WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL PROCESSES IN KENYA: THE CASE OF NYAMIRA COUNTY 1963-2013

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS (HISTORY) OF KENYATTA UNIVERSITY
DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the Almighty God who has cared for me all my life, inspired and led me to this level. To my husband Zachariah for the support and understanding that he gave me throughout the period of study and to my children Horace, Fridah, Faith and Sammy for their big motivation and impetus to forge ahead.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

Political processes: This is a series of things or activities done in the political arena. These activities may include registering as voters, being elected for parliamentary or civic seats, voting in the elections, debating issues that affect citizens, campaigning, attending civic meetings etc. Citizens have to participate in these processes. If the citizens do not participate in one way or another, there cannot be a democratic government because a democratic government involves the citizenry women included. It is important that the citizens are informed on their rights they are able to participate better.
### ABBREVIATION AND ACRONYMS

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<tr>
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<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>ADC</td>
<td>African District Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>BPA</td>
<td>Beijing Platform for Action</td>
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<td>CBOs</td>
<td>Community Based Organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Convention on Elimination of Discrimination against Women</td>
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<td>C-WES</td>
<td>Constituency Women Enterprise Scheme</td>
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<td>DP</td>
<td>Democratic Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECWD</td>
<td>The Education Center for Women and Democracy</td>
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<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education For All</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPPP</td>
<td>Engendering the Political Process Programmes</td>
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<tr>
<td>FIDA</td>
<td>International Federation of Women Lawyers</td>
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<tr>
<td>FORD</td>
<td>Forum for the Restoration of Democracy</td>
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<tr>
<td>FPE</td>
<td>Free Primary Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>FSE</td>
<td>Free Secondary Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICTs</td>
<td>Information and Communication Technologies</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDEA</td>
<td>Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>IEBC</td>
<td>Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>KANU</td>
<td>Kenya African National Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>KAR</td>
<td>King’s African Rifles</td>
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<tr>
<td>KCPE</td>
<td>Kenya Certificate of Primary Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>KHAA</td>
<td>Kisii Highlands Abagusii Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDGs</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPs</td>
<td>Members of Parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MYWO</td>
<td>Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>NARC</td>
<td>National Rainbow Coalition</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCSW</td>
<td>National Committee of Status of Women</td>
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<td>NCWK</td>
<td>National Council for Women of Kenya</td>
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<tr>
<td>NDP</td>
<td>National Development Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>NWC</td>
<td>Narc Women Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>OI</td>
<td>Oral Interview</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSC</td>
<td>Parliamentary Selected Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDHR</td>
<td>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNIFEM</td>
<td>United Nations Development Fund for Women</td>
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<td>WEF</td>
<td>Women’s Enterprise Fund</td>
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ABSTRACT

The pertinent question is why is there apparently low participation of Nyamira County women in the political arena since independence? There has been inequality in political leadership at all levels in Kenya including Nyamira County. The study was undertaken to investigate reasons for the underrepresentation of women at all levels of political leadership and decision-making, look at strategies to enhance women participation and also lack of inclusion of women in scholarly documentation necessitated this study. The study made use of five objectives; examined the place of women in Nyamira County in the pre-colonial era and during the colonial rule, assessed whether there were any political, economic or socio-cultural factors that have impacted on women’s political participation of Nyamira women during the reign of Jomo Kenyatta 1963-1978, investigated whether Moi’s regime made any efforts to involve women in Nyamira County in political participation and finally established whether there have been any efforts made by Kibaki’s government to enhance the level of political participation of women in Nyamira County. This study made use of the Marxist feminist and gender theories. The targeted population was men and women aged 18 years and above in Nyamira County. Respondents were selected from each constituency on stratified random sampling and targeted at least 10 respondents from each constituency of Nyamira County. Data collection was done through question guidelines and interviews. The study therefore, found out that although women in the traditional set-up were to some extent subordinate to the men under the African customary Law, in many respects the roles of men and women were complementary in nature. Second, the study found out that the colonial policies, practices and missionary activities greatly affected the participation of women in political processes in the area. Third, the study found out that the participation of women in political processes during Kenyatta’s reign was very minimal. Fourth, the study found out that women’s participation in political processes prior to 1990s remained low but with the reintroduction of multi-party politics saw an increased political participation of women in Nyamira County. Finally, the study established that Kibaki’s government has made some efforts to enhance the level of political participation of women in the area. This study was important because it sought to fill the scholarly gap that exists, for example, some women in Nyamira who have been active in the past do not seem to be included in the scholarship, hence contribute to knowledge and literature in the area. The study may also contribute a lot to the government policy-makers and help in putting strategies in place that would realize women’s participation in political process.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Women's representation and participation in politics has been an uphill task throughout the world. Since Ester Boserup's (1970) pioneering work of women and development in the Third World, studies continue to confirm her finding that women are not equal beneficiaries with men of the fruits of so-called modernization and development. Okoth (2000) and Campbell (2010) agree that across the world there seem to be barriers to women's participation than it is to men. This is demonstrated by underrepresentation of women in the political cadres. In cases where women get a chance to lead, they are often seen as ersatz men—Margaret Thatcher of Britain as “Iron Lady” or Golda Mier of Israel as “the only man in the cabinet” Campbell, (2010). Yoon (2004) observes that on a global survey, only about 39 states have elected a woman president or prime minister.

According to the UN report titled, “The World's women 2000: Trends and statistics”, women comprise “… less than one-tenth of the world's cabinet ministers and one-fifth of all sub-ministerial positions”, United Nations (2000). In this report, sub-Saharan Africa is ranked lowly number five in the ranks, while Nordic regions followed by the Americans are rated comparatively high. The reports indicate that percentage of women in parliament in sub-Saharan Africa is just below the global average.

This report seems to be corroborated by the fact that women in Africa have been excluded from most of the important positions until 2003 when Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was elected president of Liberia (Hay and Stitcher, 1995). Even though they have been represented in the legislative organs their number has remained minimal compared to
their male counterparts. This is despite the resolutions passed in the UN Decade Conference of Nairobi in 1985 and the Abuja Declaration.

In the recent past, the political arena of some Eastern African countries has made some strides in terms of women inclusion in political participation (Okoth, 2000). Meena (1992) states Tanzania was the first African country in 1998 to include 30% quota representation in her national constitution. Tanzania was followed by Rwanda and crossed the gender parity in women participation in politics as UNIFEM (2008/09) illustrates.

Kenya is one of the countries with observably low participation of women in political processes. Kariuki (2010) observes that even though women make up to about 52% of the population, decision making organs has remained largely minimal and marginal to women since independence.

Notwithstanding low participation of women in political processes, most historical studies undertaken in Kenya have not been gendered. Zeleza (1999) argues that the documentation of historical change in Africa has been biased against women. He continues to note that even the regional histories displays the same tendencies. This is the same case with Kenyan. Writing about ‘Gender Analysis’, Ochwada (1995) asserts that Kenyan, women, are invisible in most of the historical works in Kenya. There were those that totally ignored women, and others just mentioned them in passing. Therefore, local level research is needed to bring to cognition the social, economic and political realities that grassroot women are subjected to (Pala, 1978).

In 1990s, the study of history of women in Kenya began to expand. Women were studied in Economics, Agriculture, Trade and Migration etc. as indicated in her study of Siaya

Major studies undertaken on political participation of women, cover the Kikuyu and to some extent the Luo. For instance, Kanogo (1987) demonstrates how the state was an instrument of actualizing male interest thereby enhancing men’s power over women and offering women limited opportunities of ownership of land, participation in formal economy and the exercise of statutory power. In her other work (Kanogo, 2005), interrogates political and socio-cultural structures and practices that shaped and controlled women’s lives in colonial Kenya. She examines the dilemma of African women within the milieu of two oppositional legal frameworks – pre-colonial and colonial and how women dealt with them, with varying degrees of success. Mwangi (2004) asserts that when colonial authorities began to create a system of private property rights in Kenya, they extended those rights to men only because ownership in the west was historically a male privilege. Nyakwaka (2012) notes that Kenyan women constitute a vital national resource whose ideas, creativity and concerns for social cohesion can help bring about positive change in all spheres of the society. Therefore, their potential needs to be fully exploited if Kenya needs to forge ahead in development.

Most studies that have been carried out in Gusii cover the general areas of socio-economic issues. For instance, Onsongo (2005) has done a study on patriarchy and subordination of women among the Gusii. She argues that the traditional practices
governing marriage among the Abagusii contribute to the subordination of women. Nyang’era (1999) has written on “The making of man and woman under Abagusii customary laws”. He observes that there are traditional norms and values which regulate and inform much of their behaviour and ideas about gender, marriage and kinship. Hakansson and Levine (1997) have argued that the wife becomes a property of the clan into which she is married once dowry has been paid. Otoigo (1996) observes that the payment of dowry constituted the key to getting access to land for the wife. The wife gained managerial and user rights to husband’s land, the right of maintenance as the right for her sons to become legal heirs to the land allocated to her. Silberschmidt M. (1999), in her study on “Gender Antagonism and socio-economic change in Kisii District”, observes that patriarchy and socio-economic change have benefited men at the expense of women. She further argues that both customary law and some consequences of socio-economic and political change have put women in disadvantageous positions. Nyakundi (2009) has done on “Female Circumcision: Gusii Perspectives” and in his article, he has observed that there are several disadvantages of female circumcision. Omwoyo (2008) has looked into the effects of agricultural innovations and coffee farming on women’s role in agricultural production among Abagusii of Western Kenya during the colonial period. The Ministry of Planning and National Development (2000), notes that contribution of the females in Kisii, in sustaining the economy of the district is enormous. Women provide almost all forms of labour but it is not factored into the national income.

Most of these studies deal with the Gusii in general and have not tackled specific localities in GusiiLand. This means there are often no studies on the small entities of Gusii. Yet local level studies can generate detailed information on issues that have merely been dealt with generally.
Despite the existence of the studies on the history of Gusii women none directly deals with politics, and therefore is a scholarly gap which needs to be filled. There are no records of women in Nyamira who have been active in politics in the past hence it is necessary to undertake the study of this kind.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Women’s engagement in political leadership is a global concern because in virtually all societies leadership is gendered masculine. The participation of women in political leadership in Nyamira County remains minimal despite the resolutions passed in the UN Decade Conference of Nairobi in 1985 and the Abuja Declaration in the political sphere. This situation has persisted despite the fact that Kenya has ratified most of the human rights conventions the most prominent being the 1979 convention of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (Yoon, 2004). The literature on women in politics from a historical perspective seems to be limited despite the numerous studies on women and politics. Studies undertaken on the Gusii women in general do not also deal with the political involvement and no study has been undertaken on the involvement of Nyamira women. The documented works on Gusii women deal with the socio-cultural and economic issues. None directly deals with politics, there is a gap that needs to be filled. This study therefore, is a historical investigation on women’s participation in political processes in Nyamira County from 1963 to 2013. It investigates the contribution of factors such as colonialism, missionary activities and legislations imposed by the post independent governments, culture, wealth and the level of education to political participation of women. Owing to the evidence of disparity in women’s political participation in different areas within Nyamira County, the study investigates these disparities among women of Nyamira County.
1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was guided by the following research questions:-

i) What was the place of women in politics in Nyamira County during the pre-colonial and colonial periods?

ii) Were there any political, economic or socio-cultural factors that impacted on women’s political participation in Nyamira County between 1963-2013?

iii) To what extent were women in Nyamira County involved in politics during Kenyatta’s reign 1963-1978?

iv) Did Moi’s regime make any effort to include Nyamira County women in politics from 1978-1992, how about after 1992?

v) What efforts did the Kibaki government make to enhance the level of political participation of women in Nyamira County in the period 2002-2013?

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study sought to: -

i) Examine the place of women in Nyamira County during the pre-colonial and colonial periods.

ii) Assess whether there were any political, economic or socio-cultural factors that have impacted on women’s political participation in Nyamira County between 1963 and 2013.
iii) Analyze the political participation of Nyamira County women during the reign of Jomo Kenyatta 1963-1978.

iv) Investigate whether the Moi regime attempted to involve women in politics in Nyamira County.

v) Establish whether women’s participation in politics in Nyamira County was enhanced by Kibaki’s government.

1.5 RESEARCH PREMISES

i) The pre-colonial Gusii was patriarchal but there were some complementarities. However, the colonialists introduced policies that reinforced the subordination of women.

ii) Socio-cultural, political and economic factors have been mainly responsible for women’s dismal participation in politics in Nyamira County between 1963 and 2013.

iii) Although the Government’s Sessional Paper No.10 on African socialism at independence (1963) clearly indicated that political participation by both men and women should be on equal terms, the incoming leadership had inherited from the colonialists male dominated political structures.

iv) Although women’s political participation prior to 1990s remained low in Nyamira County, the re-introduction of multi-party politics during Moi’s era (1978-2002) witnessed an increased political participation of women in Nyamira County.

v) Although women’s political participation prior to this period (2002-2012) remained low in the Nyamira County, Kibaki’s government made some efforts to enhance women’s participation.
1.6 SIGNIFICANCE AND JUSTIFICATION

Many scholarly works have already been published on women’s participation in political processes for example leadership in Kenya in general, such works like Kabira (1994) Kabira and Masinjila (eds) (1997), Kanogo (1987), Kanogo (2005), Mwangi (2004), but none has been focused specifically to Nyamira County. No attempts have been made to investigate the forces impacting on women’s political participation. Thus this study contributes to knowledge and literature on the political participation of women in Nyamira County specifically and generally in Kenya and the world.

Women are grossly underrepresented in political leadership in most African countries. In Kenya generally and Nyamira County in particular, women constitute more than half of the population and they play a critical role in the development of the country and the county for that matter. Women form the bulk of the voting population hence attracting huge interest during electoral strengths over their male counterparts, they are yet to convert these numbers and actualize self emancipation. In spite of Kenyan women having been at the forefront in championing the discourses and strategies that support women’s right and gender equality – reinforced ostensibly by the hosting of the 3rd World Conference in Nairobi in 1985, the status of women continue to be dismal. Yet no development can be achieved without the inclusion of half of the population. Thus this study investigated in detail factors hindering Nyamira women’s election into leadership roles. Despite the studies that abound in Kenya, no study has been done on women’s participation in political processes in Nyamira County. In support of this, Banda, (2011) argues that Africa will only develop with total participation of women in politics and other leadership roles.
The study covered the period between 1963 and 2013 which is basically the post-colonial era. 1963 is significant as it marks a period in Kenya when political institutions were transferred into the hands of Kenyans. At this point, the constitution that was adopted granted equal rights to both men and women in terms of political participation (Kabira, 1998). However, the years following independence women continued to lag behind in politics in Kenya. Nyamira County was no exception despite the precedent that had been set by Moraa Ng’iti in early colonial time in Gusii. Yet in the post-colonial era, women in this area have generally taken a political backseat. 2012 is important as Kenya saw major constitutional changes of which are advantageous to women. Thus, this study investigated in detail into reasons for their low participation in political processes.

Much has been done of factors hindering women’s access to political leadership roles ranging from, cultural, economic, legislation, education, ignoring other areas like oppressive practices of post-independent regimes, male conspiracy and (non-) incorporation of grass root women in the political processes which are some of the variables that explain why other rural areas have low women parliamentarians than others. The study contributes to the literature on oppressive practices of post-independent regimes, male conspiracy and (non-) incorporation of grass root women in political leadership roles in Nyamira context. It is expected that the reach of this work may go beyond Nyamira County and impel reform in the attainment of women’s full participation across Kenya and Africa.

The outcome of the research will be of relevance to the government policy-makers on the advantages of involving women’s participation in political leadership at all levels. It aims
to serve as a tool for reference to all those who would work to increase women representation in political leadership roles in various countries.

1.7 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The study was confined to the geographical limits of Nyamira County. The County was curved out from the former Kisii District due to political and administrative reasons. The area covers the present Kitutu Masaba, Borabu, North Mugirango and West Mugirango constituencies. The area was chosen because local level studies can generate detailed information on issues that have merely dealt with generally. The study sought to interrogate the forces impacting on women’s political participation in Nyamira County. 1963 was chosen because it marks the independence year of Kenya. 2013 on the other hand serves as a convenient date to end the investigation and analysis. Kenya saw major constitutional changes in 2013 most of which are advantageous to women.

Literature on women’s participation in political processes in Nyamira County is lacking and hence literature from outside the geographical area were used particularly sources from the Agikuyu, Akan and Igbo of West Africa and materials from Southern Africa and also from the internet. Another problem was inadequate finances to enable travelling from one place to another and finally the problem of insincerity i.e. giving wrong or conflicting information especially on their rights and sharing responsibilities with their men.
1.8 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.8.1 INTRODUCTION
The body of literature on the participation of women in political processes is increasing from time to time. However, literature on political participation in many parts of Kenya is scanty. Nyamira County is one of such areas where literature that focus on women’s participation in political processes is lacking. The literature that exists covers the larger Gusiiland before Nyamira was curved out in 1988 due to political and administrative reasons. The literature which exists on Gusiiland is basically dedicated to socio-economics for instance, Onsongo, (2005), Nyang’era (1999), Ochieng (1986), thus, lacking historical context.

1.8.2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE
Charlton (1984) observes that in virtually every country in the world, women are dependent upon men in formal politics at the local, national and international levels. Equally important in this conceptualization, she notes, is the recognition that these three levels are increasingly interrelated. Thus, events at the local level whether in private (family) sphere or public sphere are more and more influenced by institutions of the national state. Moreover, the expansion of multinational organizations mean that virtually no country can be considered impermeable to influences that originate from outside its borders. She concludes therefore that whatever their traditional condition, women in general have little or no formal institutionalized power at the local, national and international levels in comparison to men. Even when women do acquire public influence locally or nationally, she observes that influence is often undermined by the limited
autonomy of their national state. This reference material is an important one to the present study although it does not focus on any specific country.

Campbell (2010) notes that in virtually all societies, leadership is gendered masculine, where women get a chance to lead they are often seen as ersatz men. Many women leaders are forgotten when they are seen as anomalies and not part of the pattern. She continues to note that by the time children start school, they already have a deeply imbued sense of what it means to be a male and female in their society.

Gordon and Gordon (1996) observe that politically African women in most African societies during the pre-colonial period were influential political actors in informal ways, if not through formal political roles. They continue to observe that with the advent of colonialism in Africa men gained political advantage as customary sources of female power were ignored or undermined. Europeans imposed their own prejudices about the proper authority of men over women by dealing only with male leaders. Moreover, men were provided new commercial opportunities in cash crop agriculture, and began to assert their customary rights to land and the labour of their wives in order to accumulate income for themselves. This work is important as it provides insights to the present study, on the subordination of women in Kenya generally and Nyamira County in particular.

In expanding of similar view Abena (1991) and Kariuki (2010) examine the aspect of culture in enhancing gender imbalances in African societies. Abena (1991) defines culture as the sum total of a people’s way of life. Both scholars observe that conceptually, language, gender and the law converge in culture and that by the time they are adults, children of each society have internalized or acquired specific values regarding the gender issues they have experienced. They add that it is in culture where specific values
and ideas about male and female roles are found, what the society expects from each, codes of behavior in various circumstances and the associations and the connotations that go with each genus. Kariuki (2010) adds that in most Kenyan communities, the place of women is not clearly demarcated in the public as they are perceived as appendages of men and hence unfit for leadership positions. The gender differences prevalent in most Kenyan societies are not as a result of one’s sex but a creation of Kenyan cultures that are primarily patriarchal. Once a child was born, patriarchal aspects of the society were inculcated in his or her mind through socialization. These works are important to the present study as they address the role of culture in the marginalization of women in Kenya generally and specifically in Nyamira County.

In dealing with issues of subordination and marginalization of women, several scholars have also identified patriarchy as a major hindrance against women’s political participation. Walby (1990), Okemwa (2002) and Ruth 1998) all assert that in many patriarchal African communities, women are not supposed to challenge men in the contest for political leadership. Walby (1990) defines patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices, in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. Okemwa (2002) describing characteristics of a patriarchal society observes that in these societies, women were regarded as second-hand citizens, used and handled like personal property of men, exploited, oppressed and degraded. These scholars conclude that in such a case where societies are patriarchal, it is this patriarchy that determines entirely the character of all members of the society, the values and priorities, the place and image of women within it and the relations between the sexes. In this literature, women are portrayed as weak. These works are important to the present study as they address generally the issue of patriarchy, which the present work of Nyamira County addresses.
Norris and Inglehart (2001), Kenworthy (1999), Wollack (2010), Agbalajobi (2009) and Maina (2002) all observe that economic power and resources are essential in political participation. Norris and Inglehart (2001) and Kenworthy (1999) note that (non-)participation in labour force influences female political participation. They all note that women who find themselves in the formal wage labour force are more likely to enjoy political representation. They point out that these women have greater financial independence as well as higher levels of self-esteem. Kenworthy analyzes the role of formal wage labour by pointing out that technical representation and supervisory skills are skills that women in the formal economy bring to the political realm. “Jobs in such fields as law and journalism commonly provide the feasibility, financial resources, experience and social networks that facilitate running of elective office”. However, women in Sub-Saharan Africa are frequently employed in informal sector or involved in subsistence agricultural activities. Active women in the formal labour force are thus in the minority (Kenworthy, 1999). Wollack (2010) posits that financial autonomy or access to economic resources is a very important factor for women’s greater participation in political life. He further points out that, worldwide women’s lower economic status and relative poverty are substantial hurdles to overcome. Because women control and have access to fewer economic resources, they are often unable to pay the formal and informal costs associated with gaining a party’s nomination and standing for election.

Agbalajobi (2009) argues that political campaigns are expensive and require solid financial backing for success. Over the years sexual division of labour and job opportunities offered on sex basis has given men productive gender roles, enabling them to possess more purchasing power over their female counterparts. She continues to observe that societal value assumes that political activities are masculine and this makes
it worse as financiers and sponsors of politicians prefer male candidates over female ones, since they believe they stand a better chance. As a result, women political aspirations have grossly hampered by lack of financial bedrock to subsist their endeavour. Maina (2002) observes that there is glaring gender gaps in access to ownership and control resources. Most African societies are patriarchal and almost all the family assets are owned and controlled by men. Men own cash crops, livestock and land. Women own household goods like cups, plates and sufurias. These items are associated with provision of domestic care by the woman and are not considered as assets. Maina continues to assert that land is the most valuable asset for most African families and yet, despite the fact that women constitute more than 52 percent of the population, they own less than 5 percent of the land. This study identified economic power and resource ownership and discussed the role they played in the low participation of women in political processes in Nyamira County. Although these works are general, they provided some relevant insights into factors that relegate women’s political participation in the present study.

In dealing with the issue of lack of education to girls and women, several scholars have identified lack of education as a major force militating against women’s political participation. Machaffey (1981), Kenworthy (1997), Maina (2012), Onsongo (2005) and Kanogo (2005) all posit that in many African communities, men were given greater educational opportunities than the female counterparts. Kenworthy (1999) contends that education instills interest in political matters and educated women would be more adept to seek elective office. He explains that, over many years educational opportunities have been muted in, preference for education for the boys. Maina (2002) emphasizes that education is both a tool for entrenching gender inequalities and a tool for eradicating the inequalities. Onsongo (2005) observes that for education introduced by the colonialists was discriminatory to women
therefore, majority of the women remained illiterate. Kanogo (2005) notes that the syllabus that girls were exposed to during the colonial period was designed to cultivate their domestic skills for their roles as wives and mothers. And as such, women were not expected to combine marriage and careers. Moreover, these contradictions have continued to affect women’s careers and indeed how work places and politics are structured. These works are important to the present study as they interrogate the effects of the colonial policies and practices.

Mbeo and Ombaka (1989) and Choti (2005) note that no legislation in Kenya was been formulated in answer to the women subordination or motivated by feminist concerns. These scholars observe that on the contrary most political leaders, both men and women argue that the laws of Kenya provide for equality of the sexes and that women should take advantage of this equality. But in reality, Mbeo and Ombaka (1989) emphasize, that there are discriminatory laws in our statute books. In addition, to them, the ideology of equality is a legal fiction, which helps legitimize the status quo. In theory, law is supposed to define the norms of conducts by promulgating objective and value neutral rules applicable to all citizens, irrespective of their status. They conclude that in treating unequal persons equally, the law reinforces existing conditions and promotes inequality. Although these studies give comprehensive analysis of the issue of Kenya legislation s impacting on women’s political participation, they fail to address other equally important forces impacting on women’s political participation like patriarchy, financial backing among others.

Butegwa (1995) and Ogusanya (2002) posit that the mass media has great influence in formulation of public opinion. They further add that the capacity to create, spread and
perpetuate stereotypes as well as to alter them is undeniable. They continue to note that the image the African media has given women is rather typeset. Those women are presented as powerless victims of wars, violence, famine and diseases. They note that stories of successive initiatives launched by women hardly get a line in national newspapers. They, therefore, conclude that African women need to involve the media in every project and that on their part the mass media must improve the coverage, which they give to events that concern women and their organizations. Although these works do not focus on a specific country, they provide some relevant insights into the factors relegating women to participate lowly in politics in Kenya generally and Nyamira County specifically.

