respondents, indicating a serious concern that needs addressing.

4.2.3 The Political Environment and Gender Equality.

Table 3: The political environment and gender equality.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	54	31.0	31.0	31.0
	Agree	53	30.5	30.5	61.5
	Undecided	13	7.5	7.5	69.0
	Disagree	37	21.3	21.3	90.2
	Strongly Disagree	17	9.8	9.8	100.0
	Total	174	100.0	100.0	

Source, Researcher (2023)

From the responses on the statement, the political environment in Bungoma County government supports gender equality, 31% strongly agreed, 30.5% agreed, 7.5% were undecided, 21.3% disagreed while 9.8% strongly disagreed. The combined total of respondents who either 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree' with the statement is 61.5%, suggesting that a majority of respondents perceive that the political environment in Bungoma County government supports gender equality. Conversely, those who 'Disagree' or 'Strongly Disagree' total 31.1%, which is a significant portion, but notably smaller than the percentage that agrees. A small segment, 7.5%, remains 'Undecided', which is larger than in the previous statements but still represents a minority of respondents. According to the data, the majority of respondents (61.5%) perceive that the political environment in Bungoma County government does support gender equality. This is a positive finding, as it suggests that the overall political environment is seen as being conducive to gender equality.

4.2.4 Political Leaders and Gender Mainstreaming.

Table 4: Political leaders and gender mainstreaming.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	69	39.7	39.7	39.7
	Agree	30	17.2	17.2	56.9
	Undecided	11	6.3	6.3	63.2
	Disagree	34	19.5	19.5	82.8
	Strongly Disagree	30	17.2	17.2	100.0
	Total	174	100.0	100.0	

Source, Researcher (2023)

From the responses on the statement, political leaders in Bungoma County government actively promote gender mainstreaming, 39.7% strongly agreed, 17.2% agreed, 6.3% were undecided, 19.5% disagreed while 17.2% strongly disagreed. Over half of the respondents (56.9%) perceive that political leaders in Bungoma County government actively promote gender mainstreaming. Over a third of respondents (36.7%) do not perceive political leaders as actively promoting gender mainstreaming. A small proportion, 6.3%, remains 'Undecided', which is less than the undecided proportion in the previous statements, indicating that most respondents have a clear opinion on this matter. The majority of respondents (56.9%) believe that political leaders in Bungoma County government actively promote gender mainstreaming.

4.2.5 The Political Climate and Decision-Making Processes

Table 5: The political climate and decision-making processes

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	2	1.1	1.1	1.1
	Agree	11	6.3	6.3	7.5
	Undecided	39	22.4	22.4	29.9
	Disagree	73	42.0	42.0	71.8
	Strongly Disagree	49	28.2	28.2	100.0
	Total	174	100.0	100.0	

Source, Researcher (2023)

From the responses on the statement, the political climate in Bungoma County government encourages the participation of all genders in decision-making processes, 1.1% strongly agreed, 6.3% agreed, 22.4% were undecided, 42% disagreed while 28.2% strongly disagreed. The combined total of respondents who either 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree' with the statement is a meager 7.4%. This suggests a very low perception that the political climate in Bungoma County government encourages the participation of all genders in decision-making processes. In stark contrast, a 70.2%, a strong majority, indicate a prevalent sentiment of a lack of encouragement for gender participation in decision-making within the political climate of Bungoma County government. A substantial 22.4% of respondents remain 'Undecided'. This relatively high figure might point to a level of uncertainty or lack of information about this issue among respondents. The predominant perception among respondents is that the political climate in Bungoma County government does not encourage the participation of all genders in decision-making processes. Given that over two-thirds of respondents disagree with this statement, there appears to be significant room for improvement in the inclusivity of decision-making processes.

Discussion

The research findings are consistent with Erlank (2005), who underscores a discernible lack of awareness of gender-based norms within institutions. In the case of Bungoma County Government, a significant proportion (84.5%) of respondents sensed a lack of political commitment to gender mainstreaming, suggesting a dearth of awareness or prioritization of gender norms within the county's leadership. This aligns with Bryan & Varat's (2008) assertion that institutional behavior mirrors that of the government they serve, underscoring the need for leadership to show commitment to gender mainstreaming.

Moreover, the findings also resonated with O'Connell (2013) and Melissa (2015), who highlight the role of institutional leadership in creating an environment conducive to gender equality. Although the majority of respondents perceived that the political environment supports gender equality (61.5%), they also expressed dissatisfaction with the participation of all genders in decision-making processes. This suggests a clear discord between perceived support and practical action in promoting gender mainstreaming.

The finding of 56.9% respondents perceiving that political leaders in Bungoma County government actively promote gender mainstreaming somewhat contradicts the studies by the World Bank (2010) and UNDP (2008), which indicate limited female representation in leadership positions across various African countries due to a poor approach to gender mainstreaming. The noted discrepancy may be due to a difference in scope between the present study and the cited literature, or a disparity between perceived actions and actual outcomes in terms of female representation in leadership.

The lack of political will in the Bungoma County government to enforce gender mainstreaming policies, as perceived by a significant majority (80.5%) of respondents, resonates with the discussion by Sibanda (2015) and Ryan (2007) about the symbolic inclusion of women in leadership. This tokenism, as described by the authors, may explain why respondents feel there's a lack of substantive effort to enforce gender mainstreaming policies in the county. In conclusion, the study's findings largely align with the existing literature, indicating a perceived gap between the aspirational ideals of gender mainstreaming and their practical implementation within the Bungoma County Government. The study also highlights the importance of genuine political commitment, as emphasized by various authors (Lepinard, 2015; Erlank, 2005; Zegeye et al., 2018), in advancing gender mainstreaming at the institutional level.

Conclusion and Recommendation

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Based on the results, we can make several conclusions. The lack of perceived commitment and political will to uphold and enforce gender mainstreaming policies, as indicated by the significant majority of respondents, points to an urgent need for the political leadership to reevaluate and reinforce its engagement with gender mainstreaming. This is essential for achieving gender equality and the successful implementation of gender-focused policies in Bungoma County government. However, the finding that the majority of respondents view the political environment as supportive of gender equality, and perceive political leaders as actively promoting gender mainstreaming, indicates that there is a foundation to build upon. These positive perceptions suggest that while there may be challenges, there is an existing infrastructure and some level of commitment to gender equality that can be leveraged and expanded.

Despite these positive aspects, the prevalent perception that the political climate does not encourage the participation of all genders in decision-making processes suggests a significant area for improvement. Increased inclusivity in decision-making processes is critical to ensuring the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming efforts and achieving gender equality. In conclusion, the findings from the objective demonstrates a clear need for increased political commitment and will towards gender mainstreaming within the Bungoma County government. While some positive perceptions of the political environment and leaders exist, these should not overshadow the urgent requirement for greater inclusivity and the enforcement of gender mainstreaming policies. Addressing these issues will be fundamental to advancing gender equality within the County government's operations.

Based on these conclusions, it is recommended the political leadership of the Bungoma County government immediately reevaluate and fortify its commitment to gender mainstreaming in light of these findings. The perception of support for gender equality is encouraging, and some political figures are perceived as proponents of gender mainstreaming; however, these positive developments should not overshadow the urgent need for increased inclusivity in decision-making procedures and the implementation of gender mainstreaming policies. Political leaders must make a stronger and more visible commitment if they are to close the gap between policy and practice. In addition to reiterating current policies, this entails making sure they are implemented effectively and fostering an atmosphere that promotes involvement from both genders in decision-making processes. Adopting a strategy like this will be essential to promoting gender equality and achieving real success in the Bungoma County government's implementation of gender-focused policies.

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