Lerner (1986) and Mlama (1991) argue that women have perpetuated their subordinate status in performing arts by agreeing to play a role that depicts their subordinate status as well as providing an applauding audience to such performances. However, the studies underscore the need for women to resist the subordinate position, which has been constructed for them in our societies. Lerner (1986) argues that women more than any other group, have collaborated in their own subordination through their acceptance of the sex gender system. Lerner argues that women have internalized the values that subordinate them to such an extent that they voluntarily pass them on to their children. Also the choices which women have in terms of providing audience to a performing popular theatre has to be critically addressed in view of the alternative entertainment available in specific socio-cultural context. These works are important references as they provide insights to the present study on how women are marginalized and subordinated in using arts.
Aduol (1992) observes that women’s limited contribution to political leadership may be attributed to lack of political maturity and experience. She further observes that their preoccupation with domestic and family obligations and the existence of an ambivalent attitude towards political activities also militate against women’s political participation. In addition, she says that their lack of experience due to their increased household chores makes them remain behind in most political activities. This work is important to this study as it portrays the situation of women in most parts of Kenya. Women have been underrepresented in all spheres of life including economic, political, religious, and other social spheres due to their inadequate experience.

The aforementioned studies are all explorations of how women are marginalized and subordinated group in many parts of Africa generally and in Kenya particularly. The studies acknowledge the fact that there are certain forces that impact on women’s political participation in Kenya generally. It is evident that no research has been undertaken to establish the fundamental causes of women’s low participation in political processes in Nyamira County. This study therefore set out to investigate these forces.
1.8.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study made use of various aspects of the theory of patriarchy an offshoot of radical feminism. Further, gender, as a theoretical construct was employed in the analysis and interpretation of the work.

Most of the earlier studies extensively used the feminist ideology to explain the existing relations between men and women and between women and power. Feminism is a broad term for a variety of conception of the relations between men and women in society. Feminism takes meaning from the moment, has no fixed definition, and is governed by its context and researcher position and identities. Feminists question and challenge the origins of oppressive gender relations and attempt to develop a variety of strategies that might change these relations for the better. All feminism pivots around the recognition of existing women’s oppression and addresses the prevailing unjust and discriminatory gender relations. Feminism does not just deal with issues of justice and equality, but also offers a critique of male dominated institutions, values and social practices that are oppressive and destructive. Even though feminists share the same ideas in terms of what gender oppression might mean, they differ widely in terms of analyzing its origin and what constitutes women’s liberation (Meeng, 1992).

Several strands of feminism exist for instance, Liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, Radical feminism, socialist feminism just to mention a few. As already mentioned, this study made use of the theory of patriarchy an offshoot of radical feminism and gender theory.

Radical feminism emerged in the 1960s in the United States in response to the sexism experienced by women working within the civil-rights and antiwar movements. Radical
feminists argued that making gender equality secondary to class equality diminished the importance of and deferred action on women’s concerns.

Radical feminists insist that women’s subordination does not depend on other forms of domination, such as class. They argued that patriarchy or the domination of women by men is primary: it existed in virtually every known society, even those with classes. Women’s subordination as it is deeply embedded in individual psychos and social practices is more difficult to change than class. Although radical feminists all agree on the primary of women’s subordination they have a variety of views on the origins and nature of this subordination. Shulamith Firestone (1970) argues that women’s subordination is rooted in their biology that is their reproductive physiology. She argues that only with the advanced technology, such as “test tube babies”, would women achieve equality and no longer depend on men. Other radical feminist argue that women are biologically superior to men because of their capacity to give birth. Still others argue that it is not the nature of set differences that should concern feminists but the social norms that devalue female biology. Many radical feminists argue that women’s subordination is rooted in male control over women’s fertility and sexuality that is over women’s bodies.

They launched a wholesale onslaught against male-dominated society and considered men as the enemy. They in addition believed that women’s issues were part of a general revolutionary struggle that one could not change the system within the established economic and political system and its institutions. Women had to exclude men from their movement because they gained nothing from cooperating with their oppressors. Radical feminists put sexuality, reproduction and patriarchy at the centre of political arena. They challenge the conventional assumptions with regard to the place of women in society.
Although demand from women empowerment, however, might explain why radical feminism has met hostility and has failed to have a significant impact on strategies on women, some of the aspects have a significant impact on feminist activists and researchers. For example, patriarchy an offshoot of radical feminism has tangible implications on the state of women in society. Patriarchy was introduced as a concept to differentiate the forces maintaining gender oppression and discrimination from other social forces such as capitalism and socialism. However, the concept obscures other differences. Sometimes this concept is used loosely with “sexism” to denote that there is one sex, which dominates and another that is subjected. But patriarchy, although a branch of radical feminist theories, has been advanced as a theoretical explanation on its own for the subordination of women. It describes the political and social control of women by men. Here patriarchy chronicles to deliver the history of the relations between the sexes and explain the form and function of male domination.

The concept of patriarchy is commonly used to explain the totality of the oppressive and exploitative relations between men and women in society. Several scholars and researchers have concluded that this concept of patriarchy has a narrow and wider meaning. Such scholars include Lerner (1986), Kabira (1992) and Abram and Harvey (1996). In its narrow sense, it refers to a system whereby the male head of the household has absolute legal economic power over his dependants, male and female members of the family. In its wider meaning, it denotes the social, political and economic systems that ensures, preserves and perpetuates male supremacy in all sectors of life. In most indigenous African societies, patriarchy, defined social relations. Under this system, kinship was defined from the male line. Kinship ties were strengthened by the age set system that excluded women.
Given that male elders presided over the affairs of the members of the clan and doubled up as the political leaders, it followed that women were invisibilised. As a result, women were expected to find their place in the husband’s clan since they were perceived as inferior to men, responsible to them and in need of protection by them. Patriarchal ideology operates upon the premise that men are superior to women and that women have to depend on them for their survival. Within this framework of patriarchal understanding, male leadership at all levels is seen as the only legitimate leadership. The most fundamental expression is in the patriarchal family where the man is the “natural head” of the household (Kabira, 1997).

Weber (1978) applied it to refer to a system of government in which men ruled societies through their positions as heads of household. He adds that in this system of social structures and practices, men dominate, exploit and oppress women. He reckons that the application of the term social structure here is important because it implies rejection of both biological determinism and the notion that every individual man is in a dominant position and that every woman is in a subordinate one. In patriarchal culture, women are defined by those who subordinate them. These definitions may be seen as ideological, as defining women in opposition to and as lesser than men. It may be argued, for instance, that it is in men’s interests as a group, to confine women into the domestic sphere; not only does it reduce competition in the work place and ensure a servicing for men at home that facilitates their work and leisure activities it also renders women dependent on men, identifies women with the “natural” world of the family and excludes them from those fields such as Science, politics, wealth creation and the arts which are seen as characterizing the achievements of humanity.
Patriarchy has over the years valorized hierarchy and dominance of men over women and empowered men to exercise male authority absolutely to the extent that they are perceived as “natural” leaders both in the household and in the wider society. But the legitimization of this domination as a principle of exercising power resulted in distortion of all institutions of power, thus when patriarchy is taken beyond the narrow meaning, it can be an invaluable tool for understanding the position of women in the society.

A major reason for the strength of the attraction of the theory of patriarchy is that it is a term with a history in those very theories that appear to be most important for feminism. Marxism talks of the crucial relations between patriarchal and private property. The issue of private property occurred due to exchange and control of women, causing the ‘world historic overthrow of the female sex’. Marxism states that private property, which gives rise to economic inequality, dependence, political confusion and ultimately unhealthy social relations between men and women, is the root of women’s oppression in the current social context. The idea of patriarchy enables women to see their personal experience as part of the general sexual politics in which they shared interests with other women. It makes the subordination and oppression of women by men visible and illegitimate and stimulates meaning that focuses on the rule of the father; it can be an important instrument for analyzing and interpreting the subordination and exploitation of women in society.

On the other hand, one of the criticisms of patriarchy, an otherwise significant theory for feminist writing, is that it is too universalistic and non-specific. It was first articulated by radical feminists to express the systematic character of the oppressive and exploitative relations that affect women and the basic critique of radical feminism was that patriarchy
takes all societies as essentially characterized by male dominance and female
subordination at the peril of historically specific analysis of relations between sexes
(Chhacchi, 1988). The danger here is that the institutions that need to be explained may
be and/or can be used as explanations in themselves that the Kenyan political scene is a
legal of colonial patriarchy. Patriarchal relations have characterized the interaction
between men and women in Kenya generally and more specifically in Nyamira County.
This has led to subordination and marginalization of women in the public sphere and
especially in politics. Their child bearing and nurturing roles and domesticity are seen as
inferior to those of men. Therefore, since independence no woman has ever represented
the wider Gusiland in parliament. Even in civic representation very few women have
held positions of power. Patriarchy will aid in the analysis of subordination and
marginalized positions of women in Nyamira County.

The concept of gender as a theoretical construct rose to prominence in anthropological
and Marxist circles and in other disciplines and theories in the late 1970s as researchers
looked for away to conceptualize the social construction of masculinity and femininity.
Attention was shifted from the biological given – female/male, woman/man to the social
relations between and among women and men. Gender analysis moved out of the home,
the private and personal world to explore the construction of gender relations in the
community, the school, the government an the ‘economy’

Gender simply refers to the distinction of male and female, the femaleness and maleness
and the social constructs and expectations that influence the way in which gender identity
and differences are perceived. Gender in representations of power in any social
organization will always correspond to changes in the organization. However, the
direction of the change may not be one way. As an encompassing element, gender involves interrelated elements such as culturally available symbols which have a multiple representations. Gender is a relation of domination but not all gender relations are socially constructed as a result of the behaviour of women and men themselves. They are therefore, historical, changeable, subject to abolition and transformation through everyday happenings as well as periodic moments of crisis and transformation.

Young (1988) explains that gender theory emerged in the late twentieth century as a result of feminist theorists attempting to understand the complexities of women subordination from political leadership, unequal share of responsibilities which means decision making and authority is a male domain. Gender analysis as a feminist research generally has a political commitment. It reveals the mechanism of domination over women and arms them with a tool to struggle against oppression. The concept as a theoretical construct arose as a scholar and researchers mainly anthropologists and historians looked for a way to conceptualize the social construction of femininity and masculinity. Scholars argued that women like men, are biological beings but that women’s subordination was socially constructed and not biologically determined. They argued that to conceptually differentiate between the two realities, it is necessary to identify "sex" as the biological differentiation between male and female and "gender" as the differentiation between masculinity and femininity, as constructed through socialization and education, among other factors. What is biological is fixed and unchangeable, but what is social is subject to change and should be the focus of attention for feminist theories (Young, 1988). In the recent past gender is used as class, ethnicity or race, which means it can be used as an analytical social category. The use of gender which gained wide spread acceptance has emphasized the need to include men in our
analysis. The need to deal with relational issues, so gender has been used in various studies particularly those related to development. Attention shifted from the biological given female/male, woman/man to the social relations among women and men. Gender analysis was no longer confined in the home, the private and personal worlds. It moved out to explore the construction of gender relations in the community, school, the government and the economy.

Bem (1993) discusses the hidden assumptions embedded in cultural discourses, social institutions and individual psyches which as she notes perpetuates male power and oppress women and sexual minorities. She argues that these assumptions, which she calls the lenses of gender, shape not only perceptions of social reality but also the more material things – like unequal pay and inadequate daycare – that constitute social reality itself. Her penetrating and articulate examination of these hidden cultural lenses enables us to look at them rather than through them and better understand recent debates on gender and sexuality. According to her, the first lens, androcentrism (male centeredness), defines males and male experience as a standard or norm and females and female experience as a deviation from that norm. The second lens, gender polarization, superimposes male and female differences on virtually every aspect of human, from modes of dress and social roles to ways of expressing emotion and sexual desire. The third lens, biological essentialism, rationalizes and legitimizes the other two lenses by treating them as the inevitable consequences of the intrinsic biological natures of women and men. After illustrating the pervasiveness of these three lenses in both historical and contemporary discourses of Western culture, Bem presents her own theory of how the individual either acquires cultural gender lenses and constructs a conventional gender identity or resists cultural lenses and constructs a gender-subversive identity.
She contends that we must reframe the debate on sexual inequality so that it focuses not on the differences between the men and women but on how male-centered discourses and institutions transform male-female difference into female disadvantage. Her arguments demonstrated that “the construction of the selfs seems to lie as much with the individual as with the culture. Gender identities are situated in both time and place, with the content of masculinities and femininities over time, not only can the content of gender discourse change over time, as well as vary from place to place, but there can be more than one gender associated with biological than one gender associated with biological sex. The examples of female husbands and male daughters among the Igbo in South Eastern Nigeria (Amadiume, 1986) make this clear. Hence there is a concept of gender division of labour (as distinguished from sexual division of labour), which emphasizes that organizations of labour among women and men are socially and historically constructed division, and not biologically determined.

Pettman, (1996) observes that the social construction of gender is part of ruling relations and leads to the ideas and practices of ruling at different levels (household, local, national, global). According to Driscoll and Krook (2008), a shift to gender has two implications on political research: it moves the analytical focus away from biological sex which treats men and women as binary opposites, to constructed gender identifies which view masculinity and femininity as features that exist along with other identities. The dichotomies that continued dominant discourses which support male supremacist relations were questioned and critiqued in theory and practice for example public/private, personal/political, base/nurture, real/ideal and female/male (Stamp, 1989).
However, theories of gender offer a chance to delve more deeply into these dynamics by exploring masculinities and femininities as well as relative status of men and women in conduct of political life. According to Imam, et al (eds) (1997) gender recognizes that relations are by nature about power and they are built on authority, conflict, negotiation and dialogue. In all these relations women tend to have largely unequal relations with men whether from North or South. They do not enjoy the same autonomy as their male counterparts with regard to their status, roles, material and intellectual production.

Gender also has normative concepts which set the interpretations of the meaning of the cultural symbols (Scott, 1889). These symbols are expressed in religious, educational and political doctrines, of a people. For instance, the structure of patriarchy has been used to ensure the continued dominance of men over women. The term also had different meaning and weight in the pre-colonial era and in the colonial and post-colonial era. For example, the view of men as the natural leaders was different in the pre-colonial period; the women were excluded from politics and decision-making organs (Scott, 1989).

All these forms of oppression are imposed by men and hence are encompassed under the rubric of patriarchy. Since most African cultures are patriarchal, it is difficult for its members to view women and men as equal partners. However, gender as a theoretical construct assumes that the relations involving domination and subordination in a society are just caused by patriarchy and society’s expectations. Unfortunately, these relations tend to be equal in more than one way. Power is conflated making it difficult to sort out what is happening as a result of gendered structures and what needs to be attributed to the social class, ethnic background or nationality of the concerned. This shortcoming notwithstanding, as a theoretical construct gender will be especially relevant to this study.
It will be applied to analyze the colonial policies and practices imposed by European officials to govern through male authorities and hence formalizing male institutions while ignoring the female counterparts. Although independence was granted to Kenyans, women still remain oppressed and excluded in most economic, social and political decision-making processes. Hence, this theory together with patriarchy will be used to analyze and interpret the factors responsible for women’s peripheral position in politics in Nyamira County.

1.8.4 AREA OF STUDY

The study was carried out in Nyamira County, Nyanza Province. This county was curved out from the former Kisii district now Kisii County in 1988 due to political and administrative reasons. It consists of Kitutu Masaba, Borabu, West Mugirango and North Mugirango constituencies. It shares a common border with Kisii County to the West and South, Homa-Bay County to the North, Kericho County to the North East and East and Bomet County to the South East.

There are two major communities that are neighbours to Nyamira County – the Luo and the Kipsigis. Nyamira County is endowed with natural resources such as soil, water, rich flora and fauna for agricultural production. The district has a highland equatorial climate, rainfall over 1500mm per year. The high altitude of the district is expected to lower temperatures. However, the proximity of the equator raises the temperature to a mean annual maximum of 27°C in lowlands and minimum of 16°C in the highlands.

The high and reliable rainfall coupled with moderate temperature is suitable for growing of crops like tea, coffee, pyrethrum, maize, beans, finger millet, sweet potatoes, bananas, fruits and variety of vegetables. There is also the practice of dairy farming in the county.
Most parts of the county have red soils. The soils are deep and rich in organic matter. There is also clay, red loam, sandy, black cotton and organic peat soils. The organic peat soils are important in brick making, pottery and manufacture of tiles. The red volcanic soils support the growth of cash crops such as tea, coffee, pyrethrum, maize, bananas and potatoes. The county has several permanent rivers and streams that drain into Lake Victoria. The people of Nyamira County have had along trading relations with their neighbouring communities. They practiced barter trade during the pre-colonial era and even now they do trade among themselves (Otoigo, 1996).
Figure i. Counties of Kenya
Figure ii: Nyamira County
1.9 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.9.1 INTRODUCTION

This section deals with the design and methodology that was used for the study. It shows the research design that was used, the population and sampling procedures that were employed and the data collection instruments used.

Quantitative data was also utilized to capture figures as how many women have vied for parliamentary election, how many have vied for civic seats, how many have ever won and also voting patterns in the period under study among other issues. Primary and secondary sources of data were consulted for this research. Primary sources included oral (in-depth) interviews, observation and question guidelines.

Secondary sources included written sources: published books, theses, seminar papers, newspapers, maps and magazines. These were broadly categorized into oral and written sources. Secondary sources included mainly written works, such as published books, journals, unpublished theses and seminar papers. Local newspapers were also used extensively. These were obtained from various libraries, including; Post-Modern Library of Kenyatta University, British Institute in Eastern Africa Library Nairobi, Institute of Development Studies and Institute African Studies Library of University of Nairobi, the National Library Kisii, Macmillan Library, Kisii University Library, Maseno University Library and online journals accessible on the Internet.

Data from these secondary sources enabled us to situate the study theoretically and also work on the primary data. The secondary sources also provided a general background on the place of women politically in Africa and in Kenya.
Primary data was gathered from former districts’ annual reports relevant in informing the study about the political role of women in pre-colonial and colonial Nyamira. Archival data, which constitutes first hand records from the participants, and observes that have been passed down to posterity was especially relevant in informing the study about the political role of women in pre-colonial and colonial Nyamira. Oral interviews were conducted principally in the wider Gusii region. However, the research sample was drawn from Nyamira County. Those interviewed included the youth above 18 years, who were judged by the researcher as having relevant political opinion and elderly men and women who may have lived through the four periods of our study. Others included government officers from the Ministry of Gender, Sports, culture and social services, legal consultants and women groups in Nyamira County. The selection of information was done using snowballing.

The main target population was the men and women aged 18 years and above in Nyamira County. Respondents were selected from each constituency on stratified random sampling targeting at least 10 respondents from each constituency. This sample is stratified for gender. The researcher stratified the sample by gender strata, making sure that the females are over sampled as opposed to males. This is because females rarely participate in the parliamentary electoral politics. This method was appropriate as the researcher was interested in issues related to gender disparities in the population Mugenda & Mugenda, (2003).

Elderly informants were those aged 55 years and above as thought by the researcher. This method is useful when population that possesses the characteristics under study is not
well known and there is need to find subjects. For instance the few identified assisted in identifying others that they may know of.

Question guide (Appendix 2) constituted an important tool especially to the research assistant that this project had hired. Detailed interview guides were used regarding women who have tried to stand for elective seats from the county and if they faced any challenges. Note taking was employed during the interviews.

Recorded interviews were fully analyzed and grouped according to the similarities and differences in response. These data was fully transcribed and typed by the researcher. Secondary sources data was subjected to textual criticism to test the relevance and accuracy of the documents that were identified as appropriate for this study. Question guidelines were qualitatively analyzed with attention being paid to the reasons for varying response. After the analysis and synthesis of both primary and secondary data, with the guidance of research objectives, writing of the final thesis commenced.

1.9.2 SUMMARY

In this chapter the background of the study has been discussed and it has been noted that most studies undertaken in Gusii are general and do not tackle specific localities in Gusiiland. It has also been noted that the study is very important because works available on Gusii women deal with the socio-cultural and economic issues and not politics. This study investigates participation of women in political processes. This has also led to outlining the research questions, objectives of the study and the research premises.

It has also been noted that despite the studies that abound in Kenya, no study has been done on women’s participation in political processes in Nyamira County, yet Nyamira County is the home of the once nominated MP Catherine Nyamato, former MYWO
Chairperson Wilkista Onsando and former councilor Grace Nyamongo. The area was chosen because local level studies can generate detailed information on issues that have merely been dealt with generally.
CHAPTER TWO

NYAMIRA WOMEN ON THE EVE OF KENYA’S INDEPENDENCE

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter examined the pre-colonial set up of the Gusii people in Nyamira County. Thereafter, it discussed the various colonial policies, structures missionary activities and the impact these had on the people of Nyamira. The main policies analyzed include: education, politics, Economics, Religious as well as the women’s responses to these policies.

The imposition of colonial rule in Kenya had profound effects on the Kenyan population. The worst affected were women. In Nyamira County, the traditional roles of women were increased as men left homes to work in settler plantations and in factories; their domestic responsibilities were left to women. Therefore women were overburdened yet their responsibilities were not rewarded as they were considered valueless due to the fact that those duties had no monetary value. On the other hand, men were recruited settler plantations were initially coerced and later forced due to introduction of poll and the hut tax which were to be paid per hut heads of a household; in this case men.

In addition to the colonialism, missionary activities also impacted on women’s political participation in Nyamira County. The missionary stations that were established in Gusiiland influenced the transformation of the Gusii society in Nyamira County. The missionaries were the initial Europeans to pay attention to girl education. Despite the fact that educating males was given greater priority, the missionaries began a program of female education well before the government. However, on realizing that women were not ready to adopt their teachings of discarding the already entrenched Gusii traditions
they began the training of boys. They thus discouraged the education of girls as they considered this a waste of resources. According to them, education of girls would have resulted in arrogance and this was not allowed in the religious setting. Consequently, they concentrated on educating few girls especially those whose parents had been converted to enable them become good, caring and submissive wives to the elite husbands. Further, they discouraged the education of girls by authorizing all circumcised girls not to enroll in their schools.

Although Nyamira County women participated in protesting against these rules by the missionaries and later in the chase away of Europeans from Gusiiland, their efforts were not rewarded as those of men at independence. They therefore remained marginalized and relegated to the periphery particularly in the political arena of the Kenyan nation and Nyamira County.

2.1 **SOCIO-CULTURAL SETTING OF THE GUSII IN PRE-COLONIAL TIMES**

For the Gusii, the transition from childhood to adulthood is marked by group initiation ceremonies culminating with circumcision for boys at around the age of twelve, and clitoridectomy for girls at around the age of nine. The ceremonies occurred annually, just after the harvest and lasted from October to December. The circumcision of the girls was done before that of the boys. This practice was highly regarded in the community as a way of initiating women and men into adulthood and preparing them for marriage. Women who have not undergone the rite are seen as outcasts and may not find men to marry (Nyang’era, 1999) note that:

Any person who disregards the customary law is also discarded and woman who is not cut (circumcised) is regarded as a child. The initiates do despite them and the society does not respect them. Their failure to go through the ceremonies and
rituals makes them not to be raised to the ranks of the initiates and they fail to be admitted as full members of the society. They do not qualify as adults and therefore they find marriage very rough...they are cut by force. The uncircumcised was not allowed to sleep on bed or sit on a chair in the presence of the initiates. Circumcision was the only root to attain the higher status in the society. The stigma of being despised or abused was only removed by circumcision.

Among the Gusii, the primary domestic unit was the compound (omochie), which comprised of either a polygamous or monogamous senior male, his wives or wife’s hearth-hold and his married sons and their respective wives’ hearth-holds. Husbands did not have a separate dwelling their physically productive years. However, when they became old and weak, they were allowed to dwell in a hut (egesa) constructed as part of their first wife’s property – unmarried sons.

For years, there had been much criticism and agitation against circumcision by certain misinformed missionaries in Nyamira County and other parts of Gusililand customs and without investigating the psychological importance attached to it, these missionaries drew their conclusion that circumcision of girls was nothing but a barbaric practice as such needed to be abolished (Obae, O.I 2012). On the other hand, the Abagusii looked at these Europeans with great suspicion. Of those who attack the very old traditions to disintegrate their social order and thereby hasten their Europeanization. The abolition of girls’ circumcision, as it will be discussed which identified the age groups and thus prevent them from perpetuating that spirit of collectivism and national solidarity which they had been able to maintain for a very long time (Sibia, O.I 2012).

In pre-colonial past, the Gusii people organized themselves around patrilineal structure whereby descent was traced through the male line. Marriage was virilocal; however, men were prohibited from marrying women from their clans. Clans were exogamous, women were considered strangers in their husband’s clan not only because they had to move
from distant clans but also because they were ritually restricted from forming any lasting links with their own families (Okemwa, 2002).

Historically the Gusii share a common language and cultural heritage but never acted as a unit. Tracing their descent to a common ancestor, Mogusii, the Gusii society was organized around a maximally expanding lineage that fragmented into semi-autonomous family units. Membership and belonging within these units was reckoned in term of interlocking claims to clan succession and ritual (Hakanson, 1987). The Gusii lineage system was also ordered around age sets whereby men and women who were circumcised in the same cycle formed a bracketed cluster of individuals. Spatial and social norms were gauged in terms of mutual reciprocity within and between age sets, in the production, processing and control of resources of the land. Wives were integrated into their husband’s age grade and had to be accorded due respect, regardless of the fact that most of them were much younger than his age mates (Okemwa, 2002).

Since they were not necessarily comprised of individual’s of the same age or sex, relations within and between age sets was fraught with tensions, competitiveness and power imbalances. Notwithstanding these internal age differences and external sexual distinction, both male and female individuals who were circumcised in the same year perceived each other as being “those who gather together” (abagisangio) (Okemwa, 2000). Members of an age set considered each other as being equal in status and influence but had to defer to those senior age sets in respect to those of young ones. Positions of leadership and authority were accorded to those who succeeded in containing these inherent age set tensions, instilling social harmony and thereby promoting the interests of its members. These positions were delineated further on the basis of gender
such that female age sets had to defer to those of their male counterparts, within an equivalent hierarchy.

Despite patrichal tendencies among the Gusii, authority structures allowed men and women to exercise authority over their own sex and activities. Women who were past child-bearing age ensured that social order prevailed in the society. Those senior women had roles to play in the rituals, they were responsible for the education of children, circumcision of girls, settling of disputes and negotiating between two fighting parties. In general, the assignment of separate tasks to men and women stressed the complementary nature of responsibilities, superiority of one sex over the other was not implied on the division of labour and where inequalities arose, these was almost always compensation in some area (Gordon, 1996).

The Abagusii education system begins at birth and ends at death. The child has to pass through various age groupings with a system of education defined for every stage of life. Before the advent of Europeans the parents took the responsibility of educating their children until they reached the age of community education when every member of the society was expected to take part in the provision of education.

The Abagusii education was mainly informal with no special school structures. It took place in the homestead, especially in the grandfather’s or/and grandmother’s house. This education was carried out through the medium of songs, lullabies, recitations and proverbs. It encompassed the entire history of the family and clan traditions absorbed by listening to recitations, songs and lullabies. It was easy for the children to assimilate these early teachings without straining. This kind of education was provided from one generation to another (Kerubo, O.I 2012, Lambert, 1965).
As the young girls and boys grew their future roles became clear as it replicated in their play. The boys played the role of the father and acted in the same manner as their father. On the other hand the girls learnt to behave like their mothers. They made and carried toy babies and cooked imaginary dishes as their mothers. Boys could be seen building houses using sticks as their fathers. The grandparents were in-charge of the co-education of the children. This was done in the form of folklore and ethnic legends (Mwangi, 2004).

In the community education, the emphasis lay in a particular act of behaviour in a concrete situation, while little emphasis lay in the sphere of behaviour. It is nonetheless through this that the growing child acquired a mass of knowledge all the time. It is important to mention here that the Europeans did not realize the importance of the Abagusii education and thus attempted to abolish it by introducing theirs. Moreover they did not understand the reason of educating both sexes. To them the woman’s responsibilities were those in the homestead and therefore they only needed to be taught the duties of housewifery. The missionaries therefore in their attempt to discourage the girls from attending schools authorized all circumcised girls not to attend schools pledged themselves that they would not in any way adhere to or support female circumcision. This raised great controversy between the missionaries and the people of Gusiiiland (Kerubo, I.O, 2012). Children of those who did not denounce the custom were barred from attending missionary schools. Later on, the ban of girls attending school was lifted but the missionaries maintained that teachers were to be only those who had denounced the custom, for they hoped that teachers with this qualification would be able to mould the children in the way favourable to the missionary attitudes.
2.2 PRE – COLONIAL ECONOMIC, RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATION OF THE ABAGUSII

The chief economic activities among the Nyamira County people were crop farming, livestock keeping and trade. Each nuclear family for instance man, wife and children constituted an economic unit. This was controlled and strengthened by the system of division of labour according to gender. From the homestead to the field and to the tending of the domestic animals, every sphere of activity as clearly and systematically defined.

Each member of the family unit knew perfectly well their roles, in economic productivity and distribution of the family resources, to ensure the material prosperity of the group (Kanogo, 1987). At the family level, the building of houses was the responsibility of all members. However, each gender contributed differently, while men cut down timber, put up the framework and cut grass for thatching. Women carried grass for thatching and plastered the walls with clay or cow-dung. Men built fences around the homestead or gardens. Women on the other hand, were responsible for the entire housework which included cooking, fetching water and firewood and washing utensils. With regards to the cultivation of the field, men cleared bushes and cut down big trees. They also broke virgin soil with sticks or hoes. Women prepared the ground for sowing while planting was shared by both men and women. Women planted beans, millet, sorghum and sweet potatoes. Weeding was done collectively. Harvesting of crops was mainly done by women while men looked after the animals.

Barter trade was mainly conducted so as to acquire items that one did not have. Finger millet was mainly used to acquire farm implements such as hoes and axes. These iron implements were very scarce, partly because they were made by specific people, belonging to a certain lineage. Those who received grain were not necessarily food insecure. They too would exchange this grain for a goat or anything else that they needed.

Besides trading internally, the Gusii also traded with the Luo. The Gusii mainly bartered finger millet for Luo pottery, fish and salt. In cases of severe need, the Luo even
exchanged their cattle for grain. It is apparent that in both cases, people gave a way that which they were best skilled in, while they acquired that they needed most.

These trade ties increased in volume to the extent that, regular periodic border markets were established. Much of this trade took place along their common border markets although in later years Luo traders were to be seen in Nyamira County with donkey loads of lick-salt and pots, walking from place to place in Gusii region hawking. There were no fixed market days, although moonlit seasons were preferred, in case night fell in the course of the journey (Birundu, 1973). With time fixed meeting places developed near the common borders and these were later to become market centres and established towns (Obudho and Walles, 1976).

There was not much trade between the Gusii and their other neighbours the Kipsigis, except during severe famines. There are however, some indications that the Gusii traded with the Kuria, Maasai and the Kipsigis. Oral narratives also suggest that Arab traders came to Gusiland before Indians, Nubians, Somalis and later the British, although they stayed only briefly. They exchanged bangles and beads for food and ivory. These early visits are corroborated by observation that for a long time, Gusii women commonly wore beads and bangles as part of their cultural ornamentation (Ochieng’, 1974).

Access to land was in terms of male succession but absolute ownership did not exist. Land was regarded as belonging to the founding occupants, who then transmitted corporate custodial right to all the succeeding occupants. In this sense, land ordered their past, present and future relations. Male elders were accorded the ultimate authority and control in monitoring their descendants’ relations with respect to the land. Their status was gauged in terms of their success in controlling their respective sons and in instilling
mutual harmony and cooperation within and between their wives’ households. Likewise, sons’ status was gauged in terms of their success in containing tensions amongst their respective wives (Okemwa, 2002).

In Gusii society, division of labour was based on age and sex, and the family was the main source of labour. Male adults were the heads of families. They generally managed the homes and performed non–routine tasks such as clearing the bush for cultivation, fencing around the homes, building houses, granaries and cattle enclosures and defending the community against external aggression. On the other hand, women performed almost all routine agricultural and domestic duties. These included seed selection, hoeing, sowing, weeding and harvesting. They also undertook all household activities such as collecting firewood, fetching water, cooking, maintaining the houses, grinding finger millet and raising children. Young girls helped their mothers with duties around the home and in the fields, (Hakanson, 1994).

Labour groups were common among the Gusii. These included egesangio, risaga and ekeombe. These groups were mainly utilized during peak periods such as land preparation and harvesting. In both organized and hoc labour groups, input were measured by the number of hours invested and these were equal and compulsory for each member. Whenever someone was indisposed, he or she was required to send a replacement. Hence, as soon as one decided to participate, one committed oneself to group rules and regulations that governed performing these tasks (Okemwa, 2000)

Before the advent of Christianity in the region, the Gusii believed in the existence of one God, who was the originator of the world but did not directly interfere in human affairs. According to the Gusii, Engoro was the original progenitor and source of prosperity and
life. He governed the destiny of man, sending him rain or storm, well-being or famine, health or disease, peace or war.

The attributes of Engoro were goodness, pureness, impartiality, love and generosity. Since man was created by and derived his being from Engoro, he shared the intrinsic qualities of God, so that any behaviour which did not reflect God’s attributes was interpreted as rebellion which would be severely punished by God through His intermediaries (ancestor spirit) unless the offender took remedial action to prevent th punishment.

The Gusii God (Engoro) is said to have lived in the sky, He was not visible and did not directly interfere in the affairs of man. But while He was infinitely transcendent, He did not completely abandon the physical world. Occasionally He would dramatically manifest His mystery or power through storms, thunder, earthquakes, or lightening. The Gusii explain God’s continued operation on or involvement in the physical world to have been executed through His agents, the ancestor spirits who according to them also shared in Engoro’s supernatural and mysterious essence. As we saw earlier in this chapter, the Gusii have a tradition which goes back to Mogusii, the founder of the lineage.

The supernatural ancestor spirits were regarded as immoral beings without shape or substance like the wind and living in old settlements. The ancestors interfered in the affairs of the living but not without cause. They could either intervene on their own account or on behalf of Engoro.

The ancestor spirits were always considered right no matter how unreasonable their behaviour might seem. They were to be appeased in order that they might not bother living members of the lineage. They were, however, not worshipped.
Traditionally, it was believed that God observed man’s activities through the sun, moon and stars. Prayers to Engoro were directed through the sun (erioba). For instance, when a baby was born, the mother would hold it across her breast and gaze at the rising sun and solemnly say “erioba (sun) take care of my child”, or, alternatively, “Engoro (God) take care of my child”.

The Gusii people believed that God was “omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent”, to borrow Christian expressions. God was thought to be distant, but He was at the same time everywhere and in everything. In other words, God was also believed to be resident in every individual and it was He who constituted the “life force” in man, the “bit which disappeared from man at death”. Because God was associated with pureness, kindness and goodness, a good man was believed to possess a good heart.

The most striking aspect of Gusii religious system though was its lack of shrines. Individuals had direct access to God through prayer, which they could do anywhere. Sacrifices were offered by homestead heads. Difference animals were used as sacrifices depending on the magnitude of the problem. For instance, in a family problem, chicken would be offered. On the other hand, if it was a clan problem, a bull could be offered. If it was harvesting time, or the start of a new year, thanksgiving was given communally, led by the chief of every clan. These could be held at any convenient place within the clan territory.

Politically the Gusii had no centralized political systems, thus, the various segments of their society depended to a large extent their religious thoughts and beliefs, for the cohesion and viability of their society. Their sense of “right and wrong” were very sensitively developed and at the same time very intricately intertwined with their
religious and oral values. Religion was a major integrative factor of Gusii society. Since the Gusii did not have a strong political mechanism, devices or institutions to enforce the observance of their social values, the Gusii compensated for this defect by developing strong and often very strictly observed body of taboos. Indeed Gusii moral, political legal and social values were principally guarded by a whole range of taboos (Ochieng, 1974).

Accordingly, the word taboo when applied to the culture of a people may be defined as prohibition against certain kinds of behaviour, violation of which is believed to be punishable automatically and by supernatural means. According to Ochieng (1974), in Gusii society taboos were normally concerned ith the sancity of ritual interdictions connected with things religious, sacred oir unclean, although athe term was also used to include anything forbidden or improper.

The functions of taboos have been variously assessed, but in the light of their religious and political significance in Gusii society, it could be argued that they were used to maintain societal standards. They stimulated or prescribed common socially approved behaviour, as wella s enabling the Gusii individuals to face an uncertain future as well as face their often hostile surroundings, in the spirit of “confidence and moral integrity”. It is along these lines that Ochieng (1974) thought that the Gusii religious ideas were socially and politically vital for the stability and viability

Closely intertwined with Gusii religious system was the Gusii political organization. As already discussed that the Gusii people did not have a strong political mechanism or institutions to hold together the various segments of their society, socially and politically they depended to a very large extent on values which emanated from their religious ideas and beliefs. Apart from the use of taboos as seen earlier, the relationships between
religious and political values will again be appreciated in connection with the oaths and
curses which Gusii used during their trials. The connection with religion here is that
whenever oaths were taken, God or ancestor spirits was called up to bear witness to both
contenders who gave their evidence before clan assessors who were usually men with
few women if any. Since God was “omniscient”, He was expected to know everything
that went on in society. And since God had ultimate responsibility for punishing wicked
deeds or social offences, the Gusii believed that no offered would wantonly call the name
of God in vain (Ochieng, 1974).

The indigenous political authority system in traditional Gusii society is best understood
by starting at the extended family homestead level where lines of authority were most
clearly drawn and then proceeding upward to larger units in the political system. The
traditional Gusii homestead was on internally self-governing unit (Levines, 1979). All
disputes and rule violations arising were handled by the homestead head unless he called
in outside authority. The powers of the homestead head over his wives, sons and
daughters were great. His orders regarding a whole range of activities within his
homestead “were commands which had to be obeyed” (ibid).

Pre-colonial political power and authority were vested in local male elders’ councils and
in the big-men who dominated their neighbourhoods. However, older women, who had
gained power by dint of the number of their sons and daughters-in-law, were often in-
charge of negotiations between fighting parties. At the family level leadership rested in
the hands of the family head who was usually the man. He settled disputes affecting
members of his family. Clan elders handled cases involving different families and were
headed by the most senior member of the leading family.
Cases of conflict or violation of law which involved members of more than one homestead were brought to attention of the clan or sub-clan elders (Abagaka b’egesaku). These elders would constitute a council, normally headed by the clan elder. The clan or sub-clan councils constituted of homestead heads of good standing. These were men of wisdom, ability and bravery. The social status of these council elders and their influence in community affairs was due to their wealth. A rich man was respected and listened to. Riches meant land, cattle, sheep and goats and many wives and children. Women could not qualify as council elders (Onsongo, 2005).

Politics thus, revolved around the clan. This is despite the fact that upon marriage, a wife lived and became identified closely with her husband’s clan and her links with the clan into which she was born correspondingly weakens (Levine, 1979).

Women elders were also perceived as the custodians of the corporate land by virtue of their role in implementing and perpetuating the male elders’ ancestrally derived voice of authority. Women who were beyond child-bearing age gained equal respect as male elders and were often consulted during decision-making process. Female elders were credited for chastising both men and women who failed to adhere to the prescribed norms of behaviour (Okemwa, 2002). Accordingly, they were viewed as the moral and ethical guardians who monitored behavior and meted out the sanctions that had been imposed by male elders. They were also viewed as confidants and mentors by all new married, childless and recently widowed in-married women. Male and female elders’ spheres of influence in decision-making and control over resources were regarded as being simultaneously hierarchical and egalitarian. Therefore, neither the male nor the female
elders could interfere with the other’s sphere of influence or undermine their respective control and authority.

Women in Nyamira County in attempting to enhance their positions within the households became producers, tended to animals and made tools and other household articles used by the family. They cooked food, helped construct houses, hauled wood, tended to crops among other duties. Nonetheless, Europeans imposed their own prejudices about the proper authority of men over women by dealing only with male leaders. Nyamira County women lost their authority and public importance as colonialists deemed it necessary to educate and employ the men.

2.3 COLONIAL PENETRATION IN GUSIILAND

While the Gusii people were busy settling down in their present home towards the end of the 19th Century, and evolving their socio-economic and political ideas and institutions, imperial European powers had already embarked on the system of carving out the continent of Africa into pockets of their respective “influence” (Ochieng, 1974).

It might be probably, instructive at this stage to point out that although no European traveler, trader or missionary had visited the Gusii country in the 19th Century the Gusii people, like several other African groups had known, through their diviners, that “strangers with white skins” would visit their country. Names of Gusii prophets like Sakawa of Nyakoe, Moraa Ng’iti of Bogeka and Bonareri wife of Ogwora, rank high in their traditions, Sakawa for example had foretold the advent of “white strangers” and like the Kikuyu and Luo diviners, had advised strongly against any hostilities against them. The greatest and most beloved of the 19th Century Gusii diviners, Sakawa had often collected his admirers at the sight of present day Kisii town and prophesied where the
police lines, the hospital, the offices and churches would be. He also prophesied, that the
Gusii warriors would be disarmed by the “white strangers” if they showed any resistance.
All these, prophesies, are believed to have come true (Ochieng, 1974).

Uganda was declared a British protectorate in 1894, which soon extended to include
Gusiiland and it became part of the Eastern Province of Uganda. The Gusii people were
never informed about all those transactions, and therefore were unaware that they had
gained “free” admission to the European Empire (Ochieng, 1974).

Despite the fact that by 1900 most of the Eastern Province of Uganda had come under
British sway, the opening up of Gusiiland did not commence until 1904. In 1902, the
Gusii people were transferred together with the rest of the other tribes in the Eastern
Province of Uganda to the East Africa Protectorate (Kenya). A year later, the British
decided to set up a small administrative outpost at Karungu. Ostensibly Karungu was to
act as a base from which to bring the entire former South Nyanza (including Gusiiland)
under firm British control (Ochieng’ 1974). On their part, the Gusii had also made some
stealthy efforts to understand the nature and motives of the white people, who they had
been told had forcibly entrenched themselves in the territories of their neighbours.

The missionaries established churches and schools and also mission stations in the area
for instance at Nyanchwa, Nyabururu and through these schools and churches, the
missionaries condemned indigenous Gusii cultures and practices such as polygamy and
female circumcision. They forbade their adherents against bride wealth. The Abagusii
practiced circumcision of both sexes at puberty. According to Abagusii such cultures as
female circumcision, polygamy and bride wealth were central to the fabric of the society.
As a matter of fact, according to (Kerubo, O.I 2012) no proper Gusii man would dream of
marrying an uncircumcised girl. She adds that a man who did so became a laughing stock of the community. In case the man married and later discovered that the wife was not circumcised, he could ask for the dowry to be returned and this was considered bad omen (Maina and Oyaro, 2000). Thus the Abagusii female circumcision at initiation was not only an important part of Abagusii culture but also a symbol of subordination of junior women to senior women and to men.

The very first mission to be established in Gusiiland were by the Catholics in 1911 and the Seventh Day Adventist SDA) in 1913 at Nyabururu and Nyanchwa respectively. Another very important station was established at Bonyunyu in Nyamira County in 1921. Mission activity was initially not very successsive, several stations were looted. Active SDAs were oriented towards European family ideals and they practiced a form of protestant ethic. The SDAs afforded women some space in the missionary work but Catholics were rigid in their teachings which did not allow women to do any missionary work in Nyamira County just as it was in other areas.

In the years following the end of the First World War, many Gusii people became followers of Mumboism in growing numbers. Some of the contributing factors to this were frustrations with the colonial government due to deteriorating agricultural, trade and health conditions among the Gusii people, fluctuating currency value and the colonial administrations increasing burdensome demands concerning taxation labour owed to colonial government and requirements for registration. The colonial administration was threatened by the anti-European message of Mumboism. The colonial government ultimately banned Mumboism in 1954 (Maxon, 1989).
While the colonial administration was busy pursuing its end by force and through its agents, the missionaries were busy “domestically” people especially women and teaching them to accept the new ways. Preaching and simple education were to be used. The missionaries were to make a conquest of ‘native’ thought and habit (Mwangi, 2004). They therefore, using religion taught women to be submissive and obedient to their husbands as the latter were portrayed as the ‘heads’ of the families as Jesus is the head of the church.

As noted earlier, the colonial system and missionaries had no place for women. Although Nyamira County women had certain powers in the pre-colonial period, Gusii traditional culture was predominantly patrileneal and patriarchal (Onsongo, 2005). In this environment men were the predominant force (Odinga, 1967). As the colonialists took over control of the country, they also emphasized male dominance by transferring men’s supervisory rights over land to individual legal ownership (Gordon and Gordon, 1996). As a result of this individual land ownership, women were denied access to land, something that was new and foreign (Gordon and Gordon, 1996). Therefore, women were left behind.

For instance, the 1954 Swynnerton Land Reform Plan bracketed land into artificial boundaries and stipulated that any claims of ownership could only be legitimated by title deeds (Bulow, 1992). These land tenure laws were greatly influenced by the Victorian and Christian family model, whereby the male household head was accorded an authoritative and paternalistic position as the “breadwinner”. Men were accorded title deeds to ancestral land, thereby stratifying the previously malleable access to, use and control of the land into a fixated bracket of male ownership. Gusii men’s obligation and
responsibility to accord women custodial rights over their sons’ heritable property compromised this western ideology of exclusive rights of ownership.

The privatization and consolidation of landholdings disadvantaged women and this set the stage for their loss of rights to land after independence (Davidson, 1988). Such policies have continued in the post-independence period and they pose a major threat to way.

The colonial state in Kenya established a fiscal policy which would provide revenue for administration, infrastructure, welfare services and industry. This policy entailed taxing the citizens either directly or indirectly in order to raise the required money. For a fair taxation policy, the state requires progressive tax policy whereby those who earn more property pay higher taxes compared to the less fortune members of the society. This was not the case in the colonial Kenya. The state favored the white settlers and Asians who earned more and owned more but paid less direct taxes compared to Africans (Ekeh, 1994).

The colonial state imposed taxes on Africans as a means of removing them from their own farms in order to seek employment in the European plantations, thus earning money for taxes. The arrangement was that the need for money to pay taxes would force Africans to get involved in modern economic pursuits which would not otherwise have interested them. Africans received very little in return for their taxes.

The colonial state legitimized itself through appointing chiefs in territorial divisions such as locations and head-men in the village. These chiefs were men who hitherto were ‘nobodies’ in their communities yet the colonial state gave them both executive and judicial powers hitherto unknown to their communities. This policy proved disastrous in
most parts of Kenya and Gusiland in particular. It was these chiefs and head-men who collected taxes on behalf of the state. The village was the unit of collection, and the village head was responsible for collecting taxes and taking it to the district head (Ekeh, 1994).

In Gusiland, there were no women chiefs or village heads. All tax policy makers and implements were men and yet all women, widows and war-widows were not exempted from paying taxes. The colonial state undermined the women’s participation in the political sphere even at the lowest community levels such as the village.

The British introduced a taxation system and established institutional infrastructure in the form of chiefs and headmen. The institution of taxation did not only lead to devaluation of women’s work but also altered the women’s role in economic activities. The native Hut Tax ordinance of 1900 stated that a tax was to be imposed on a man for each hut in his homestead. This meant that the man was being taxed for every wife he married; it thus implied that the British viewed women as men’s property and consequently every homestead the man paid the woman’s tax. In Britain, it was the man who was taxed for whatever property owned even if the property belonged to his wife.

Indeed, the payment of taxes was a burden to the Gusii to be avoided at all costs. For example, men knocked down huts in their compounds so that women would share huts and thus avoid tax payment. However, on realizing this, the colonial state issued instructions that hut tax was to be payable on adult women and not on their huts (Nyakwaka, 2012).

The colonial tax policies had a number of impacts on the Kenyan women and the Gusii were no exception. One main impact was that most women were separated from their
spouses and sons, who joined wage-labour to earn money for taxes. Because men could not take their spouses to the towns, a number of them engaged in personal liaisons with prostitutes. Prostitution was common in the colonial towns because of the acute demographic imbalance of the sexes and the lack of wage opportunities for women (Zeleza, 1988). The price of these liaisons Gusii women were invisible in colonial political structures since public politics was basically men’s domain.

Within this system, the English and their Victorian ideology forced the Englishwoman to believe that ‘she was inferior to the man’ and indeed aide the man himself to think and believe that he was superior to his wife. The Englishmen therefore succeeded in making the woman an inferior being. This system was introduced GusiiLand where the man as the head of the household paid the tax for each and every wife that he married. Both the missionaries for their own self-ends therefore exploited the system of taxation (Kanogo, 1987).

Colonialism had an impact on aspects of women’s economic lives. Colonialism which coincided with the industrial revolution necessitated a demand for natural resources for industries back in Europe (Kameri-Mbote and Kiai, 1993). Since the subsistence economy of the colonized people was both self-sufficient and non-commodity based, the primary objective of the colonizers was to disrupt this self-sufficiency. The integration of cash crop trade in the local economy coupled with the introduction of taxes and land tenure laws, had the desired effect of disrupting their self-sufficiency (Okemwa, 2000).

Abagusii women continued to be involved in the household economy in ways that they had been during the pre-colonial period. In addition to the home and the childcare, they were active in trading (both local and regional) and played a primary role in food
production. With the introduction of new productive relations under the British colonialism, the nature of women’s economic involvement changed. New trade goods were introduced and the use of money infiltrated the economy in such an unprecedented extent that the market place ceased to be a bartering centre and became a place where surplus could be exchanged for cash (Robertson, 1997).

The development of an urban capitalist economy and the imposition of a taxation system had the desired effects of disrupting any semblance of self-sufficiency by artificially inserting a need for money. Initially the colonized people were reluctant to engage in labour migration because it involved working as cooks, houseboys and farm hands, jobs which were typically associated with women. Moreover the work was not only low-paid but it also compelled the labour migrants to be far away from their family for long periods of time. It is hardly surprising therefore that labour migration was at first stimulated by force and only later, by new cash needs such as taxation, clothing cash to purchase bride wealth cattle (Francis, 1995).

The wage labour was disadvantageous to Nyamira County women as they were overburdened with responsibilities as the men left for work in plantations and factories.

The overall inferior position of women in the modern sector reflects the fact that men are given preference in administration and clerical jobs as they had in the colonial state. In a situation like this, the attitude of men and women begin to diverge; the men begin to adopt ‘modern’ ways which confirm their important roles as well as women’s largely domestic roles. As these changes begin to characterize the society, women become independent on men as their incomes in the trading sector decline.
The function of indigenous institutions in Nyamira County and everywhere else was abruptly altered by the colonial system. Women suffered from these circumstances more than their male counterparts because they were systematically excluded from public decision-making. The material and psychological bases of their authority crumbled and their privileges were not preserved in the construction of the post-independence society (Gordon, 1996).

For the British colonizers, power was vested in a colonial state that was in essence as a patriarchal heritage. Specifically colonial rule was highly authoritarian and supported by male police forces and colonial troops. Under these circumstances, power did not rest in legitimacy of public confidence and acceptance. Power lay in the hands of a few male elites. This was based on the principle that there was a public/private dichotomy and that the men’s place was in the public while the women’s place was in private (Cutruñfeli, 1983). Women were therefore relegated to domestic chores, while decision-making was left to men.

The new patriarchal values imposed by colonizers and missionaries ignored the indigenous political and economic positions that women held, their freedom in marriage and their complementary shared responsibilities (Wright, 1993). The women in Gusiiiland generally and Nyamira County specifically suffered out of authoritarian control as this authority was in the hands of men. For instance, local leaders especially chiefs were elected by lining behind a candidate. During one such exercise at Sameta Stadium, Tabitha Mogotu Ogega from Bobasi was elected by majority as chief. However, the colonial administrators refused to confirm her because she was a woman (Bonuke, O.I,
Women lost their indigenous authority and they became subjects to male members of the society.

Generally, women were dislocated economically, exploited and politically dominated within a weakened indigenous order and in these spheres, women were rarely compensated in the new subordinated and politically marginalized (Gordon and Gordon, 1996).

2.4 WOMEN’S RESPONSE TO COLONIALISM IN NYAMIRA COUNTY

Women contributed greatly to the struggle against colonialism and Kenya’s self-determination. For instance the Gusii women participated in various ways including as spies, advisors, medicine women, mothers and/or wives during the chase away of the British administrators from Gusiiland. Though for a long time women lacked political articulation, they were acutely aware of the injustices and exploitation of colonialism (Kabira and Nzioki, 1993).

Accordingly, among the Gusii Moraa Ng’iti was a female freedom fighter against the British. Moraa was also a medicine woman who treated the sick or injured people especially the Gusii warriors. From the inception of British rule in Gusiiland, Moraa was undisguisedly hostile, and her influence was even more considerable since it was believed that she had magical powers and anyone who disagreed with her or refused to do what she wished could suffer severe consequences (Ochieng, 1974). Moraa was a prophetess who had prophesied the coming of the White man warning her people that if permitted even a single Whiteman to stay in the District, he would e joined by others and that eventually the Gusii would be enslaved. She offered to give warriors medicine “so that the bullets would turn into water”. She apparently had gained her reputation in the
old wars between the Gusii and the neighbouring Luo and Kipsigis where her medicine is believed to have earned the Gusii several victories. This time she advocated the murder of Northcote. She advised the Abagusii to expel the British violently. Although there was general agreement among the Gusii that Northcote should be killed, nobody seemed brave enough to do it. But hostility and unrest in Kitutu, was increasing, especially since behind the disenchantment was the influential prophetess – Moraa. But the Gusii men did not take her advice seriously. Moraa conspired with her step son Otenyo to kill Northcote a British Assistant District Commissioner as an example for the rest of the Gusii men. Under the influence of beer and medicine given by Moraa, Otenyo ambushed and speared Northcote as he rode on a mule on 12th January 1908 (Ochieng, 1974). The prophetess mobilized people and they revolted in and around Kitutu, Nyaribari and Bonchari. Moraa was arrested on the eve of 1908 punitive expedition and brought to Kisii town for interrogation. She was severely reprimanded and set free due to her advanced age (Ochieng, 1974). Her action must be seen as an attempt to reassert Gusii determination against colonialism. Moraa continued administering to the wounded Gusii Warriors until she died in 1929 due to old age. Moraa is regarded a Gusii heroine for her courage and many songs have been composed in her tribute.

Although Moraa Ng’iti was the most prominent prophets and diviner, other women participated as spies, advisors, medicine women, mothers and/or wives during the chase away of British administrators and during the Gusii Massacre of 1908 (Ochieng, 1974). For instance Bonareri wife of Ogwora was a prominent diviner although not much is known about her.
The attainment of independence in the early 1960s did not solve their problems than it did the other pressing dilemmas of poverty and economic dependency within a patriarchal world order (Sydie, 1987). Throughout Kenya, formal independence did lead to more widespread female education at all levels as government responded to insistent demands for improved educational opportunities. But the tendency for development projects to accept these existing divisions of labour as unalterable or to exacerbate this division means little transformation has occurred in the lives of most rural women (Mwangi, 2004).

The patriarchal vision constructed many areas during the colonial period has been perceived as the right model where women are seen as (homemakers) subordinate whose position is at home (Wright, 1993). The forms of gender inequalities are taking Kenya generally and Nyamira County in particular reflect indigenous pre-colonial and European influence expansion in Kenya during which the colonial period both undermined sources of status and autonomy that women had and strengthened elements of indigenous male dominance or patriarchy. At the same time, the Western gender ideology and practices that promote male dominance and female dependence were superimposed in Kenya. Since independence African male leaders have continued to add laminations to the patriarchal structures they inherited from their colonizers, often so with the support of Western investors and donors whose development assistance goes to men (Gordon, 1996).

2.5 SUMMARY

In this chapter we focused on the establishment of colonial rule in Nyamira County. We discussed the main colonial policies including, education, labour, taxation, religion and
their impact on the Nyamira Women. We also examined the colonial political structures and how they omitted women. Most of these colonial policies marginalized Nyamira women, but the women did not take this lying down. These women joined their men in anti-colonial movements.
CHAPTER THREE

NYAMIRA COUNTY WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL PROCESSES

DURING THE KENYATTA ERA 1963-1978

3.0 INTRODUCTION

The granting of independence to Kenya did not change the status of women. Women remained marginalized oppressed and subordinated despite the government’s Sessional Paper of African socialism clearly indicating that participation by men and women was to be on equal terms, including vying for elective offices (Kabira, 1998). It is clear that on attaining independence, Kenya did not change the status of women despite the fact that they were actively engaged in the struggle for independence. Indeed after independence, the establishment of a political system based on authoritarian and over-centralized state structures engendered male dominance in all aspects of Kenya society (Nasongo and Ayot, 2007). The patriarchal relations that had characterized the colonial era were solidified with the new male leaders consolidating political power and relegating women to the periphery.

The male political elites comprised the ruling government; Kenya African National Union (KANU) did not recognize the role women had played in the struggle for independence. Those that were clearly forgotten were the Gusii women who had participated as spies, advisors, medicine women, mothers and/or wives during the chase away of British administrators and during the Gusii Massacre of 1908 (Ochieng, 1974). Thus, independence to them only meant a shift from one form of marginalization to another. This chapter therefore examines the trends in women’s political participation in Nyamira County during the period 1963-1978.
3.1 **KENYA AT INDEPENDENCE**

Although the end of colonial administration constituted an important political break with the past, Kenya inherited a highly centralized state, which was characterized by the institutions administered by men who were appointed by the office of the president. A clique of black male elites were now acting on behalf of a departed white elites and that Kenya had settled into a fixed orbit of dependency around the West (Leys, 1975). Indeed, the new independent state was a colonial legacy with most of the colonial structures left intact. For instance, the post colonial Kenya offered minimal political opportunities and democratic space for effective individual initiative and participation (Choti, 2005).

Nevertheless, some optimistic observers argued that Kenya was soon to become a model for the rest of Africa, a black ruled, multi-racial gender sensitive state simultaneously dedicated to social justice, individual rights and economic growth. However, this was never to be. The constitution at the time was based on Westminster Model of Parliamentary sovereignty, with a formal division between political blocks each intending to seize complete power over, the state with a major addition, a regional system of provincial assemblies with their own designated areas of authority (Nnoli, 2000).

The new African leaders soon curtailed and eventually abolished the regional administrations, concentrating control around their ethnic boundaries. Kenya inherited a highly centralized state which was characterized by the institutions of provincial administration, in which the country’s power and control concentrated in Nairobi. By this time Kenya was divided in eight administrative units called provinces which were further subdivided into 41 districts. The provinces were placed under powerful Provincial Commissioners (PCs) while the districts were under District Commissioners (DCs). The
districts were further subdivided into divisions and into locations which were under chiefs. All these administrators starting from the PCs to the chiefs were all men appointed by the office of the president (Nyakwaka, 2012). President Kenyatta chose to retain the Provincial Administration whose zealous repression on the Gusii protests in early 1900s had been made directly accountable to the office of the president. These administrators continued to exert a lot of political power just as they had done during the years of colonial power. All administrators in GusiiLand from the District Commissioner to the village heads were men. The male administrators continued to provide administrative framework for the independent state supervising appointed chiefs and headmen in every location and directing communal labour, agricultural betterment campaigns and tax collection Nyamira County and GusiiLand as a whole. The poor representation of women persisted into independent Kenya. They remained appendages of men even after independence, thus were to be “represented” by the men in the government (Kabaji, 1997). Therefore, the patriarchal disposition of the state disempowered women as it empowered men, the spill over of which created gender hierarchy that subordinated women.

Also, after independence, multi-party democracy lasted for only one year. In 1964, the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU) party that had been formed by those who were dissatisfied by the style of rule that the president was using in consolidating power to one ethnic group quickly collapsed and joined KANU creating a de facto single party state (Throup, 1987).

In 1966, after a series of rigged KANU elections, KANU fell apart and Odinga immediately announced the creation of a new political force, known as the Kenya
People’s Union (KPU). The party was backed by roughly a fifth of the parliament among them Kikuyu and Luo members who defected from KANU. The KPU was to create a more left wing party to oppose the growing conservation of the Westminster orientation of the KANU leadership and to try and replace the ethnic basis of politics with a cleavage based on ideological, class or socio-economic grounds (Mwangi, 2004). However, this was not to be as President Kenyatta disbanded KPU in 1969. Over the short period of multi-party politics (1963-1964), KANU exercised strict control over the political processes refusing to accept legitimacy of the opposition. KANU remained a sole political party up to the early 1990s when political pluralism re-emerged (Gordon, 1996).

Kenyatta then began an earnest scheme of power concentration around himself and a clique of loyalties as the distinction between KANU and the government faded into oblivion (Mwangi, 2004). For example, for one to vote or contest for any political office, one was required to be a member of KANU. Any dissenting voices were sacked or deployed from public offices as was happening during the colonial period, when loyalty to the European meant access to “better” jobs. In addition, apart from the removal of racial connotations in the colonial constitution there were only a few if any significant changes that were adopted by the ruling government. Therefore, the officially sanctioned oppression of the citizens continued. Worst affected were women who were hardly recognized by the male political elite around the president. This is what the leaders had inherited from colonialism that considered the native as subhuman (Mwangi, 2004).

The religious and ideological rationalization of colonialism was that of a civilizing mission and from this viewpoint, the gender of the native was inconsequential. In addition, since the imposed legal order was rooted in Victorianism, in which women were
perceived as inferior beings, disenfranchised and locked many rights, the “native” woman was seen and treated as lower species. Therefore, the inherited post-independence system of governance, the place of the woman was in the kitchen (Mwangi, 2004). Women were not supposed to hold public office and even the few like Margaret Kenyatta and Jane Kiano among others, who were appointed to head the women’s bureaus and the Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO) owed their allegiance to the president or his close allies. This is what is called the feminization of neo-patrimonial politics (ibid).

One of the few aspects of the constitution to be reviewed was on issues pertaining to marriage. This was because at independence, the laws and regulations relating to marriage were not clear especially regarding inheritance and custody of children. At independence, Kenya had four systems of marriage and family law namely: statutory family and marriage law based on the Western Christian model, Hindu, Islamic and African customary family and marriage law (Muigai, 1989). There was need therefore to revisit the laws regarding marriage in order to cater for the concerns of men and women in marriage. For along time, spouses had to do with the common law doctrine that “husband and wife are one and that one is the husband”. That doctrine had the effect of disqualifying the married women from owning and controlling property during the subsistence of the marriage.

Hence, in 1967, Kenyatta appointed two commissions, one concerned with the law of divorce and marriage and the other concerned with succession. The one on marriage and divorce was to consider the existing laws relating to marriage, divorce and matters relating thereof. The work of the commission was to make recommendations for a new
law providing for a comprehensive and so far as may be practicable, uniform law of marriage and divorce applicable to all persons in Kenya. This would replace the existing law on the subject comprising customary law, Islam law, Hindu law and the relevant acts of parliament (Wanjala, 2000). The commission was also to prepare a draft of the new law, to pay particular attention the status of women in relation to marriage and divorce in a free and democratic society. It sought to advance women’s rights to maintain after divorce the own property acquired in the matrimonial home. However, the bill was abandoned because of the commission’s reluctance to depart from customary law. Male parliamentarians opposing the bill argued that wife beating was a normal customary practice and that such legal practices would have the state interface in the domestic affairs of the husband and wife (Wamalwa, 1989). At this time, there was no woman parliamentarian and none headed any government parastatal. The rejection of the bill by male parliamentarians and the public clearly indicated that women were relegated from the public sphere. Their views were therefore not needed during the rejection of the bill (Mwangi, 2004).

Further, this rejection meant that women belonged to men as property. The fact that the government rejected the bill further stamped their patriarchal nature. Women were to remain appendages of men and hence could not inherit or own such property as land and animals. Children were also to identify with the father and not the mother. As noted elsewhere in this work, one prerequisite for anybody intending to participate in politics as candidates, be they men or women is resources. Thus, women’s restriction with regard to ownership of such property as land meant dismal, if any active involvement in politics as candidates (Chazan, 1989). With the rejection of the bill by parliament not much changed
pertaining to the status of women in society. They remained relegated to the periphery especially in the realm of politics.

The independent state did not deliver democracy. Women’s issues were not integrated into the national agenda. They remained relegated to the periphery especially in the political sphere. Though women formed more than half of the Kenyan population very few actively participated in politics as candidates for elective offices. The majority only participated as voters, cheerers, dancers and mobilizers during elections (Kabira, 1998). Therefore, between 1964 and 1969 there was not a single woman Member of Parliament (MP) in Kenya, as Ms. Ruth Habwe was denied a chance to vie as an MP on the ground that women were not yet qualified for political office. But, in 1969, the first woman was elected into the National Assembly and one was nominated to sit in the legislative body along with eleven male nominated members. Thus, the total number of elected legislators between 1969 and 1974, women formed 0.56% and 5% of nominated members. Apart from the fact that the period between 1974 and 1979, saw women’s representation improving slightly, the general trend during the Kenyatta era was one of women’s marginalization in political decision-making at the local and national levels and by implication lack of inclusion of women’s concern in the legislative agenda (Nzomo, 1991).
Table 3.1: Parliamentary Women’s Participation (1963-1974)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of women candidates</th>
<th>Elected</th>
<th>Nominated</th>
<th>Total No. of Women MPs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: The League of Kenya Women Voters (1997)*

One of the measures of women participation in politics is their share of parliamentary seats, ministerial level positions, local government representation and management positions in professional and technical jobs among many others (UNDP, 1995a). Parliaments are bodies where decisions on allocations of resources, and strategies and decisions for developments are made. Thus, women’s integration into this body not only demonstrates the existence of equality and justice in the country, but also enriches the legislative process as they bring with them their perspectives and creativity (Mwangi, 2004). It is obvious that any policy aimed at improving the social, economic, political and cultural conditions of a country is likely to originate at and be sanctioned by parliament. Thus participation in parliament or lack of it would have significant effects in the struggle to acquire legitimate claims. Male members of parliament made decisions on behalf of the women since they were perceived as weak and dependent on men as the heads of the households (Mwangi, 2004).

Women’s equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general advancement of women as it is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but also a necessary condition for women’s interests to be taken into account. Without active
participation and incorporation of women’s perspective at all levels of decision making, the goals of equality development and peace cannot be achieved. Democracy entails numbers; since women are the majority in Nyamira County, then their involvement in democratic development is vital. This is on the contrary. As stated above the male members of parliament from Nyamira with the other legislators made decisions on behalf of the women since we did not have female legislators from Nyamira. Since independence up to early 1980s no woman from from Nyamira County was elected to parliament though there were two women candidates for parliamentary seats.

3.2 NYAMIRA COUNTY WOMEN AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION 1963-1978

The Gusii women more specifically those of Nyamira County, remained relegated to the periphery especially in the realms of politics. Though women formed more than half of the Nyamira population, none participated in politics as candidates for elective offices. The majority only participated as voters, in the preparation and distribution of food in meetings, leafleting, dancers and as mobilizers during elections. Thus between 1963 and 1978 there was not a single woman elected in Nyamira. The general trend during President Kenyatta’s reign was one of women’s marginalization in political division making at the national and local levels.

Apart from electoral politics and party membership, it is quite clear that collective action of the concerned against political power. For instance, setting a long-term goal of social transformation to ensure liberation from exploitation, degradation, subjugation and injustice is also part of political participation (Patel, 1994). Women’s mobilization for collective action to address some of their issues is a political tool and thus an empowering process. One positive trend observed in this regard is the proliferation of
women’s organizations which improved quite abit during the Kenyatta era. Just as oppressed and discriminated workers organized various collective initiatives against their oppression and discrimination which they had been internal victims since the colonial period, women groups evolved and grew as one of the instruments to fight against social, economic and political inequalities and marginalization (Mwangi, 2004).

In 1964, the National Plan for community Development was launched to support and accelerate economic development, prevent social ills, promote the general welfare of the community and strengthen family life and improve the care of children and women. The government released a National Community Development Policy in 1964; the policy laid heavy emphasis on self-help and people’s involvement in achieving the type of change they themselves wanted.

After independence (1963), the government did not emphasize the development potential of women’s self-help groups so; services as well as finances were cut down. The role of women’s self-help groups declined. The Maendeleo Ya Wanawake leaders joined the government ministry as Community Development Officers. These leaders got involved in different community projects such as building health centres, schools, social halls, rural access roads and nursery schools (Kerubo, O.I; 14.5.12).

In Gusiiiland generally and Nyamira County specifically, the risaga, egesangio and ekeombe groups which had been dismantled by colonialists due to the introduction of taxes, and wage economy received revitalization. These groups were however transformed and reorganized into goal oriented clan-based groups. They contributed food and clothing to the needy members of the group and also helped members perform certain activities such as digging, planting, harvesting building houses among others. Such goal-
oriented groups led to the formation of the department of community development and
the re-launching of the nation-wide organization, the MYWO in 1970s. Colonial
administrators wives had formed MYWO in the early 1950s as a women’s club after the
realization that there was need to address the Plight of African women, colonial
administrator’s wives began to hold classes for African women the villages. Ndeda,
(1994) posits that one activating factor for the formation of these women groups and
clubs in Kenya seems to have been African Veterans of the Second World War who went
to Jeanes School with their wives to attend leadership classes. They also engaged in
teaching the best use of leisure through games, African dance and song, teaching proper
standards of behaviour and spiritual guidance. When these women returned to the rural
community, they wanted to keep in touch with each other so they organized clubs
assisted by colonial administrators. The women’s organization started under the auspices
of colonial government department of community development and rehabilitation to
promote the advancement of the African woman and to raise their standards (Mwangi,
2004).

In 1951, after a series of meetings between the white ladies interested in the African
welfare and African training at Jeanne’s School, it was agreed that the existence of the
women’s institutes (Ndeda, 1994). Many of these women’s clubs joined it at pre-
independence but the organizations link with the colonial government caused bitterness
and damaged its credibility among indigenous women for years to come (Wipper, 1976).
In addition, older women felt that the training that was being offered in sewing, basketry
and weaving was so technical and so most of them abandoned it.
In spite of this setback at the time, the formation of MYWO accelerated the growth of the women’s movements in Kenya. In the local area of Gusii generally and Nyamira County specifically, there were other bodies that were also involved in organizing women. These included Young Women Christian Association (YWCA), Dorcas society, Women Ministries, Girl Guides and Anglican mothers. These groups taught women knitting, sewing, child care and cooking among others. Although the impact of women’s activities seemed small, it was however evident that women had done a tremendous job in society building. Their efforts and devotion had helped to inspire men to work harder. Other women in Gusii were involved in group farming and home industries (Kerubo, O.I 2012). During this period, the Spirit of Harambee initiated by Kenyatta emphasized the spirit of working together and pooling resources for development. It stimulated a high degree of community participation especially in community based social political and economic projects.

In Nyamira, the Bosamaro, Siamani and Nyansiongo women’s groups organized harambees for the education of their children. Others organized harambees to buy grade cows for members. As most men were engaged in local beer drinking, women through these harambees helped in establishing nursery schools in some their local areas like Gesiaga and Ekenyoro among others (Otinga, O.I 2012). In Nyamira Division, women engaged in such activities as knitting, sewing, basketry and informal education. The Siamani women group and Samaro women group for example organized classes for basic literacy. In Siamani, Ekenyoro Church assisted these women by providing rooms where basic literacy class could take place (Otinga, O.I, 2012).
The women’s movement expanded relatively slowly during the first decade of independence. Women groups engaged in social welfare activities but steered off political activities and issues of women’s empowerment. Their constitutions barred them from engaging in matters deemed to be political. Thus, although there was not a single woman in parliament until 1969, and no women holding top management or decision-making public positions, no women voices were heard at that time protesting the subordinate status women continued to hold despite the exemplary record in the struggle for political independence (Nzomo, 1993). Nzomo continues to state that laws discriminating against women continued to be enforced and progressive ones withdrawn such as the 1969 repeal of the Affiliation Act by a male dominated parliament. No significant protest had been heard from women until much later.

And yet the only and giant movement Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO) which had prided itself with being the oldest women’s organization with links from the grassroots to the national level, continued to operate in silence. MYWO retained much of the social welfare orientation inherited from its colonial beginnings having great emphasis on the role of women as “homemakers”, rather than as decision makers (Oduol, 1993).

Before 1975 Kenya development policies were gender insensitive. All development was assumed to benefit both men and women alike. It took the provocation of the 1972 ILO report on employment, income and equality for the Kenya government to make its position known on the women question in the country. It associated the disadvantaged position of women with poverty, education, training and employment. It recommended that with regard to rural women measures be taken to improve the living conditions and
reduce workloads. In response to the ILO recommendation that the government should begin to address the problem of access and equality for women in Kenya, the government reported:

The government is not aware of overt discrimination against women in the country; women are employed in important positions in the prisons and in government as well as private sector (Nzomo, 1989).

Upto the declaration of women’s decade in 1975 the government maintained the position that Kenyan women were not discriminated against and therefore did not need to struggle for rights they were already enjoying. However, apart from the Special Rural Development Project set up in 1970/71, no more programmes were set up prior to 1975. Apart from the women’s non-governmental organization (Maendeleo Ya Wanawake) set up in 1952 and National Council of Women in Kenya set up in 1964, no other national machinery for women existed. It was only after the declaration of the Women’s Decade that the government began to demonstrate an active interest in the existing women organizations and in addition created Women’s Bureau (Nzomo, 1989).

The bureau became the effective focus for policies towards women and a major means of acquiring international funds for aid specifically directed at women. Such funds were welcomed by the government and were relatively easy to come by due to the western enthusiasm for women’s development projects as a new object of third world charity. It was also established by law that support and financial aid could be afforded to associations which were registered with relevant government authorities and which had properly elected leaders and properly audited accounts (Ndeda, 1989).

Despite the existence of the Bureau, support of the Kenyan government was primarily verbal, focusing on staffing at the district level rather than specific resources which
actually reached all women. The Ministry of Housing and Social Services (Now Ministry of Sports, Culture and the Arts), placed a female officer in most districts to faster programmes and to assist women in their organizational efforts. These officers were often energetic and dedicated, but work was hampered by extremely limited budget and resources. The officers in Kisii district were not able to carry out the various activities due to the limited resources (Sibia, O.I, 2012).

The Ministry sponsored seminars to train female leaders and provided guidelines for group registration and for financial accountability. The Department of Community Development also encouraged chiefs and Assistant chiefs to support women groups. Such support most frequently consisted of exhortation to form women self-help groups for development purposes. In Response to this, chiefs and assistant chiefs from locations and sub-Locations of Nyamira encouraged women through barazas to form self-help groups. Occasionally, these chiefs and assistant chiefs allocated specific resources such as land for the use of a group. For instance women from this region were given pieces of land at Sironga, Ekenyoro Magombo among others where they planted tree seeds and later sold seedlings to people.

Kenyatta’s government remained consistent in maintaining the position that Kenyan women were not discriminated and therefore did not need to struggle for rights they were already enjoying (Nzomo, 1993). The only women’s movement that would have spearheaded women’s interests during this period was MYWO. However, in later years the organization was accused of inadequate representation of all women’s interests especially of those in rural areas (Oduol, 1993). As a consequence, women had for long suffered
various forms of gender discrimination, inequality and exclusion especially in the area of politics.

The government overtime helped to eradicate the belief that women’s contribution to development was minimal or insignificant as compared to that of men. This seems to have given women more confidence and determination to participate fully in development as could be seen by the number of projects they were involved in throughout the country (Nyakwaka, 2012). These projects included diverse income-generating projects such as dairy farming, seedling planting, cash crop farming and poultry keeping. They also established a revolving fund which was given to the members in turns to help members meet their immediate financial problems. Most of the groups made a start without outside help such as government funds and demonstrated that they could initiate and successfully undertake development activities. However, this did not mean that they need not seek financial assistance from either government or non-government organizations in order to expand their capital (Ibid).

For instance, these women groups could arrange for Harambee Fund Raising. They could invite among others political leaders to contribute money for them. They could use the money collected to carry out development projects for example, buying dairy cows, educating their children or building iron-roofed houses. Moreover, these self-help groups in Nyamira County are known to have steered the construction of iron-roofed houses in 1970s.

Politically, these women groups played a big role in the outcome of elections. Once political leaders gave their contributions to these groups, they could influence women to campaign and vote for them (Bonuke, O.I, 2012). In sum, the government was the key
factor in the formation of women groups in Kenya generally and Nyamira County specifically although most often it did not provide them with resources. Given women’s disadvantaged position in society, women groups were viewed as chief means of improvising the position of rural women in Nyamira County.

In recognition of the women’s groups to development, the Kenyatta Government established a special Rural Development Program to provide financial support to women’s groups. This program was however headed by men. Funds were embezzled and the few women in the program were co-opted by male leaders. The initiation hence collapsed and in 1971, the government established a women’s division in the Ministry of Culture and Social Services that resulted in the formation of women’s Bureau in 1976 (Ahmed, 2000). The Bureau mandate included policy formulation, implementation and coordination of all government initiatives and programs for women, collection, analysis and dissemination of data and information for the design, monitoring and evaluation of policies and projects for women and support for and liaison with women centred NGO projects and women’s groups. In Nyamira County, the number of women’s groups increased. Among the prominent women groups in Nyamira were Siamani, Samaro, Nyansiongo, Nyamira and Iranda among others (Sibia, O.I, 2012).

Apart from engaging in political and economic activities through women’s groups and women’s organizations, the Kenyatta era witnessed increased number of girls attending school. The abolition of gender and racial segregation in education at independence created opportunities for access to education for both African men and women (Caulfield, 1993).
Education and professional training of girls and women is important to build skills, confidence and knowledge that women require for active involvement in politics. Education instills interest in political matters and educated women would be more adept to seek elective office. Education raises women’s consciousness by making women aware of the benefits of their participation in politics. Thus, without education, women could not participate in county development and political leadership.

Despite the fact that Kenyatta era witnessed an increased number of girls attending school, there were no revolutionary changes in gender equality in the provision of education (Chege and Sifuna, 2006). For instance, at the time of independence, girls comprised 34 percent of the total number of pupils enrolled in primary schools in the country and 32 percent of the enrollment in secondary schools (Eshiwani, 1986).

Part of the government plan at independence was to expand the education system to cater for all children and illiterate adults, in order to combat ignorance, disease and poverty amongst the populace. Chege and Sifuna (2006) observe that, it was believed by the new government that had a right to education. In addition, it was also believed that the government had an obligation to provide its citizens with the opportunity to participate fully in the socio-economic and political developments of the country and to attain a descent standard of living. Therefore the government’s effort to expand educational opportunities for all has been reflected in its policy documents and development plans (Chege and Sifuna, 2006).

The most important concern at independence was to achieve equitable distribution of educational opportunities and relate education to national needs and aspirations (Mbeo and Ombaka, 1989). Thus there was need to revise the laws that governed education
during the colonial period. As a result in 1964, the then Minister For Education appointed and education commission chaired by S. Ominde. Its purpose was to survey the existing educational resources in the country and advise the government on the formulation and implementation of national policies of education (Chege and Sifuna, 2006).

The commission made several recommendations for tailoring, planning and relating education to Kenya’s needs and aspirations (Otiende, 1993). These aspirations were in light the regard to high level manpower training, to initiate and realize economic development nationally, equal distribution of national income and the integration for fostering national unity. Therefore the commission set out the country’s national goals emphasizing respect for the nation’s culture, enhancing social equality, national development and minimizing the extent of a competitive spirit in Kenyan schools (ibid).

This commission had a great impact on the national educational policy since independence. Education for human resource development was considered a key priority. Education was to produce a high level and middle level human resource so desperately required by a developing country such as Kenya (Chege and Sifuna, 2006). The commission also endorsed the provision of free primary education as an education policy objective, although it was not viable immediately. Thus, the government chose to put more emphasis on the expansion of higher education in order to gear it toward the human resource needs of the country (Nyakwaka, 2012). The government also provided facilities for a slow but steady increase in primary school enrollment. For instance, the increase over the period 1964-1969 was only 20 percent from 1,010,899 in 1964 to 1,209,670 in 1969 (Chege and Sifuna, 2006). The number of girls enrolled in primary schools was still lower than that of the boys. The major factors that may have caused this low educational
attainment among girls at primary level included: the need for domestic assistance of daughters, and traditional views towards the proper role of women, that did not include education (Eshiwani, 1986). Sometimes, when parents were faced with limited resources for primary schooling, they favoured the education of the male children. Thus, due to economic constrains over many years educational opportunities were muted in preference for education for boys. This was related to the patrilineal descent systems in which inheritance passed through the male line where sons retained responsibility for their parents as they grew older while daughters were incorporated into their husband’s families (ibid).

The number of girls in secondary school also improved in the period 1963 to 1985. However, as Eshiwani (1986) observes, the proportion of girls in secondary schools in form one to four actually declined from 32 percent in 1963 to record low of 25 percent in 1967 and to 31 percent in 1970. Since 1973, the proportion of girls in secondary education cycle improved from 33 percent to over 40 percent in 1984 (ibid). Similarly, the proportion of girls enrolled in form five to six slightly increased from 24 percent in 1973 to nearly 30 percent in 1984 (Eshiwani, 1986). This disparity between boys and girls in secondary school education may have come due to several factors since colonial times the trend had been to have separate schools for boys and girls. This meant that there were always more schools for boys compared to girls. But even in the secondary schools, a greater proportion of girls than boys dropped out of the educational system. For instance, girls dropped out due to teen-pregnancies. In addition, when parents were forced to choose, they preferred to educate boys compared to girls because of patriarchal reasons. On the other hand, a large number of girls were eliminated from secondary schools because their families could not afford due to poverty (Eshiwani, 1986).
The number of girls became even smaller in the post high school institutions in the first decade of independence. For example, in 1973, only 15% of the students of the University of Nairobi were women. They were mainly in this Faculties of Arts, Education (Arts) and Nursing. Therefore, upon graduation, most of these women were employed in jobs considered “feminine” and were less paying (Eshiwani, 1986). Eshiwani continues to write that by 1985, the percentage of women at the university had risen to 23 percent. This rise might have come as a result of change in parental attitudes regarding the value of education for women in the 1975-1985 decade. Equally important the view that it was daughters rather than sons who helped their parents financially could have motivated parents to invest in their daughter’s education (Chege and Sifuna, 2006).

According to Abagusii customary law, the major role of a woman was to ensure the continuity of her husband’s lineage. Other responsibilities were the production and preparation of food consumed by her family (Onsongo, 2005). Therefore, daughters were expected to marry soon after puberty. This was immediately after circumcision, a practice highly regarded in the community as a way of initiating women into adulthood and preparing them for marriage.

Moreover, a woman was to be provided for by her husband and since education became a means of entering highly paid jobs in the formal sector, it was considered more important for boys to have education because they were to become the breadwinners (Mbeo and Ombaka, 1989). In addition, it was argued that it was easy for a girl with no formal education to earn a living from the informal sector especially by selling foodstuff to workers in the urban centres and factories. Therefore, parents in Nyamira County opted to educate sons because they would benefit from them at old age as daughters were
expected to marry and join the husband’s kin. This was also a major factor that hindered girl education in Gusiiland.

On the other hand, educators and policy makers were highly gender blind. They largely disseminated information that the place of women was in the kitchen. Girls were therefore not encouraged to undertake subjects that could orient them to the public world. As Maina (2002) observes that girls were expected to pursue careers like cooks, secretaries, hostesses, teaching and so on and are not encouraged to be engineers, pilots, doctors, because these are considered to be male professions. Even the few girls that were encouraged to study as it is day, their duties after school were far too many that they ended up not succeeding as boys did in schools. Boys were/are expected to excel in school therefore, are/were allowed more time to study than the girls.

Due to the mentioned factors above, it is not surprising that the situation was even worse at the university level. For instance in the years 1984/1985, there were only 2, 566 women at both Nairobi and Kenyatta Universities as compared with 6, 488 men (Weekly Review, 1986). Almost half of these women were at Kenyatta University which was the only institution of higher learning enrolling equal numbers of men and women (ibid). The number of women at Kenyatta University was high because it offered courses in Education, Home Science and Secretarial Studies that were considered ‘feminine’. This trend continued into other technical and educational training institutions all over the country. Nursing and Secretarial were the only fields where women were majority. Even in the teaching profession where women found jobs, they were still outnumbered by men. For instance, by 1985, primary teacher training colleges in the country had 7, 420 male students and 5, 200 women (Weekly Review, 1986).
Generally, the Kenyatta era witnessed an increased number of girls attending school, meaning a future increase in their economic earning capacity. This also motivated and encouraged women to reach for their higher goals in their lives and to utilize opportunities created through various initiatives like that of creating equal employment, equal pay for equal work and equal political rights (Karani, 1989). Through education there was increased awareness among women of their needs and the need to participate in various spheres of life for example, economics, social and political sectors. Because of education a few women from the Abagusii community rose to prominence in the government offices, parastatals and in the private sector. For example, among the Abagusii in Nyamira County, there were women who occupy or occupied political leadership positions, they include Former Mayoress Kisii Municipality Clare Omanga, the Chairperson Kenya League of Women Voters Catherine Nyamato who was nominated into parliament in 1992 general elections, other politicians included: Nyarinda Moikobu, Nyang’au Bonyi, Grace Nyamongo and Eunice Otinga. Other women who were in the MYWO at the local level included Sibia Nyachieo, Ann Nyamache to mention a few. These women working with the MYWO worked with the organization to improve the welfare of womenfolk in Nyamira County by encouraging them to join social and economic groups which would earn them money for the education of their children. Illiterate women were also encouraged to join adult literacy classes to empower themselves. Education was seen both as a tool for entrenching gender inequalities and a tool for eradicating the inequalities. Thus, through education they would increase their awareness regarding the running of government, their rights in politics, their rights as women among others. Education is also important as it provides the confidence and skills
needed for women to participate actively in politics and other decision-making structures of the nation.

The same women, a thorn in the government’s side called attention to the discrepancy between government’s verbal support for maendeleo and its meager financial support. The MYWO national leadership changed in the late 1970s and a number of new faces assumed office. The appointments were not done on merit but were based on the relationship that one had with the political elite of the time (Nzomo, 1998). In these much rigged elections, the needs of the women folk in Kenya were neglected. The new national executive was out of touch with the realities of the women in the Kenya as they increasingly developed a lifestyle close to that of the European elite.

Fed up of unfulfilled promises and tired with what they saw as hypocrisy, Nyamira County women like many other rural women were alienated in many ways from both the government and its own national executive. The women’s morale to campaign for higher positions in education and in government decreased. Most of them went back into their traditional roles of child bearing and nurturing.

3.3 HINDRANCE TO NYAMIRA COUNTY WOMEN’S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

There are diverse reasons that may explain why despite the active involvement of Nyamira County women in the struggle for independence, the granting of independence in 1963 in Kenya and the improvement of educational policies during this era did not result to their increased participation in the political sphere. They remained marginalized and relegated to household duties as well as providing family labour as men were
engaged in clerical jobs in the rural and urban factories such as tea and coffee and in
government offices.

There are many obstacles that women face as they attempt to participate in politics. There
are many barriers that have been erected by society to bar women from politics. One of
these enormous reasons may be as a result of the social cultural norms, beliefs, myths
traditions, practices and customs that the society has internalized to the effect that women
cannot make good leaders. As Hay and Stitcher (1995) observe the sex stereotype and
gender segregation in education, employment and allocation of roles in the private and
public life are primarily a product of the early socialization process. Through
socialization a child is able to learn and adhere to the set of cultural norms and values not
forgetting the stereotype. The culture of the people which entails all aspects of human
behaviour is learned through socialization and not via genetics (Mwangi, 2004). This
culture includes social norms, values and beliefs of a particular society as well as the way
these are expressed through symbols, words and actions. Once a child was born,
patriarchal aspects of the society were inculcated in his or her mind through socialization.
The girl child was initiated into domestic roles as this was perceived as the female world.
On the other hand, the boy child was socialized into leadership roles and was therefore
introduced into such roles as grazing, hunting and guarding the homestead. These were
considered male duties which hardened them for future leadership roles.

Due to this socialization, the Gusii in Nyamira County were and still remain patriarchal
in nature. This is a social, political and economic system that ensured, preserved and
perpetuated male supremacy in most spheres of life. In Nyamira County, this system
characterized the operations of practically all structures in the society. As Kabira and
Masinjila (1997) observe that within this framework of patriarchal understanding, male leadership at all levels was seen as the only legitimate leadership for the protection of women. Patriarchy takes various forms and is experienced at different levels beginning from the family.

Walby (1990) argues that since patriarchy is a term that emits various contentions among many scholars, it needs to be conceptualized at different levels. Together with Rosaldo (1974) and Mies (1986) have therefore identified two levels of patriarchy. The first form is what they have called private patriarchy. Walby (1990) posits that this form is based upon household production. In this case, the man as the head of the family controls almost all members of the family including the wife. The man as husband or father thus becomes the direct oppressor and beneficiary, individually and directly, of the subordination of women. He determines who is to go to school and who is to graze, hunt, cook or nurse the babies. Rosaldo (1974) also argues that the subordination of women by men results from their confinement in the domestic sphere. They work for long hours in the home catering and caring for children, husband and the sick and generally for other members of the extended family. This denies them many opportunities such as adequate access to education, job opportunities, and general information about the country’s political and economic developments and so on. The second form is what they called public patriarchy. This is based on structures other than the household. In this case, women may have access, though inadequate, to both public and private arenas but they are nonetheless subordinated within both. Thus at home, women are subordinated by their husbands or fathers while at school and in other public spheres, men look down upon them. Stitcher and Parpart (1988) agree with assertion when they posit that the subordination of women is not only in the household but also in other public functions. This study focuses
on both forms of patriarchy because Nyamira County women in their everyday activities experienced both.

In the wider Abagusii community, the status of women was largely determined by her relationship to men (Omwenga, O.I, 2012). A woman’s social position was determined through the men in her life, one as her father’s daughter, as her husband’s wife and lastly as her son’s mother. Maybe the reason why there has been so much female oppression within Abagusii society is because from the time they are born women’s rights to individuality is taken away. All through her stages of development, a woman was tied to someone, their father, husband or son (s). They were never appreciated as individuals in the society. Many a time, women and girls were unfairly viewed as less capable of undertaking societal responsibilities than their male counterparts. Indeed their security and social approval often came through satisfying the men and particularly by producing male heirs for the husband’s family. Their sons ensured the continuity of the husband’s lineage and hence producing girls especially Gusililand since it was believed that the lineage died with the death of the man who was the head of the household (Kerubo, O.I, 2012).

Another issue that facilitated subordination and oppression of women within the patriarchal setting was bride wealth (Ndeda, 1999). For instance, upon payment of dowry the husband gained rights to his wife as a domestic gained domestic worker, bearer and nurturer of children. As he became the owner of his wife he also became the owner of the children he fathered. The payment of dowry therefore ‘legitimized husbandhood’ as well as fatherhood. The payment of dowry under the Abagusii customary law makes the marriage permanent and it cannot be dissolved easily (Nyang’era, 1999). Initiating
divorce or separation was not easy for women in this community if a woman in this community. If a woman who has been married under the Abagusii customary law (through payment of dowry) decided to live separately from the husband like most modern women do, she would still be regarded as wife to her husband and could not enter into another permanent relationship with another man (Okemwa, 2005). The payment of dowry also contributes to the subordination and exploitation of women in the Abagusii community. The negotiations for dowry are normally characterized by hot arguments and bargaining as if a woman was a piece of property being sold. The more dowries paid for the woman, the more submissive she is expected to be to her husband because he purchased her at higher services from her. As Maina (2002) posits that dowry discriminates against women because they suffer abuse and violence on the basis that dowry was paid for them. Many men who oppress their wives in Nyamira County use the justification that they paid dowry therefore they can do what they want with the women.

In addition, in the modern Abagusii society some parents ask for a high bride price if they have educated the daughter up to say university level. As Henn (1984) observes that, traditional practices such as payment of bride wealth, predominantly male inheritance of land, and the belief that children belong to their father’s lineage in patrilineal societies continue to limit the freedom of choice and the economic independence of African women.

In addition to the traditional practices, there are other modern practices that have contributed to the subordination of women as well. Christianity, for instance, has served to reinforce the subordination of women by preaching that man is the head of the family. Onsongo (2005) observes that the teachings of Bible are used to silence Christian women
who question their status in society. For example, the following verses from the Bible are often quoted when marriage is being solemnized:

“The wife does not have authority over own body, but the husband does” (1st Corinthians 7:4).

“Wives, submit to your own husbands as is fitting in the Lord” (Colossians 2:18)

These verses invoke the divine will in justifying that women should serve and submit to their husbands as they do to the Lord. As Okemwa (2002) argues that some of the Biblical teachings on the relationship between wives and husbands assume and reinforces a relationship of domination and submission between sexes.

There is considerable evidence that before the advent of Christian missionaries, both men and women shared in the leadership of the indigenous religious functions. Both participated and served in the offering of sacrifices in sacred places. In Bosamaro Chache Location for instance, there was a special tree under which sacrifices were offered by both men and women. Women particularly from Bokayo area were known for rainmaking. Gekara (O.I, 2012) pointed out that Nyamondo from this region was known for “blowing the rain” during ribina prayers and singing. After the introduction of Christianity, some women served as missionaries and participated in spreading in the gospel of Jesus Christ (Renzetti and Curran, 1992). These women also engaged in the interpretation of the scripture (Omwenga, O.I, 2012; Carmody, 1979).

As many scholars argue, there is nothing in Jesus’ reported words that could be labeled anti-female or sexist. Rather, he treated both men and women simply as individuals who needed his help or as co-workers or friends. Within a hundred years of Christianity as Renzetti and Curran (1992) argue, an all-male hierarchical structure was firmly put in place. Women were relegated to the periphery as second-class citizens within Christianity.
a state that persists to date. Thus, within Christianity particularly in the Catholic Church which is dominant in some areas within Nyamira County, women participate passively in church matters. Their suggestions and views are not taken not unless supported by several men. Of course this is rare, men are supposed to be rational, authoritative and in control, women on the other hand are portrayed as weak and irrational.

The Seventh Day Adventist (S.D.A) churches which are dominant in Nyamira County have become a bit liberal and it affords women some space especially in preaching the word of God. For instance, women ministries which are organizations within the SDA churches that are formed by women and girls have been going out to Maasailand to preach the gospel (Rebecca, O.I, 2012).

However, church leaders discourage women from participating in politics as it is considered unholy, involving abuses and insults. Women are majorly encouraged to form Christian groups through which they can spread the word of God and help the needy.

It should be noted that unlike the Catholic Church, which is known for its rigidity as regards to sexuality, the S.D.A church is a bit flexible. In fact the Catholic Church is one of the most conservative denominations in this aspect. It has remained steadfastly resistant to change. Women are therefore discouraged from public missions. The S.D.A Church since its inception encourages girls’ education. During the Kenyatta era, a few schools were set up particularly in areas where S.D.A Church is deeply rooted and people referred these areas as Bosomi (an area where people have gone to school). Some of these areas included Sironga, Magombo, Bonyunyu, Kenyenya, Kiabonyoru and Nyainogu among others (Obae, O.I, 2012).
Together with increased participation and improved educational policies as regards to girls’ education, the Kenyatta era witnessed the declaration of 1975 as the women’s year. A world conference was held in Mexico the same year. Among the most significant issues articulated during this conference was the concept of women’s development that emphasized equality, peace and development of women (Staudt, 1990). The women in development stand advocated for women’s development in terms of education, employment and empowerment. Education in this case was understood as a pre-requisite for improvement in women’s status. Access of girls and women to formal education was therefore encouraged. In terms of equality, the UN women’s commission discovered that legal rights for women had been down played and that though most governments had constitutions that granted women equality, too often these rights were not enforced in the face of custom and patriarchy. This they argued resulted into the marginalization of women in both political and economic participation. The conference also encouraged the participation of women in income generating activities to help poor women since they considered economic activities as key to improving the status of women in society (Tinker, 1990; Hay, 1995).

Though this year marked some considerable improvement in the status of women in Nyamira County, not much was realized until 1985 when the women’s decade was celebrated in a conference in Nairobi. The projects that the conference advocated for failed since the leaders of these programs lacked not only the experience in creating visible income generating activities for the poor but also experience in running these organizations on a business basis. Since the organizations had non-social programs, they tended to retain stereotypes about women’s domestic roles and they set up income generating projects based on incorrect assumptions about women’s needs, daily activities
or skills. These projects assumed that women were predominantly housewives with ample free time who only needed pin money for supplementary food or clothing. Further, these new income generating activities assumed that women had skills in traditional women’s crafts like pottery, basketry and sewing, activities quite foreign to most poor women in rural areas (Mwangi, 2004). As a result, such projects seldom resulted in economic returns without constant subsidies. In Nyamira County, a number of such groups flourished, albeit for a short period. They included Siamani in Bonyamatuta. Another group called Samaro kept four grade cows from which they could sell milk (Sibia, O.I, 2012). These groups were also involved in seedling planting and brick making for sale, explains Sibia one of the group leaders.

Women were responsible for the production and preparation of food consumed by their families. According to the Abagusii customary law the wife was and still is in-charge of Ekegancha [pot of flour], Enyakaruga [Cooking pot] and Enyang’eni [Vegetable pot] (Nyang’era, 1999). These responsibilities meant that a woman worked hard to provide food for the family. The routine of a rural woman started early in the morning when she woke up to milk the cows before taking them to the fields at daybreak. She prepared porridge for the children and set them to school. She had to proceed to the farm where she stayed tilling the land in the hot sun up to about midday when she went home to prepare lunch for the children. Then she had to attend to the cattle by taking them to the river for water. In the afternoon she started preparing for the evening by looking for firewood from the forest and fetch water from the river. Her children especially the girls, if of age, may assist her in some of these chores. All these burdens as Nzomo (1998) observes indicate a level of exploitation by men. Women had little or no time to discuss the social, economic or political issues of the community. The responsibilities of those
living in urban areas were not any different as their services were required later after work by their children and husbands. This was because as research has indicted many Gusii men demanded unlimited services from their wives arguing that they married the wife and not the ayah (Presley, 1992). If the husband was working far from home, as is the case in the modern capitalist economy, the domestic responsibilities of a woman are even increased. As Levine (1979) in her study of the Abagusii at various stages of married life prior to reaching adulthood, she found out that women have heavy domestic and childcare obligations. As Abbot (1979) observes:

Men exploit women in this community and yet they cannot claim any property rights. Men after marrying know that they have somebody to produce children for them, grow food and look after livestock.

The exploitation of women in the domestic sphere is reinforced by the traditional practices which the modern laws have upheld. This exploitation was further exemplified by considering the products of the woman’s labour. For instance, while women supply most of the labour for agricultural production especially in cash crops such as tea and coffee, men being the custodians of account numbers of the sales earn the money and drink all of it without minding the labourers-wife and children.

Basic discriminations against women embedded in the legal and other institutional structures had remained unchanged before and after the women’s decade, without any audible voices of protest from within or outside the women’s movement. For instance, the 1969 repeal of the Affiliation Act remained in place. In addition, the Law of Marriage and Divorce Bill had already twice come up for debate in parliament and was defeated by the male-dominated parliament, without any significant protest from women. It has also
been noted that, there was continued retention of the law that denied house allowance to married women in public service and lack of provision for paid maternity leave for women.

3.4 SUMMARY

In this chapter, we have discussed the involvement of Gusii women in politics at independent Kenya and we have established that, the granting of independence to Kenya did not automatically translate to women’s equality in the political arena as expected by many. Thus, they continued being marginalized, oppressed and subordinated by their male counterparts led by President Kenyatta. Nonetheless, in efforts to enhance their status women in Nyamira County mobilized and organized themselves into goal oriented groups and later rekindled MYWO which they had rejected in the 1950s because of its association with the colonial government.

It has also been noted that the reviewing of educational policies by the government led to an increased number of girls attending school. However, this did not result in more women participating in political activities as candidates for political posts as would be expected. This was because of their roles as homemakers, caretakers, producers, reproducers, among others. In addition, the cultural norms, traditional practices and stereotypes that society has internalized dictated that the place of the woman was in the kitchen and were not expected to hold public office. The issue of women’s lesser status and men’s superior status is so deeply ingrained in patriarchal system among the Gusii
and ensured that women remained appendages of men who would not be entrusted with any leadership roles.

It has also been established that, 1975-1985 was a decade dedicated for women all over the world. The 1985 Women Conference in Nairobi aimed at reviewing the state of gender relations at the end of the UN Decade for women. Unfortunately, this United Nations Decade for women found many Nyamira County women unaware that there had been an entire decade dedicated to them and committed to the achievement of among other things, gender equity. Discrimination against women embedded in the legal and other institutional structured had remained unchanged before and after the Women’s Decade, without any audible voices of protest from within or outside women’s movement. The Women’s Decade especially the sitting of the 1985 Women’s Decade Conference in Kenya, had some positive impact in the Nyamira County women’s empowerment, especially at the level of raising women’s awareness on gender issues. As a result there were concerted efforts of some committed individual women from Nyamira County, who organized workshops, seminars, educational tours to publicize the situation of women and to educate women about their rights.
CHAPTER FOUR

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN DURING MOI’S REGIME

4.0 INTRODUCTION

By the time of the death of Kenyatta in 1978, Kenya had acquired the reputation of being one of the most open politics in Africa (Throup, 1998). However, the leadership of the country mainly lay in the hands of a few male elites. Most of these elites belonged to KANU, a party that had monopolized a party politics. Most people belonged to this party has not much opposition had been experienced. The representation of women in politics at the time was still minimal especially because the organizations dealing with women’s issues were mostly headed by men (Nzomo, 1998). At the local area of Nyamira, few women were engaged in the activities of these organizations especially because they were busy in their farms, as men had left for the urban areas.

Moi’s take over in 1978 with totally a new ideology was to face more challenges than his predecessor (Thoup, 1998). First, Moi came to power just as the cash crop boom of mid 1970s was ending and as the international women’s decade was commencing. Women from the local area of Gusiiland had therefore become more impoverished due to the fallen earnings from coffee and tea and most of them were not willing to join any group. Most activities advocated for during the women’s decade such as income generating activities were collapsing and there was urgent need to revive them.

This chapter examines the participation of Gusii women in politics during President Moi’s reign and democratization in Kenya citing the absence of women from multiparty politics. The role of various women organizations, which women used as vehicles for attaining political space in the new democratic dispensation in the country were also
examined. The United Nations Women’s Decade of 1979, the 1985 Women’s Decade Conference, the Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization, the era of political pluralism, the Beijing Conference of 1995 and hindrances and successes of women’s political participation in Nyamira County were analyzed.

4.1 THE WOMEN DECADE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN 1975-1985

As already been noted, the women’s year conference of 1975 recognized that women had been systematically disempowered through the process of economic decay. International agencies and individual donor nations determined to assess the ways in which their aid programs affected women (Fraser, 1987). The delegates adopted a three-fold strategy for change. First, they agitated for the creation of national women and development instruments to monitor the status of women and make governments more accountable to women’s needs. Secondly, they campaigned for changes in family law that would guarantee women equal status. It was during this time in Kenya that in 1976, the bill on marriage and divorce was introduced into parliament but was withdrawn one month later only to be reintroduced after three years (Wamalwa, 1989). Thirdly, they lobbied for the creation of implementation of new economic policies targeting women. Each of these goals was partially achieved during Moi era.

The UN decade for women inspired institutional and legal reforms throughout Africa and elsewhere in the world. By 1985, most governments of African countries had created full ministries for women affairs. Cameroon, Zaire, Burundi, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Mauritius and Zimbabwe were among these countries (Fraser, 1987). Kenya had not yet created a full ministry. The ministries that dealt with the issues of women included such soft ministries as health, education, social services and culture. These ministries are
considered female ministries with the assumption that their work is related to traditional female work and concerns. These ministries also command fewer resources and have a lower status than the other powerful ministries such as finance, planning, Foreign affairs and trade (Bekele, 2000).

In 1980, the world conference of the UN Decade for women admitted that the economic and social situation of rural women had not improved much since the first half of the decade. A small section of the rural population had benefited through technological advance: access to better education, land services and inputs but most rural people remained poor and cut off from these opportunities. Indeed Nyamira County was one of those rural areas whose population lacked these opportunities. Only very few women like Clare Omanga, Catherine Nyamato, Nyarinda Mokobu an Wilkista Onsando had benefited. While there was a marked increase in the number of self-help groups, evidence showed that their activities did not have marked impact. In any case, the largest numbers of women were reraely aware of their existence and their value.

By 1990, mechanisms existed in 40 nations to monitor the impact of development policies on women. African women supplemented these government agencies with their own organizations to research on women conducted by African women. AAWORD, which they founded, had branches all over Africa. In Kenya, AAWORD offices are in Nairobi. Information on participation of women in economic, social and political sphere is disseminated from such offices. These organizations also monitor elections in Kenya and supports women willing to vie for elective posts in politics. They also create awareness of legal rights, educate women on how to claim these rights and advocate for reform on law and policies that discriminate against women.
Unfortunately, institutional and legal changes have not always improved the status of women in Kenya. The existence of such institutions does not necessarily indicate that a government is committed to a meliorating the position of women.

Women’s bureau and organizations may exist but they are often poorly funded and staffed. Government officials may ignore the bureaus because they see them as peripheral to essential policy concerns or because they deny the reality of women’s subordination (Nzomo, 1998). The Kenya government for instance maintains that women have already made significant progress and now occupy positions of importance in both the public and the private sphere yet women remain marginalized in both the economic and political spheres. The women’s organizations and groups where women are primarily supposed to be engaged have been co-opted by the government and can therefore not challenge the government’s complacency and demand changes in the status quo (Keller, 1984). Legal changes promoted during the UN decade have not strengthened women’s status. Where legal reforms have been enacted, their impacts have been diluted by the absence of enforcement mechanisms and by the reluctance of women to demand their legal rights in court (Parpart, 1988). These phenomenons suggest an essential weakness in the strategy of pursuing change through legal reforms. Such reforms do not necessarily after prevailing social attitudes about women. In Kenya men have resisted legal changes because they threaten the patriarchal cultural system under which men have profited (Mwangi, 2004).

The third legislation of the UN strategy, the use of development policy to give women a greater economic security had received the greatest support from the donor community. These programs on economic development had attempted to integrate African women in
development by giving them greater access to existing resources and institutions (Hay, 1995). Most of the resulting policy initiatives had targeted the rural poor women and organized them into special development projects. These associations had empowered self-help and self-reliance, ostensibly in an effort to give control of their own economic lives. Women are organized most often into small groups that then engage in income generating activities such as raising dairy cattle, raising poultry and buying farm inputs among others. The participation rate in these programs had been high. In 1986 alone, Kenya’s self-help programs encompassed 15,000 groups and more than 550,000 people ( Nzomo, 1997).

In Nyamira County, most of the women groups which had become dormant in the late 1970s due to lack of finances were revived in the mid 1980s. Women self-help groups like Samaro Siamani, Nyamira and Nyansiongo were assisted through such programme. These self-help groups started contributing small amounts of money and most of them bought at least one grade cow for the production of milk. Siamani women’s group in Bonyamatuta location contributed money each and later organized a harambee in 1986 buy grade cows for some members, while others sued the money to educate their children. Another group Samaro Women’s Group contributed money which they used to hire pieces of land. From these pieces of land, they made bricks which they sold to individuals, local churches and schools.

Attesting to this, the secretary to the group said that there was need to revive such organizations rearing dairy cows to ensure availability of milk for their children and also for sale in the area (Onyari, O.I. 2012). In Nyamira County, many such self-help groups
sprouted in the late 1980s and local women joined willingly and contributed the required registration fee of between eight and ten shillings.

Although majority of these organizations women formed in Nyamira County and indeed elsewhere in Kenya can be viewed as welfarist in nature, they can also be conceived as political if conceived as collective strategies in which individual women combine resources to cope with changing structures – structures that increase women’s need for cash while disproportionately excluding them from acquiring it as compared to men (Staudt, 1990). These gender solidarity groups did not however engage in political matters as they mostly consisted of rural women who believed that politics was a reserve of men. They nevertheless acted as good arenas where they could air their grievances on domestic violence. These groups later in the 1990s during the multiparty politics acted as very good avenues where women mobilized themselves and campaigned for their candidates. The major problem underling the failure of the UN policies was that of women’s political invisibility. Though most projects were meant for rural women, men and the elite women hijacked them. Decisions regarding participation of these groups at every stage, local, and national therefore excluded rural women.

At the local level, male elders controlled and disbursed development funds received from the government. At the national level, male bureaucrats gained political capital from managing successful programs. Consequently, Kenyan women were rarely in a position to voice their needs and concerns. They were not present to pressure local and national male politicians to place women’s issues at the centre of development planning; they were not present to demand changes in land law, to give input to the design of effective leadership in the government before, during and after the UN decade for women. As
Nzomo (1998) observes, government co-option of top women group leaders and the social welfare orientation of these organizations conspired to make them toothless bulldogs.

The women of Nyamira County who had attended the 1985 conference in Nairobi left there with determination, as Omanga (O.I; 18.5.12) observes, “we came back to teach our rural women to come out of their cocoons and start business in order to empower themselves economically”. At the conference women were encouraged to educate the girl child as the saying goes… if you educate a woman you have educated the whole society but if you educate a man you have educated an individual. Mrs. Omanga (O.I; 18.5.12) continues to note that, “we are people who can stand on our own, and we do not need to depend on men”.

4.2 MAENDELEO YA WANAWAKE ORGANIZATION

In 1985, Kenya had the honour to host the end of UN Decade for women conference in Nairobi. Kenyan women generally and a few from Nyamira had the opportunity to participate effectively in all stages of preparation for the conference. Indeed this was a very rewarding experience. However, before this conference recruitment of women groups had been intensified. Seminars to assess the achievement of women were held from the grassroots to the national level. Gusiiiland generally and Nyamira County specifically had her share of these seminars. But again most of the rural women in Nyamira County were not aware of the decade. Nzomo (1993) clearly states that many Kenyan women were indeed unaware of the entire decade devoted to them.

The MYWO was the largest women’s association in Kenya in the 1980s. It involved around 5,000 rural clubs and a membership of 500,000. At the 1985 decade for women,
it assumed a leadership role both at the NGO forum and at the governmental conference (Nzomo, 1989). It was given a great boost by the increasing attention of overseas aid agencies to women’s projects. MYWO was seen by foreign donors as a viable vehicle through which to channel resources to women at the grassroots level. Nyamira County is known to have produced one of the Chairpersons of MYWO. This was Wilkista Onsando who is remembered for having steered the women’s organization closer to the ruling party KANU. Her tenure at Maendeleo House was eventful during the turbulent period of KANU rule (Kiragu, 2006).

For example, a Kenyan news magazine reported that MYWO received several millions of dollars over a three-year period in the mid 1980s (Weekly Review, 1989). The money was to be distributed to local women’s groups by the MYWO leaders. Since most of them had been co-opted by the government, the money the disbursed to local women groups was embezzled again. The money was to be distributed to local women groups. Those who were to distribute the money had patrimonial relations with the male leaders and therefore in their corrupt endeavours embezzled the funds. The little amount that reached local women groups was to be distributed but male local leaders used nepotism, as it was the order of the day to distribute the money. The leaders regionalized the whole issue and distributed more to the regions of origin or to their male friends’ areas. Moreover, the local women groups used the funds to fulfill their own interests (Ochengo, O.I, 2012). The effect of this was the break up of many women groups. It was very unfortunate that this mess of embezzlement hit MYWO when its chairperson was from Nyamira County. In 1986, many of the affiliate MYWO associations had broken up and financial scandals were rife throughout the country. The government intervened ostensibly to straighten up the financial mess in 1987 MYWO was the formally affiliated to KANU (Hay, 1995).
1989, the MYWO elections clearly illustrated that the formal affiliation of the MYWO to KANU meant that the women leaders only served the government’s interests. The key male politicians got the opportunity to ensure that their wives, sisters and friends captured the leadership of the organization. Rural women and those with no relation to the male politicians were relegated to the periphery. Despite grassroots, women’s cries of rigging and male interference, the powerlessness of the majority of women in this organization was once again affirmed (Mwangi, 2004).

According to Nzomo (1998), the elections were unfair since most women were not considered for any posts. The merging of the MYWO with KANU was a wrong move since the male players took advantage of the organization. Moreover, the strategy that the government adopted of openly preferring and jointly working with the KANU-MYWO to the total exclusion of the groups weakened and further fragmented an already divided and vulnerable women’s movement in Kenya. The conflicts and rivalries that had been so common among the leadership of the national women’s organization increased thus postponing the development of a relatively cohesive women’s movement that could have formed the basis of effective women’s participation in politics (Kabira, 1998). Local mobilization also went down as the local women associated the educated urban women with KANU. The voting, vying and general involvement of women in politics decreased as they perceived themselves as appendages of men with their fate determined by men with little or no reference to women (Weekly Review, November, 1989).
4.3 WOMEN AND THE REINTRODUCTION OF THE MULTI-PARTY SYSTEM

1991 – 1997

The dawn of multi-partism came at a time when there was a deep lying discontent on the part of women at the oppressive environment they had operated in (Oduol, 1995). Oduol (ibid) continues to observe that, while legally they had the right to participate in public functions on equal terms with men, in reality political mechanisms and patriarchal nature of the society prevented them from doing so. In January 1992, preparatory period for the multiparty elections in Kenya, a high premium was placed on political empowerment as a means of achieving the goals associated with the advancement of the status of women (Nzomo, 1994). This was in the hopes that if women actively participated and attained key political decision-making positions in large enough members at least 30 percent of the total numbers, they would for example ensure the removal or repeal of laws that discriminate against them. Consequently, they would participate in designing development policies that would mainstream rather than marginalize and disempower women (Gordon, 1996). Thus from January 1992, women’s lobby groups and organizations embarked on a mobilizing and strategizing campaign to ensure that in the December 1992 general elections, women candidates would win the maximum number of parliamentary and civic seats.

Nzomo (1993), states that women expressed their desire and determination to fully participate in that process and had insisted on their issues being mainstreamed in the new democratic agenda. Oduol (1995) notes that, the repeal enabled women to reassess their role in the emerging society with its shifts in power relationships and challenges the hitherto accepted social values which had undermined their status in society for generations.
One basic strategy employed by the women organizations to achieve women’s political empowerment was to sensitize and conscientize women in Nyamira County who are the majority of voters on the power and merit of voting for women and other gender sensitive men. Another related strategy employed was to encourage and build confidence in those women with the political office during the elections. In order to achieve this objective, a National Women’s Convention bringing women together from the grassroots to the national level was held in February 1992 to map out the women’s agenda.

However, the training workshops were only successful in urban areas as rural women were not reached. Among those who attended those workshops were Catherine Nyamato, Nyarinda Moikobu, Grace Nyamongo among others from Nyamira County. Organizations such as AAWORD, YWCA, carried out civic education programmes and gender awareness campaigns using the medium of training workshops, seminars, the media, posters and other printed materials. The NCSW also monitored the elections as an accredited observer body and gave moral and material support to women candidates throughout the campaign period until the completion of the election process (AAWORD, 1998).

Although this multiparty elections in December 1992 general elections did not result in a critical mass of 30 percent women elected to decision-making bodies, it did reflect the enormous efforts of the women’s movement to empower female voters and candidates. For instance, after the advocacy, lobbying, mobilizing and enhancing gender awareness 6 women stood for civic and parliamentary seats from Nyamira County. This was over 100 percent increase from the previous elections.
Despite the numerous obstacles that women faced during the electoral process ranging from harassment, intimidation and discrimination within parties, financial shortfalls, mass rigging and other electoral irregularities, six women won the parliamentary seats and about 45 were elected as councilors. Nationally, women have however proved their political tenacity and their determination to penetrate the male dominated political hierarchy with or without affirmative action. Indeed, if the electoral process had provided a level playing ground and fair, there is no reason why more women would not have won the civic and parliamentary seats. The modest number of women elected during the 1992 general elections was an important political achievement, but it fell short of the original objective of attaining (Nzomo, 1994). Furthermore, outside the political arena, many of the gender concerns women identified and lobbied for still remained on the drawing board. Discrimination against women in existing laws and practice is still in place as are the negative images and the various forms of violence against women which are on the increase despite protests from some women activists. Nevertheless, the point that needs to be underscored is that the women’s movement in Kenya put up a remarkable pressure for women’s empowerment and the respect of women’s human rights in 1992 (AAWORD, 1998). The women’s groupings in 1992 encouraged each other on the importance of voting responsible and gender sensitive leaders. They also lobbied for the 6 women who were elected at the time. There was no elected woman in Nyamira County in the parliamentary elections but one female Catherine Nyamato was nominated to parliament. Nevertheless, 3 women were elected to the civic seats. Indeed, the lobbying and campaigns done by women groups created awareness among women on their rights as voters and elected members. However, most women in Nyamira County voted in male
leaderships. Indeed, the six women were too few to influence gender sensitive policy changes in a two hundred member parliament (Nzomo, 1994).

Consequently, while women’s voices in the civic society continued to be audible in the post election period, they were not as loud and forceful as they were during the 1992 election year.

The 1992 elections had 3 women standing for parliamentary seat from Nyamira County. None of them managed to be elected and one nominated to parliament. The one nominated was Catherine Nyamato from West Mugirango Constituency of Nyamira County. This was and still is the highest political ladder that a woman has climbed from this community.

The 1992 election results and the subsequent handling of women’s issues proved to be a great disappointment of Kenya women. Oduol, (1995) observes that both the opposition parties and the ruling party KANU did not have clear and specific policies within their constitutions regarding women’s issue. They did not give any considerations to the inclusion of women in all positions within the party hierarchy (Oduol, 1993).

Due to the disappointment of the election outcome, many women activists turned to be less politically overt but strategically empowering activities of civic education and gender awareness. This fatigue went on until 1995 when the international women’s conference was held in Beijing. Here, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was adopted which called for equality, development and peace.
4.4 KENYAN WOMEN AND THE BEIJING CONFERENCE 1995

Every human being has the right to participate in decisions that define her or his life. This right is the foundation of the ideal of equal participation in decision-making among women and men. This right argues that since women know their situation best, they should participate equally with men to have their perspectives effectively incorporated at all levels of decision-making, from the private to the public spheres of their lives from local to the global (Miranda, 2005).

The Beijing Conference in 1995 was held ten years after the Nairobi Women’s Conference. The conference goals were equality, development and peace for all. The Beijing Conference was built on the foundation laid by the Nairobi meeting asserting that empowerment and autonomy of women, and the improvement of women’s social, economic and political sphere were of paramount importance for the achievement of transparent, accountable government and administration and sustainable development in all areas of life.

For Mrs. Wilkista Onsando, land ownership and inheritance were crucial during her stint at the MYWO. The former Chairperson of MYWO led the Kenyan delegation of women to Beijing to assess the progress made on issues regarding women and their development, and not to gang against men. Wilkista (O.I; 18.5.12) observes, “a lot of men were convinced that women had ganged up against men”. Wilkista notes that what she learnt from the seminars is that women play a crucial role in shaping the foundation of leadership in society.

The delegates also noted that the poor relations that prevented women from leading fulfilling lives operate at many levels from the personal to the public. Consequently,
achieving the goals of equal participation of men and women in decision-making would provide a balance that would accurately reflect the composition of society which is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning (Nzomo, 1999).

During the conference, it was agreed that equality in political decision-making is important in order to ensure that democracy is realized in all countries. It was also agreed that women’s equal participation with men in political life plays a vital role in the general process of advancement of women. The equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for justice and democracy, but it can be seen as necessary conditions for women’s interests to be integrated on to the social agenda. Consequently, without the active participation of women, and the incorporation of women’s perspectives at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved (Beijing, 1996).

The UN Fourth World Conference on women in 1995, recognizing this key condition for women’s empowerment, which in turn is required for democratic governance, identified as one of the twelve critical areas of concern in its Beijing Platform for Action (BPA), women in power and decision-making (Beijing Handbook 1996).

For this concern, the platform recommended two (2) strategies: “Take measures to ensure women’s equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making” and second, “Increase women’s capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership”. Both strategies were proposed to be addressed by the government of Kenya in national bodies, the private sector, political parties, trade unions, employers’ organizations, research and academic institutions among others (Beijing +5 2006).
The delegates at the conference noted that women had made considerable gains in the areas of leadership in the community and informal organizations and in the public offices worldwide. However, socialization and negative stereotyping of women through media reinforced the tendency for political decision-making to remain the domain of men. At the same time underrepresentation of women in politics and education has prevented women from having a significant impact on many institutions in their countries. Thus, in order to address this inequality between men and women in politics and positions in decision-making at all levels, it was suggested that the governments and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming gender perspectives in all policies and programmes, so that before decision are made and taken, an analysis is made of their impacts on both men and women (Beijing, 2000).

The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (BPA) brought change in Kenyan and Nyamira women for that matter. Many initiatives were attempted along the proposed actions under the two strategies in the BPA (Miranda, 2005). It led to arise in women consciousness and self-confidence as women began to speak and say NO to continued social scorn and disrespect. After the Beijing Conference in 1995, the women’s movement regained more vigour and significant improvements in the lives of women could be attributed to the works of women’s organizations during this period (Muteshi, 2006). This period saw a change of approach by women in seeking innovative ways of confronting patriarchy.

One year after the Beijing Conference, one female legislator charity Ngilu tabled a motion on the Platform For Action. In the motion, the government committed itself to among other things to translate, interpret, simplify, clarify and disseminate the resolutions
of the Platforms For Action (PFA), convene seminars, workshops and other fora in all sub-locations to explain the PFA. The government was also to allocate adequate provisions for the advancement of the welfare of women implementing and continually monitor access the PFA (Mugo, 1990). This was the first in the seventh parliament that a female MP had successfully tabled women friendly motions that was passed by the parliament. For the first time women had reason to remain optimistic that the government was beginning to become responsive to their needs (Nyakwaka, 2012).

Unfortunately, the hopes created by the motion were short-lived; the government did not create necessary mechanisms promised for the implementation of the motion. The government had given lip-service to the needs of women with nothing being practically done on the ground. Women MPs also realized how quickly private motions can be shelved to gather dust since the government did not generally feel obliged to implement them (Nyakwaka, 2012). Charity Ngilu however continued with her struggle for women’s rights and for the PFA. Indeed, in 1997 elections, she became the first female to run for presidency in Kenya. She was ranked fourth overall in a field of seven men and two women; herself and Wangari Maathai (Kabira & Wasamba, 1998).

The conference though attended by several Kenyan women among them Wilkista Onsando and Clare Omanga from Nyamira County, was seen by rural women as an organization for the powerful educated urban women (Kerubo, O.I, 2012). The rural women thus did not gain from it. In Nyamira County, during the 1997 elections, several women failed to vote for the presidential female candidate Charity Ngilu as they viewed her as one of the educated urban women out to fulfill their own interests (Omwansa, Nyaanga, Bosire, O.I, 2012). Nevertheless, this conference acted as a reminder to the
government that there was need to create a women’s ministry. Though the ministry was created, it was headed by a man and was dismantled two months later, a sign that the government was still not ready to listen to the grievances of women. This issue of women lesser status and men’s superior status is deeply ingrained in patriarchy and this makes the relationship seem natural to women themselves.

4.5 CONSTRAINTS AND CHALLENGES IN WOMEN’S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NYAMIRA COUNTY

The period 1997-2002 saw numerous and far reaching changes on the political, social and legal fronts. Politically the country witnessed the consolidation of multiparty democracy in parliament. At the social level, citizens generally became more aware of their rights as evidenced by the type of demands that they made to their leaders. Evidently however, there was continued need for civic education to make citizens even more aware of their rights and obligations. A key obstacle to this process was the fact that avenues for delivering civic awareness through the use of public media remained largely restricted as the government maintained a tight grip on the sole state controlled broadcasting establishment – KBC (Mugo, 2002). To a significant extent though the private sector added channels for information dissemination as privately owned radio stations that broadcasted on the FM band proliferated. Some private TV stations also went on air, radically changing the media landscape of the previous five years. However, a lot of this revolution was only experienced in Nairobi since the frequencies of these private media houses were restricted to Nairobi. Therefore, rural areas such as Nyamira County relied heavily on rumours and other personal information dissemination channels emanating from Nairobi. In addition, there were privately owned magazines that were accessed in the rural areas. In the larger Gusiiland, the Mirror, Gusii Star and Sauti ya Gusii
proliferated. However, these magazines keeping in line with the patriarchal tradition only encouraged women to vote and pray for the nation. This also alienated the women (Omwansa, O.I, 2012).

Despite the constitutional amendment of 1997 during which the Public Order Act was amended to remove the clause requiring that licenses be obtained to convene public rallies, the police continued to crack down on civic education rallies with impunity. At that time, two opposing political blocks; KANU and FORD people dominated in Nyamira County. Ford people’s Henry Obwocha of West Mugirango, Masanya of North Mugirango and Okioma of Kitutu Masaba Constituencies dominated in the region. There were constant disruptions of rallies and eruptions of violence from members of opposing blocks, which scared off a number of women voters and aspirants (Mugo, 2002; Obae, O.I, 2012).

The five years between 1997 and 2002 passed with mixed successes. After only two years since the fourth UN Conference on women in Beijing, Kenyan women had looked upon to more inclusive political and governance dispensations. After all, the conference resolutions captured in the Beijing Platform For Action were quite explicit and represented global consensus in terms of strategy for ensuring women’s full participation in the process of economic, social and political developments, (Thongori, 2002). The watershed event for women’s full drive to demand political participation came in 1997. In that year, Phoebe Asiyo unsuccessfully tabled a private member’s motion seeking to legislate affirmative action in Kenya’s political arena. The motion contained among other proposals a requirement that all registered political parties nominate at least a third of women of all its candidates. The motion was defeated and it served as awake up call for
women. They realized that the success of their course depended largely on their acting jointly rather than in isolation. After quick consultation, the Kenya Women’s Political Caucus (KWPC) was inaugurated within the precincts of Parliament, a symbolic move given that the motion of the KWPC was to increase women’s representation in political offices (FIDA, 2002). The rise of the KWPC marked the strongest manifestation that women were determined more than ever before to consolidate their struggle for political participation as a political force. Its first joint initiative was in August 1997 when KWPC presented women’s demands for inclusion in the constitutional review process in the form of “Women’s Reform Initiatives”, a document of the Kenya Women’s Political Caucus (Mugo, 2002). Following the 1997 general elections, women’s hopes that this stage of affairs was changing were raised when a ministry of women’s affairs was created in 1998. However, it was headed be a male minister Maalim Muhammed. Women viewed this as a demonstration of the notion that women’s capacity for leadership was wanting despite glaring evidence to the contrary. The ministry was subsequently dissolved hardly two months after its establishment. Nyamira County women like others in the rural areas perceived this more as a confirmation that the government was not committed to women’s advancement (Mwangi, 2004).

The constitution of a nation is a contract between citizens and the government that stipulated the values and principles by which they wish to live while instituting the organs through which they will be governed. It is the supreme law of the land (Koome, 2002). In 1962, when Kenya’s then constitution was finally negotiated at Lancaster House, only one Kenyan African women, Priscilla Abwao attended and was not allowed to participate in the talks or present her memoranda. It is therefore not surprising that
constitution in Kenya discriminated against women and provided only limited protection from discrimination on the basis of sex.

The period 1997 to 2005 was one in which Kenyans made significant strides towards their dream of achieving a new constitution order. Unlike the case of the 1962 Lancaster House, constitutional conferences, this time round women demanded and secured several places at the negotiating table (Chesoni, 2002). They became active in pressing for constitutional reform as they had a major stake in the overhaul of the existing constitution. The draft bill of the constitution of Kenya review commission held much promise for women. The bill addressed many of the concerns of Kenya women regarding constitutional equality through women specific provisions and mainstreaming gender while directly addressing barriers to a culture of constitutionalism that had affected all seeking to rely on the constitution to enforce their rights (Chesoni, 2002). The number of women parliamentarians and local representatives in the political arena also increased greatly. However, a lot remained undone. There was need to mobilize and appoint local women as they articulated the needs of their fellow locals. It was therefore the work of women organizations and individuals to assist these women in order for them to attain the qualifications needed for one to be a local or national leader. Though President Kibaki’s Government promised to be gender sensitive, it was the work of the women organizations and individuals to keep the government on toes to ensure that this was fulfilled.

Women experienced a wide range of discriminatory practices, limiting their political and economic rights and relegating them to the periphery. The constitution extended equal protection of rights and freedoms to men and women, but only in 1997 was the constitution amended to include a specific prohibition of discrimination on grounds of
gender. However, constitutional provisions allowed only males to automatically transmit citizenship to their children. Women continued to face both legal and actual discrimination in other areas. For instance, a married woman was legally required to obtain the consent of her husband before obtaining a national identity card or a passport (Mwangi, 2004).

As already observed, the Moi regime although having witnessed several positive trends that would have translated into improved women’s political participating did not fulfill the equality that it had vowed to set. Women agonized as men consolidated power and continued to marginalize and exploit women’s labour arguing that the Abagusii Society did not allow women to rule a country while men were watching. Other reasons that contributed to their marginalization include: violence during elections, poverty, multiple roles, and masculinity of political parties. All these are discussed below.

The Abagusii in Nyamira County are patriarchal. Almost all the family assets were owned and controlled by men. Men owned and controlled livestock, cash crops, and vehicles if any, land, and even houses. Women owned household goods which are associated with the provision of domestic care by the women and were not even considered to be assets. Land was/is the most valuable asset for most Kenyan communities. Women constitute more than 52% of the population yet they own less than 5 percent of the land. Despite this fact, women do about 70 percent of the agricultural work. Men assert their customary rights to land and the labour of their wives in order to accumulate income for themselves but were not obligated to share this money with their wives. Even in the working families where both the man and woman contribute to
acquisition of property the general pattern remains, capital property such as land, house and car are invariably registered in the name of the man.

The banks and financial institutions charged with provision of financial support to small businesses initiatives often require collateral. Collateral comes in form of title deed, a logbook, agreement of sale and so on and it is very unlikely that a woman has either of these as the property is normally registered in the man’s name. Worse, some institutions would require the approval of a spouse when the applicant was a woman. If the applicant was a man, no such conditions were necessary. Thus, as a woman, she would be required to have security informs of title deed or logbook plus a marriage certificate. In most customary settings such as Abagusii community, women do not own land, hence do not have title deeds in their own names and do not have marriage certificates because they married under customary law. This effectively shut women’s attempts to secure loans, as they did not fulfill the necessary conditions. In the event that they got the loan, their multiple roles as wife, mother and income earner could only allow them to undertake business on a ‘part-time’ basis, which means that the business does not generate any surplus income. Most of the businesses were informal and did not add value to the official gross and were not supported by the government. Thus, campaign financing is one area where Nyamira County women are at a structural disadvantage, relative to men. Political campaigns are notoriously expensive and Kenyan women and Nyamira women who as a group have lower incomes than men and fewer economic resources are not likely to have the financial resources necessary to mount expensive political campaigns (Nyaanga, O.I. 2012 and Oroko, 2013).
The ability of women to attain financial autonomy or access to economic resources is very necessary for their greater participation in political life. Women who find themselves in the formal wage labour are more likely to enjoy political representation. They have greater financial independence as well as higher levels of self-esteem. Over the years, sexual division of labour and job opportunities offered in Kenya on sex basis has given men productive roles, enabling them to possess more purchasing power over their female counterparts. Only few women that are affluent possess the economic power to bankroll political nominations and campaigns. Majority of the women in Nyamira County live in abject poverty. As a result, women political aspirations have been grossly hampered by lack of financial bedrock to subsist their endeavour. As Grace Nyamongo (O.I; 14.5.12) posits, “until women are financially able not many women will try to vie for political positions. Additionally Nyarinda Moikobu (O.I; 18.5.12) says that during her campaigns women could ask her for money. “Others would tell me to buy them sugar and when I said I did not have money, they told me that I did not need their votes”, explains Nyarinda.

Women are also subjected to various forms of violence. Violence is often used in the family situation as a weapon of power. Women are often in subordinate position therefore they are the ones who suffer violence and sometimes do so in silence. This can either be physical, sexual or psychological. Just like other African societies, the Abagusii male in Nyamira County consider battering as a form of disciplining the wife and do not consider it abusive. Men who batter their wives in this region use the justification that they paid dowry therefore, can do what they want with the women. Therefore dowry discriminates against women because they suffer abuse and violence on the basis that dowry was paid for them. This violence against women is associated with patriarchy, giving men a higher
social status over females and has crept into public life, which reflects in state activities. The family plays an important role in maintaining this patriarchal order across generations.

The socialization of children to expect and accept different roles in life has created a social mechanism for the development of values that engender the several forms of discrimination against the female sex. Like women in many parts of Kenya, the Abagusii women in Nyamira County have had difficulty penetrating the patriarchal political decision-making structures and process of the county and the state at large. Patriarchal pressures, particularly, evident during the 1988 general elections in Kenya, when the queue voting method was employed. A husband could then successfully order his wife or wives and other members of his family not to line up behind a female candidate. As Odhiambo (2005) posits that culture and patriarchal tendencies underpins women’s exclusion from political participation.

Traditional belief and practices that women should not hold positions of power is the ultimate hurdle for women seeking political office in Nyamira County. According to Catherine Nyamato (O.I; 18.5.12), most Gusii traditional systems and practices do not allow women to take leadership roles. Nyamato continues to observe that, the men are sometimes overheard saying that time is not yet ripe for the women to be voted into elective positions in the region which still practices patriarchal pecking order when it comes to leadership roles. Overall impact of gender bias, cultural norms and practices has entrenched a feeling of inferiority in women and placed them at a disadvantage vis-à-vis their male counterpart in the socio-political arena. Thus, the Gusii electorate has for
decades lived with the reputation of never electing a woman to parliament since independence.

As mentioned earlier, education and professional training of women is important to build skills, confidence and knowledge that women require for active involvement in politics. However, education offered during the colonial period was discriminatory to women. Men were given greater educational opportunities and access to government training. This meant that majority of the women remained illiterate. Indeed, education broadens and sharpens one’s intellectual about the world around. By denying women education and training, it was almost impossible for them to participate fully in national development and politics. Thus, women could not make leaders as education was believed to be a primary qualification for leadership. At independence, though there was dramatic increase in the number of girls and boys who received formal education, there were no revolutionary changes in gender equality in the provision of education (Chege and Sifuna, 2006).

After the first decade of independence the government abolished school fees thus introducing free primary education in order to achieve more equitable distribution of educational opportunities throughout the country. This was a good idea which could increase girl child enrolment in school. But, still there were other levies that parents had to pay and this kept girls from poor families out of school. For instance, parents had to pay levies as activity fee, building fund, exercise books fund among others. The parents ended up paying more than the school fees thus, girls from poor homes ended up not attending school. Most parents in Nyamira County lived in abject poverty and this meant that many girls from this region were not sent to school. According to the Abagusii
traditions, the major role of a woman was to produce, reproduce, nurture and ensure the continuity of the man’s lineage. Therefore the girl was expected to marry off soon after circumcision that came at puberty stage. Thus there was no need for formal education as the woman would be provided for by the husband who was considered breadwinner in his family. Among the Abagusii, parents preferred educating sons because they would depend on them at old age. Educating a girl was not profitable according to them as she could get married and join her husband’s family (Onsongo, 2005).

By the 1980s, the overall enrolment of girls in the country had improved and was almost equal to that of the boys in primary school. Unfortunately, girls in Nyanza continued to lag behind. At secondary school level girls made 41 percent of the total enrolment by 1985 (Weekly Review, 1986). Moreover, there were still inequalities in the quality of education for the girls. For example in 1985, there were 200 fully maintained boys secondary schools in Kenya with an enrolment of 147,000 compared with only 107 schools for the girls, about half of the number of boys. The girls’ enrolment was only 75,000 (ibid). Accordingly, very few girls went to secondary school compared to boys. This meant that fewer girls than boys were admitted to the university and other technical institutions. With this kind of disparity in education, very few women rose to prominence in Nyamira County.

It is now widely appreciated that to the extent that law institutionalizes and legitimates existing conditions and relationships, it can be a major constraint to development in situations of inequality. But there is also growing recognition that creative use of the law often accelerates the process of development, precisely because law defines relationships and relationships define power. Law is both an instrument of domination and a
mechanism of empowerment (Mbeo, 1998). With specific reference to women, the challenge lies in identifying and doing away with constraints in the law and enhancing the women’s role in development by ensuring them access to legal resources. To understand the current legal system in Kenya, one has to appreciate the historical imposition of the British colonial legal system, which destroyed some organic legal institutions while preserving others. As a result, two different broad systems of law co-existed in Kenya: Western type law and customary law. Ombaka (1989) argues that the co-existence of two different value systems and ideological grids presents a range of unique problems to the resolution of the woman question.

The legal system that strengthened colonialism was necessarily as oppressive and exploitative as colonialism itself (Kibwana, 2002). It was oppressive because Africans were ruled without their consent and against their resistance, exploitative because its mission was to service capital accumulation by the imperial power, not to develop the local population. The legal orders were based on ideologies completely foreign to the population it was to govern. Therefore, the colonial legal system was repressive because it was imposed, exploitative because of the mission of colonialism, and it was historically alien because it was inorganic (Ombaka, 1989). The question being asked here is how this legal order relates to Nyamira County women. To the colonialists, the Africans were subhuman. Indeed the religious and ideological rationalization of colonialism was that of a civilizing mission. From this viewpoint, the gender of the African was of no great importance. However, since the imposed legal order was rooted in Victorianism in which women were viewed as inferior beings, were disenfranchised and lacked several rights, the African woman was seen and treated as a lower species to her British counterpart. The colonial legal system did not replace the pre-colonial legal systems completely.
The colonial policy was to destroy those aspects of pre-existing institutions, which militated against colonial rule but to conserve those which did not threaten colonialism. Thus, pre-colonial land tenure systems in Kenya generally and in Nyamira County in particular were destroyed to make way for cash crop agriculture while indigenous administrative institutions such as chieftaincy were conserved not only as a cost reducing measure, but also to a cost reducing measure, but also to effect more culturally relevant rules (Mwangi, 2004). Similarly many aspects of private law such as family law were left intact wince they had no direct bearing on the dictates of the colonial economy. The colonial legal order was constituted by a co-existence of imposed legal systems and substantial aspects of indigenous legal systems (Kameni, 1993).

The year 1963 marked the granting of independence of Kenya. The rule by colonial males was transferred to local leaders all of whom were males. Thus the basic philosophical and jurisprudential basis of the current legal order, like the colonial one, is characterized by continuity of the imposed laws which have now been internalized their racial aspects removed and taken over by local leaders. These laws up top date are unjust to women (Mbeo and Ombaka, 1989).

No legislation in Kenya has been formulated in answer to the women question or motivated by feminist concerns. Most political leaders both men and women argue that the laws of Kenya provide for equality. In reality, there are discriminatory laws in our statue books. Even if Kenyan laws ensured equality, the question still remains whether formal juridical equality translates to substantive socio-economic and political equality. Otherwise, to assert that our laws are not discriminatory assumes incorrectly that we have enough laws. It therefore merely poses the question on whether existing laws accord
equality to women. It does not recognize that there could be new laws, which promote women’s interests. The ideology of equality is a legal fiction, which help legitimize the status quo. In theory, laws are supposed to define the norms of conduct by promulgating objective and value neutral rules applicable to all citizens irrespective of their status. It is precisely this “equality” of treatment which results in or reinforces actual inequality. In a historical context in which women have been discriminated against, formal equality means actual inequality (Mwangi, 2004). Actual equality demands affirmative legal initiatives to correct the historical imbalance. We need to go beyond juridical equality and fashion the operational norms to ensure equality in opportunity (Ombaka, 1989).

Until November 1997 after the IPPG (Antiparliamentary Party Group) reforms, discrimination on the basis of sex was not prohibited. Section 90 of the then constitution stated that “a person born outside Kenya after 11th December 1963 shall become a citizen of Kenya at the date of his birth if at that date his father is a citizen of Kenya”. But a child born outside of Kenya to a non-Kenyan father and a Kenyan mother is not a Kenyan. Similarly, women in Kenya cannot get an identity card, passport or any other identification document without her husband or father’s consent. This implies that the Kenyan constitution is gender insensitive. Women are not given their rightful citizenship without identification to their husbands or fathers. With the reviewing of the constitution, however, women have a chance to alter existing legal laws which hinder their development (Mwangi, 2004). To do these, women need to work together. Further they need to be aggressive and to ensure that laws that have been passed in their favour are implemented.
Following the minimum reform agitation the 1990’s changes in the law permitted the nomination of candidates by their party except for the president. Half of all nominees according to the reforms were to be women. This did not happen. This demonstrates despite passing the laws; if the government does not have the political will to implement them nothing will change. The government needed to exempt itself from activities and movements such as the National MYWO. Once the government is a stakeholder in such organizations, they most often than not co-opt the women from such organizations and hence these women may not advance fellow women’s interests for fear of victimization by the same government. Moreover, by excluding itself from such organizations they become popular (Mwangi, 2004). In the past regime for instance, the ruling party KANU had no ideology of addressing the women’s situation the party and in the national women’s movement –MYWO. As such it was largely ineffective as a vehicle to champion women’s political interests. Although MYWO was normally independent from the former ruling party, it suffered from its national and local leadership being co-opted into the government and thus denying up of grassroot women support (Wiper, 1975).

The women in Nyamira County found MYWO synonymous to KANU and hence withdrew their membership. It should be noted here that although the former MYWO Chairperson Wilkista Onsando hailed from Nyamira County, she did not at any time address the Nyamira County women. As already mentioned she steered the women’s organization closer to the then ruling party KANU. This made the women feel cheated and abandoned. The organization was thus unpopular in Nyamira County as the grassroot women considered themselves cheated. They thought of Wilkista Onsando as unworthy and selfish, out to fulfill the government’s interests and her own interests. Nyamira County women’s low contribution to political participation may thus be attributed to the
behavior of such small cliques of women leaders elected by them, but who forgot them on assuming office. This makes rural women to heave stereotypes towards politics. This may explain why most women complained of women being their worst enemies since once they are involved in political campaigns and political organizations they easily fall victims to co-option by the men in power (Nyaanga, O.I, 2012). This respondent bemoaned the situation by giving an example of Samaro Women’s Group, which collapsed due to their leader, a woman, who danced to the tune of male district leaders who did not have the interests of these women at heart. Such women sowed the seed of mistrust among majority of the rural and urban women.

Other residents both men and women, complained of the feminized neo-patrimonial nature of politics in Nyamira County. Most of them argued that only wives, daughters and other female kin of male leaders are appointed to leadership positions be they local or national. They argued that no woman could be elected or appointed to any political office if she does not have a male “godfather”. This is what Amina Mama (1991) calls fenocracy, where women leaders after election or appointment strive to uphold the interests of the males who facilitated their election or appointment. As elsewhere in Kenya, this state of affairs has resulted in women losing trust and confidence with fellow women. They thus opt to leave politics to the men.

The structures and agenda of political parties are factors in consideration of women’s political participation. Many parties, reflecting the more general conditions in the rest of the society do not easily accept or promote many women into their echelons left alone women’s occupation of the important positions within the parties. Political parties are the main avenues through which Kenyans can assert their presence and influence in the
national and local politics. Unless people participate in the party politics, they cannot have an impact in the political arena. Unfortunately, the participation of women in party politics and leadership positions is very low both at national and local levels. This can be explained in terms of the little attention given to the discrimination of women within the political parties. Although no political party has formulated rules and regulations that overtly discriminate against women, such discrimination is implied. For instance, most of the political parties did not have any aims and objectives addressing the participation of women (Odicoh, 2001). This lack of reference is an indicator of the little space available to women within these political parties. Even for those parties that have these objectives, the ideas are only on paper. More often, these objectives are ignored when it comes to implementation. In addition to party based discrimination, women candidates and voters in Nyamira County cited hostility from their male counterparts as one of the reasons for their poor political performance. Violence or threats to violence intimates women such that some women candidates and voters withdraw from vying or even voting before the exercise is over. Political campaigns are so insecure that women fear being assaulted during these campaigns and elections. This kind of intimidation strengthens the feeling that politics is indeed a dirty game. According to Omwansa (O.I, 2012), one of the common campaign strategies used by Kenyan politicians is embarking on “meet-the-people” tour. This is usually done at night in drinking places. Political parties usually give cash handout and free local brews for example busa in Nyamira County to win voters. This definitely put women at a disadvantage because drinking places and public gathering at night are considered unfavourable for morally upright women among the Gusii. Fighting is rampant and the use of nasty language against women who are seen around such places is very common. Indeed the abusive language used by drunkards is
used not only to block women opponents, but also to block women candidates from entering voting centres. Besides night campaigns are unfavourable to women because of domestic duties and the fear that their father or husband would suspect them of being involved in illicit affairs (Nzomo, 1997).

4.6 SUMMARY

In the chapter we have discussed various trends and transitions in Kenya during Moi and era and the effect that these had on the political participation of women in Nyamira County. It has been established that just like the Former President, Moi did not have any place for women. Women were marginalized and remained relegated to the periphery in politics and other spheres of life. Nyamira women were most affected. The use of neopatrimonialism by President Moi left these women at the periphery of political participation. This is because President Moi consolidated power to the male loyalists and few women were appointed to leadership posts. Economically Nyamira women were marginalized as they lacked access to economic opportunities. They relied on the formation of social and economic groups called merry-go-round for the sustainance of their families. The collapse of agriculture left many women in Nyamira County in abject poverty, as this was their main source of income. Lack of resources meant little if any involvement in politics as we have already discussed that, resources in very important in political participation.

It has also been noted that out of the factors that hinder women from political participation, barriers that have been erected by society and ignorance among women are the main factors. Due to the cultural norms that society has internalized to the effect that women cannot make good leaders, a woman’s political participation is invariably more
difficult than a man’s. In addition, due to their little education women seem not to be aware of their political rights and hence during elections they are easily manipulated and hoodwinked to vote for men.

It has also been noted that though the year 1985 found the Kenya women unaware of the whole decade dedicated to them, the year had some positive impact in the Kenya women’s empowerment. In addition, ten years later the Beijing Conference that was held had far reaching effects on women including the rural women who got important ideas of campaigning for men and women who were gender sensitive. Nyamira County women mobilized and campaigned for Mrs. Nyamato but were defeated by a male candidate. The 1992 elections saw six women elected to parliament while Catherine Nyamato was nominated by the KANU government. In 1997 eight women were elected into parliament, while the Gusii electorate in Nyamira County never elected a woman. The year 2002 when President Moi was retiring saw the highest number of women ever to be elected to parliament but as ‘usual’ Nyamira County never elected a woman to parliament.
CHAPTER FIVE

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN POLITICAL PROCESSES DURING KIBAKI’S
REGIME 2002-2013

5.0 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter investigated the participation of Nyamira County women in politics during President Moi’s regime. The chapter discussed various trends and transitions in Kenya during Moi’s era and other effects of these on the political participation of women in Nyamira County. This chapter marks the beginning of the ‘new’ transition in the Kenyan policies as the year 2002 witnessed the highest number in the women parliamentarians in the country.

5.1 WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN 2002 ELECTIONS

The 2002 elections were preceded by a two-year period in which women political NGOs empowerment were engaged in a well funded preparatory programme under the so-called Engendering the Political Process Programme (EPPP) banner. Despite the EPPP, for most of 2002-when the succession and constitutional review debates took center stage in Kenya’s political discourse – there was a notable absence of women’s voices in those debates. Women’s silence had become so loud that even issues related to the traditional gender concerns that women were passionate about over the past ten years did not so much as elicit a comment form gender-based organizations. Instead, it was the media men and women, who took the lead role in commenting on such issues – including the issue of the significant drop in the number of the registered female voters (in proportion to men) for the 2002 election.
The 2002 elections in Kenya were significant in the sense that they were the first transition elections. The incumbent President Moi was retiring as stipulated by the constitution. Therefore, all political developments focused on his succession. The election year was also characterized with a lot of political activity as parties and politicians realigned themselves in preparation for the polls. KANU having merged with the National Development Party (NDP) appeared set to clinch victory for the third successful term. However, this was not to be, since major fall-out at the eleventh hour saw KANU rapidly disintegrate.

Behind the scenes women organizations were negotiating with parties to gain entry into the campaign arena. Their main goal was to secure more parliamentary and civic seats for women. Before the 2002 elections women’s organizations developed the Kenya women’s political manifesto, just like they had done in the previous elections. In their manifesto, they described their political agenda in areas they wanted the government to set standards on policy, practice and action (Gumboznsvanda, 2003). In the manifesto, the women focused on areas that had always been close to their hearts; these included affirmative action, at least one-third representation in parliament and local government. They wanted the government to encourage voter participation, discourage violence, fraud, corruption and intimidation during election. Finally, in this sector, they wanted the government to set a ceiling on campaign financing for political candidates to discourage commercialization of politics. These are factors that had continued to hinder women’s participation in politics and perpetuated their marginalization (Gumboznsvanda, 2003).

The women’s manifesto also focused on poverty and economic empowerment, and education for girls and women, whereby the government was to eliminate gender
disparities in primary, secondary and post-secondary institutions. Finally the manifesto targeted health and HIV/AIDS. Women pointed out that despite the measures to improve health, reduce the maternal mortality and infant mortality rate, available statistics were alarming. At the same time, prevalence rate on HIV/AIDS was high among the women in Kenya and since women were caregivers, they were more likely to be affected and infected by the virus more than men (ibid). Apart from women’s manifesto, most of the manifestos of parties that took part in the 2002 General Elections showed that their policies did not fully target women. Women’s issues were given lip service by most of the political parties; they did not link the fact that women constituted the majority of voters and their own policies (Nyakwaka, 2012).

Apart from MYWO that spent most of 2002 mobilizing women to support Uhuru Kenyatta for presidency, the political position of other women’s organization remained unknown and their modes of participation in this electoral political process invisible (Nzomo, 2003). She continues to observe that, similarly, their views about the changing fortunes of the constitutional review process especially the possible negative gender impact of going into elections with the old constitution was also unclear. During the campaign period, only the well-known incumbents such as charity Ngilu, Beth Mugo and Martha Karua who could steal appearance at a few training workshops organized by the Engendering the Political Process Programs (EPPP). The majority of other female candidates remained invisible (Nzomo, 2003).

On the other hand, male politicians with a common desire of taking power from Moi mobilized Kenyans into a super-alliance called National Rainbow Coalition (NARC). Women were not able to use their numbers and expansive organizational structures right
from grassroot to national levels to marshal a super-alliance just like their male counterparts. From time to time, during 2002, there were distinct though uncoordinated voices that spoke of some gender issues. Women lawyers in particular were quite vocal especially on the issue of constitutional reform and gender violence (Nzomo, 2003).

5.2 WOMEN’S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION DURING KIBAKI’S REGIME 2002 - 2007

The 2002 women’s participation in electoral and reform politics demonstrated that there had been inadequate learning from past setbacks and lack of consolidation of gains built on past achievements. For ten years, since Kenyan women launched a women’s agenda for engendering democratization in the country, the same weakness that were noted as a “no go zone” on the road to women’s empowerment were still the subject of endless lists of “obstacles still to overcome” and ways forward. It was as if the women’s movement’s attempts to reconstitute itself a fresh each year before general election hardly enough participatory time for a disadvantaged sector (Kamau, 2003).

After Moi’s retirement in 2002, Mwai Kibaki succeeded him with his NARC winning a majority of seats in parliament. The 2002 women’s participation in electoral and reform politics demonstrated that there had been inadequate learning from past setbacks and lack of consolidation of gains built on past achievements. For ten years, since Kenyan women launched a women’s agenda for engendering democratization in the country, the same weakness that were noted as a “no go zone” on the road to women’s empowerment were still the subject of endless lists of “obstacles still to overcome” and ways forward. It was as if the women’s movement’s attempts to reconstitute itself a fresh each year before general election hardly enough participatory time for a disadvantaged sector (Kamau, 2003). The number of elected women MPs rose from 4 in 1997 to 9 in 2002. Following
the landslide win of the 2002 elections, the immediate challenge for the winning party NARC was to form a government of national unity that not only ensured broad based participation in decision-making by all the diverse communities of Kenya, but also respond to the need for gender equity and justice in representation in all key political and other public decision-making (Nzomo, 2003). The other pertinent issue that the NARC government promised to tackle was to deliver a new constitution that would create a more inclusive government especially one that would include women within hundred (100) days. But this did not happen, it was only until August 2005 that a draft constitution became ready and was put to vote in a national referendum on 21st November 2005. The government side which was supporting the draft lost and therefore the old constitution with an all-powerful president was retained. He continues to observe that given their small number in parliament, women became extremely silenced during the constitution campaigns (Murunga, 2010).

Efforts that were made by women’s political organizations and their affiliates bore some fruits for Kenyan women. First, more women were nominated to the 2003-2007 parliament that at any other time in Kenyan political history. NARC nominated six (6) while KANU the main opposition party nominated two (2) women. Second, the ruling party also appointed three women to the cabinet. These were Linah C. Kilimo, Martha Karua and Charity Ngilu. Four women were also appointed assistant ministers. These achievements could be attributed to many factors of course including the president’s personality and the changed political mood in favour of having gender parity in politics and public affairs generally (Nzomo, 2003). According to this study, despite these achievements, Nyamira County women did not elect any woman to parliament except 4 women who were elected to civic seats in the County. The only female contestant
Catherine Nyamato for the parliamentary seat lost with 4,720 votes to Henry Henry Obwocha who won with 7,047 votes. Though she was defeated, she displayed a sterling performance.

Another important factor is the impact of the pressure from women themselves. Women formed several organizations to press for their rights. There might have been many organizations that promoted women’s inclusion in the political field but the notable among these were the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW), the Federation of Kenyan Women Lawyers (FIDA) Kenya Chapter and the women political caucus. These organizations worked alongside the older organization MYWO and the National Council of Women of Kenya to lobby for increased women representation in the public realm (Nzomo, 2003). She continues to observe that these organizations did a remarkable job given that their approaches to the issue of representation had of always been in harmony with the government.

In addition, the events leading to the political pluralism in 1992 contributed significantly to the emergence of women’s organizations that specifically identified that there was a direct casual relationship with respect to conditions of women’s lives and the manner in which societal relations are structured and organized (Nzomo, 2003). Thus a few politically oriented women NGOs in collaboration with likeminded Community Based Organizations (CBOs) played significant roles not only in the traditional socio-economic arena, but also in engendering democratization in the political arena, notably the League of Kenya Women Voters, the National Commission on the status of women (NCSW), the Education Center for Women and Democracy (ECWD), the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) (K), among others (Nzomo, 2003). These organizations initiated civic education and training aimed at political empowerment and capacity
building of women candidates; and voters as well as gender sensitization of men and women. According to Grace Nyamongo, such initiatives contributed to increased gender and civic awareness in the country and Nyamira County.

In the late 2002 during party nominations, the male dominated party (NARC) leadership discriminated against women. When the women lobby groups realized this, immediate efforts were put in place to help safe the situation (Nzomo, 2003). Nzomo continues to observe that in November 2002, a loose coalition of women NGOs including many of those affiliated to the women’s political alliance and women political caucus as well as individual activists and professionals, banded together to form a forum that was initially labeled: Women of NARC, but was transformed some three weeks later into the NARC Women Congress (NWC).

The basis of the women’s coalition was to make sure that NARC party won the 2002 elections. It was assumed NARC would support women candidates and nominate others to political office upon winning elections (Nzomo, 2003). She continues to assert that for two months, NWC members volunteered their time and even financial resources to produce and disseminate presidential and party campaign materials, organized and conducted training for election party agents, participated in the presidential campaigns and monitored the Election Day polls.

The key long term objective for this spirit of volunteerism, was to obtain a guarantee from the male dominated NARC that if the party won the elections it would incorporate women as equal partners in the post-election power sharing and would complete and engender the new constitution and governance process generally (Nzomo, 2003).
Unfortunately, the so called progressive and gender sensitive parties like the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) which had committed itself to appointing one-third of women as aspirants did not have particularly comprehensive gender agenda (ibid). However, women still voted overwhelmingly for NARC as a party because women believed in democracy and that it could make a difference in their lives especially in line with NARC campaign promises of social change. But a proposed memorandum of understanding to formalize the envisaged partnership was never tabled. This was because the MOU had no legal backing and based on gentlemen’s trust. Nzomo (2003) further explains that, the post-election power sharing arrangement envisaged did not happen. Indeed, the only gain for women was the nomination of five women out of seven NARC nominees (Nzomo, 2003). No woman was elected or nominated from Nyamira County.

In 2002, although a total of 130 women had declared their interest in running for parliamentary seats, only 44 were nominated to contest among 1,037 parliamentary candidates. At the local authority level, out of 7,008 candidates competing for a total of 2,093 seats, only 380 were women (ibid). Nyamira County had two women running for parliament seats and four for civic seats.

For parliamentary seats Catherine Nyamato and Nyarinda Moikobu stood from West Mugirango and North Mugirango Constituencies respectively. None of them won. Those who stood for civic seats only two went through.

5.3 NYAMIRA WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN THE GRAND COALITION OF 2007

After two and half decades of gender activism, gender sensitization, capacity building, lobbying and mobilizing, Kenya and Nyamira County women to take up various political leadership positions, civic, gender and human rights awareness has remarkably improved
alongside strategies for policy and advocacy interventions. Policy makers have also mastered the gender language and can rhetorically articulate equality principles. Kenya however, remains greatly challenged with regard to women’s ascendancy into public political leadership positions. Currently, the Kenyan parliament has only 10 percent women representation trailing far behind the globally average of 18.8 percent women representation in parliament (Murunga, 2010).

According to this study, Nyamira County politics remain dominated by men and especially old men. It is them who mobilize local loyalties, control and manipulate vast economic resources in election campaigns, and build networks and political alliances in order to secure power, once in government offices, they use their control over state institutions and decision-making in order to enrich themselves and further strengthen their positions. Up to now, they have frequently succeeded in blocking initiatives geared towards improvement of the legal positions of women (Kamau, 2010).

The end of the former “State Party” Kenya African National Union (KANU), the taking over by the NARC government by the end of 2002 and even the political upheavals from the crisis that resulted from the general election of December 2007 did not help to change the gender insensitive male political culture in any decisive manner (Kamau, 2010).

The dominance of patriarchic structures in Kenyan politics and society is well illustrated by the low number of women among the members of parliament (MPs). As of May 2007, Kenya’s parliament had 222 members, 210 of them were elected and 12 appointed by the political parties represented by the political parties represented in parliament (Murunga, 2010). There were a total of 18 (7.7%) women parliamentarians, 10 of them were directly elected and 8 nominated. Out of the 35 cabinet ministers only two were
women, down from three in 2005 which had been the highest representation of women in parliament (Murunga, 2010). He continues to observe that there were a total of 18 (7.7%) women parliamentarians, 10 of them were directly elected and 8 nominated. Out of the 35 cabinet ministers only two were women, down from three in 2005 which had been the highest representation of women in parliament since independence, yet it was far below the neighbouring countries of Uganda at 24.7 percent and Tanzania at 22.3 percent (Murunga, 2010). According to this study, Nyamira County constituencies never elected a woman MP not even a nominated one during the 2007 elections and this meant no woman from Nyamira County held a ministerial position (O.I; 16.5.12, J. Ondieki and Choti, 2005).

In the elections of December 2007, the engagement of numerous organizations showed some limited success; and as already noted above, 10 women were elected as MPs out of the total number of 210 MPs. Another 8 were nominated as MPs by the political parties (of overall 12 nominated MPs). As a result, the women’s share of Kenya’s parliament reached 10 percent (Murunga, 2010).

An encouraging development according to this study, lay in the fact that the number of female aspirants for parliamentary mandates reached 269 (out of a total of 2,548), a figure much higher than 2002 (44 out of 1,015). According to Catherine Nyamato (ibid), “more than in the past, Nyamira County women are prepared to bid for political offices, and it can be expected that this trend will continue in the next elections”.

The number of women leaders in Kenya rose again during the multi-party era due to more women presenting themselves for elective positions, increased lobbying for the inclusion of women in decision-making (including advocacy for quotas and affirmative
action), and the diminishing influence of oppressive cultural norms against women. More and more women are better educated and qualify for senior positions that were previously dominated by men. In addition, many women who are seeking leadership positions earn their own money and possess property which has further reduced their dependence on men (Choti, 2005).

In the new cabinet formed in April 2008 women held seven ministerial and six assistant ministerial jobs (out of a total of 90 positions). However, Martha Karua, Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs and arguably the most high-profile female politician in Kenya, stepped down from office on April 7, 2009, after conflicts with President Kibaki. She was one of the aspirants for presidency in the March 2013 elections. Another female cabinet minister Hellen Sambili the then Minister for Higher Education, Science and Technology was dropped by PM – Raila Odinga after some conflicts.

According to this research, no constituency in Nyamira County has ever been represented in parliament by an elected woman politician since independence. Thus, no woman from the community has ever been at the top ministerial positions. The furthest a woman from this farming community has climbed on Kenya’s political ladder is being nominated into parliament in 1992 General Elections (O.I. Nyamato, 2012 and Choti, 2005).

This research also found out that there were other women who stood for elective positions from the Gusii community but never made it to parliament. These included Mrs. Margaret Atogo and Ms. Magdalene Mwebi who stood in Kitutu Chache Constituency but lost to Hon. Richard Onyonka, Prof. Mary Gesicho ran for Nyaribari Chache Constituency seat but lost to Dr. Robert Monda, Carren Magara who declared: “in politics blood is not thicker than water”. She went ahead and demonstrated her
philosophy by wrestling the South Mugirango parliamentary seat against her brother Omingo Magara but she also lost to her brother though later he lost the seat to his opponent due to a petition in Kisii Law Courts.

According to this study, this brand of politicians was not expecting a walkover. They were aware that although registered women voters outnumber men on the IEBC Roll, a cultural mindset against women’s leadership in Gusii leadership was their main impediment.

**Table 5.1: Parliamentary Women’s Participation (2002-2007)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Women Candidates</th>
<th>Elected</th>
<th>Nominated</th>
<th>Total Number of Women MPs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
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*Source: Murunga (2010)*

5.4 **EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN NYAMIRA COUNTY**

Empowerment is the granting of political, social or economic power to an invididual or group, in this case Kenyan women and girls especially the Nyamira County women and girls.

Access to education and professional training by women is very important to build confidence and knowledge that women require to active involvement in politics. Education instills interest in political matters and educated women would be more adept to seek elective office. Through education therefore, there would be increased awareness among women of their needs and the need to participate in various spheres of the
political, economic and social sectors of the state (Machaffey, 1981). Thus, education has remained the most dominant theme in all President Kibaki’s remarks. The president saw education as the ultimate empowering tool of any nation’s youth and the equalizer that gives young people a fighting chance in life.

In 2003, the government introduced the Free Primary Education (FPE) that saw close to two million children who had dropped out of school due to lack of fees enroll in public primary schools. Thousands of school going children thronged to primary schools and saw some schools overwhelmed by the population of pupils. According to Education Minister then Prof. Sam Ongeri, the school enrollment increased by 46% over the past eight years from 5.9 million in 2003 to over 8.6 million in 2011. The number of pupils who sat for KCPE also went up from 587,961 to 776,214 during the same period. As a result, the transition rate from primary to secondary rose from 47 percent in 2002 to 74 percent in 2012. Gender parity in primary education is 1.02 in favour of girls (Standard on Sunday December 30th 2012). Generally, the fate of girls in Nyamira County was no different from the bigger picture of the rest of the country. There was generally an increase in the number of children both boys and girls going to school. The numbers of girls were relatively high even though these girls’ numbers dwindled throughout the primary level so that by standard eight, the number of girls had dropped (Tooley, 2012, Sifuna, undated).

Following the success of FPE, the Kenya Government introduced the Free Day Secondary Education (FSE) in 2008. This had been one of the key promises that President Kibaki had made to the Kenyan people during the 2007 general election. Under FSE, each of the 1.9 million students in the 6, 540 public secondary schools countrywide
is allocated Kshs.10, 625 per year to cater for tuition and learning materials. The expansion in primary and secondary school education has been backed up by the largest expansion of university education in Kenya’s history (Mathooko, undated).

University enrolment rose from 75,000 students in 2002 to 251,554 in 2012. Government sponsored students’ admissions in public universities rose from 9,712 in 2003 to 41,879 in 2012. Girls’ enrolment in public universities also rose from 23% in 2003 to 42.9% in 2012. In both public and private universities female enrolment currently stands at 43%. Focusing on education for Gusii girls in Nyamira County in general, the fate of the girls is not different from the bigger picture of the rest of the country. With both the FPE and FSE, the number of students admitted to our public and private universities has increased. The number of female students even though still low as compared to those of the male students, has generally increased during this period (2002-2012).

The government has made efforts of taking university education to the people. The number of constituent university colleges that have become fully fledged public universities established in the last ten years now stands at twenty four (24) and spread across the country. One more fully fledged public university (Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology) was established in 2007. Of the 62 both private and public universities and constituent colleges currently established, 32 of them have been established in the last 10 years. Apart from Kisii University College, several other public and private universities have opened branches in this region of Gusiiland – Kisii and Nyamira Counties. Kisii University has opened campuses in various parts of the region. For instance, Ogembo Campus, Keroka Campus, Nyamira Campus, Down Town
Campus, Gudka Campus, Twin Towers Campus just to name a few. With these public and private universities in the region many parents are taking their daughters and many working women especially are going in for further education. Thus, many women and girls from Nyamira County are now accessing university education without travelling far like before.

The above establishment of universities has become possible because 17.4 billion shillings has been spent as development funds in expanding access to university education. This has increased from a nil allocation in 2012/2013 financial year (Standard on Sunday December 30th, 2012). With more education, people have begun to appreciate they can make choices to determine their lifestyles. This is what has fuelled the clamour for gender equality and equity. Women are exposed now and more are becoming aware of their political rights.

The government and its partners have developed strategies and implemented a variety of initiatives to address girls and women education. The government supports education of the girl child through sensitization and conducive legislative framework. Such as the National Plan of Action on EFA 2003-2015, Report of the Education Sector Review 2003, Ministry of Education Strategic Plan (2006-2011) and service charter and Kenya Education Sector Support Programme (2005-2010). All these frameworks have paid attention to girls and women education and training (Tooley, 2012).

For a long time the contribution of women in the economic development was not recognized even though they constitute about 50.5% of the total population. Socio-cultural practices have contributed to the economic isolation of women. These practices deny women the right to ownership of property and other productive assets. Some of the
laws in Kenya discriminate against women, for example the customary law, when it comes to inheritance of property. The female gender largely access resources through parentage or marriage but with the ownership, control or decision-making power (WEF, Strategic Plan, 2009).

Gender disparities in terms of access to education, retention in school, transition from one level of education to the other and academic performance remains one of the challenges facing girl-child in the country. These disparities may be attributed to various factors, among them, societal beliefs and practices. Many women especially in rural areas therefore find themselves disadvantaged in establishing and running businesses due to lack of technical qualifications and inadequate market information.

According to the survey conducted in 2006 on the well-being in Kenya, women constitute 29% of formal wage employment. The low formal wage employment may be attributed to low education attained and is one of the reasons for disparities in income. The report found out that 50.8% of females are poor with 31.2% of poor households being female headed.

The Women Enterprise Fund (WEF) is an initiative of the government and was established through Legal Notice No.: 147: Government Financial Management (Women Enterprise Fund) Regulation, 2007. WEF operations began in December 2007 while its official launch by His Excellency the then President Kibaki was on 26th May 2009. The Fund is a key driver in reducing gender disparities by availing more opportunities for women through economic empowerment building their capabilities and reducing their vulnerabilities.
In advancing the same view, Wallock (2010) observes that financial autonomy or access to economic resources is a very important factor for women’s greater participation in political life. Worldwide women’s lower economic status and relative poverty are substantial hurdles to overcome. To tackle the issue of economic or financial empowerment, the government made history in August 2007, as Women Enterprise Fund (WEF) was set up to address the issue of financial exclusion of women from the mainstream economy. The establishment of women Enterprise Fund is a positive step towards ensuring resources reach excluded women. It is also a testimony of the Kenya government’s commitment to the realization of the 3rd Millennium Development Goal (MDG) on women empowerment and gender equity. The pillar is a flagship project under the social pillar in the vision 2030 (WEF Strategic Plan, 2009).

Thus the fund provides wholesome financial solutions to the challenges that women have faced over the years in starting and growing their business namely, access to credit, high cost funds, lack of collateral and low financial literacy. Launched by President Kibaki the fund quickly became a flagship project under the social pillar in Vision 2030. The fund is the key driver in reducing gender disparities by availing more opportunities for women through economic empowerment, building their capabilities and reducing their vulnerabilities. Subsidized loans to start or expand existing business are available to individual women at 8% per annum from financial intermediary partners (Standard on Sunday December 30th 2012).

The establishment of the fund is a sure way of achieving meaningful economic development, for a peaceful, stable and prosperous society and for promotion of human rights. By January 2011, a total of 1.15 billion shillings had been disbursed to over 221,
691 women countrywide using the two channels of that of the Constituency Women Enterprise Scheme (C. WES) and Financial Intermediary Partners. Over 3, 800 women had been trained in business management skills. To date 645, 825 women have accessed the fund’s loans since its inception. Women’s lives are being positively transformed through the fund (Kamau, 2008). Most women interviewed from Nyamira County confessed to being able to make more independent decisions after receiving the loan with respect to purchase of health and educational services for their children and to purchase of a number of household items including family property. As Jane Ondieki (O.I; 14.5.12) observes, “as a woman I can now buy what I want without necessarily seeking for money from my husband”.

Several women groups in Nyamira County have started village savings and loans accounts. This is where each village, collects money from members (men included) loan each other who return the money with interest. For instance members of Nyansiongo village led by Clare Omanga (O.I; 18.5.12) have been assisted by a Swiss company which has given them saving boxes to use.

For most women groups, it has not been easily sailing. Most groups in Nyamira County are not doing well because members do not trust their leaders. As Sibia Nyachieo (O.I; 14.5.12) observes, “when you dress well they think you are using their money to buy clothes”. This is usually a case with rural groups.

On the other hand, women who find themselves in the formal wage labour force are more likely to enjoy political representation (Kenworthy, 1999). Technical representation and supervisory skills are skills that women in the formal economy bring to the political realm. Jobs in such fields as law and journalism commonly provide the feasibility,
financial resources, experience and social networks that facilitate running for elective office (Wallock, 2010). However, women in Nyamira County are frequently employed in informal sector or involved in subsistence agricultural activities. To assist women get formal employment, the government through president Kibaki, in October 2006, issued a directive requiring that 30 percent of all appointments, recruitments and promotions in public service be reserved for women. This has been entrenched in the new constitution. Following this decree, there has been an increase of women in key appointments. In Nyamira County, a few primary and secondary schools are headed by women. However, this decree has not been fully realized, it is thus imperative that employers adhere to the decree. Also, following the presidential decree on 30 percent Affirmative Action in the public sector, three ministries namely; State law office, Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development and Ministry of State for Defence are leading with 66.7%, 58.5% and 50.0% respectively (Status by December 2010) (Daily Nation March 8th 2011).

The government has also achieved a lot in advancing the cause of women empowerment as demonstrated by the creation of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development, the National Gender and Equality Commission, the Women Enterprise Fund and other key institutions. Addressing guests when he launched the 60th anniversary celebrations of the Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO) the president said, “These achievements go along way in inspiring women to exploit their potential and be role models to our children, especially the girl-child and inspiring their future ambitions to excel” (President Kibaki’s Speech).

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy that has been adopted to mainstream gender issues in the public sector. To realize this, the government has appointed gender officers in the public service. Gender mainstreaming as a performance indicator has been introduced in
the performance contracting for the public sector. This is a milestone in Kenya as it will ensure that gender is mainstreamed at policy, planning and programming and budgeting in the sector for women’s empowerment (Standard March 8th 2011).

5.5 THE CONSTITUTION 2010 AND WOMEN

After Mwai Kibaki succeed President Moi in 2002 with his National Rainbow Coalition (NARC), his government promised to deliver a new constitution that would reduce presidential powers and create a more inclusive government (especially one that would include women) within 100 days. This did not happen and it was only in August 2005 that a draft constitution became ready and was put to the vote in a national referendum on 21st November 2005. The government side, which was supporting the draft lost and therefore the old constitution with an all-powerful president was retained. Given their small number in parliament, women became extremely silenced during the constitution campaigns (Murunga, 2010). Charity Ngilu, a leading women politician who contested for the presidency in 1997, was reported in the press as a ‘fading star’ in the constitution confusion (Sunday Nation 6 November, 2005).

Once the government lost in the referendum, a new cabinet was appointed which unfortunately saw the number of women cabinet ministers reduce from just three to two. The same president who had been supporting a constitution that would see a third of all public positions reserved for women retracted from his own promise. This is an indication that leadership had no commitment to gender equality and equity (Murunga, 2010). No woman from Nyamira County was appointed for a top ministerial position as there was no woman elected to parliament.

Kenya has had two major constitutional reforms involving wholly new texts since gaining independence: in 1969 and in 2010. In 1969, the 1963 independence constitution was
replaced with a new text that entrenched amendments already made to the system of
government that the independence constitution had contemplated. These changes
included: changing the structure of the state from a federal, or Majimbo system, to a
unitary system; creating a unicameral instead of bicameral legislature; changing from
parliamentary to a semi-presidential system with a powerful presidency; and reducing the
protections of the bill of rights. Further amendments to the 1969 constitution were later
affected including in 1982, the institution of a *de jure* single party government
(Wikipedia 20th April, 2013).

The demand for a new constitution to replace the 1969 text began in the early 1990s, with
the end of the cold war and democratic changes taking place elsewhere in Africa. The
single party system was ended in 1991, and the first presidential election took place in

Calls for a comprehensive review of the 1969 constitution intensified in the late 1990s
and early 2000s, helped by the victory of the opposition National Rainbow Coalition
(NARC) party in the 2002 general elections. Official and civil society constitution
processes led to the adoption of what became known as the “Bomas draft” constitution
(after the location of the conference that adopted it). However, substantial amendments
were nonetheless made to this draft prior to a referendum in 2005, resulting in a split in
the then ruling coalition. The Liberal Democratic Party faction of the government, led by
Raila Odinga, and supported by KANU led a successful ‘No’ vote against the amended
Bomas Draft [called the Wako draft after the alleged mastermind of the changes]
(Murunga, 2010).

At Bomas there were a few women from the Gusii community. Among them were Clare
Omanga and Wilkista Onsando. Here they campaigned against Female Genital Mutilation
(circumcision) practice which is highly regarded in the community as a way of initiating women into adulthood and preparing them for marriage. They told the participants that it was high time the practice was stopped (Omanga, O.I; 2012).

The review of the constitution stalled and negotiations over the adoption of a new text seemed deadlocked. A deadlock only finally broken by the intervention of the African Union through a mediation team headed by Kofi Annan, following the outbreak of serious post election violence in early 2008.

The constitution of Kenya was the final document resulting from the revision of the Harmonized Draft Constitution of Kenya written by the Committee of Experts, initially released to the public on November 17, 2009 so that the public could debate the document and then parliament could decide whether to subject it to a referendum in June 2010. The public was given 30 days to scrutinize the draft and forward proposals and amendments to their respective members of Parliament, after which a revised draft was presented to the Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) revised the draft and returned the draft to the Committee of Experts who published a proposed constitution on February 23, 2010 that was presented to Parliament for final amendments of necessary. After failing to incorporate over 150 amendments to the proposed constitution on April 1, 2010, the proposed constitution was presented to the Attorney General of Kenya on April 7, 2010, officially published on May 6, 2010 and was subjected to a referendum on August 4, 2010. Due to the promises for women contained in the proposed constitution, draft, many people especially women from Nyamira County voted for the proposed constitution. The new constitution guarantees women rights that were previously absent. These include creation of elective and nominated seats in the National Assembly set for aside for women. Thus Alice Chae is the only woman elected to the National Assembly as women
representative from Nyamira County. The new constitution was approved by 67% of Kenyan voters (Wikipedia 20th April, 2013).

Women as human beings should be accorded their rights and these rights should be enforced where they are not being enjoyed (Kerr, 1993). On the issue of women’s rights, the new constitution guarantees this. Nyamira County Women now are able to pass on citizenship to their children regardless of whether or not they are married to Kenyans. The constitution also guarantees elimination of gender discrimination in relation to land and property as well as giving everyone including women the right to inheritance and unbiased access to land. Although minimal some families in Nyamira County have started giving everyone including women the right to inheritance and unbiased access to land. There is also the creation of elective and nominated seats in the National Assembly set aside for women and many more. All these were absent in the previous governments. The new constitution has advocated a 30 percent representation of women in all appointments. The women of Kenya and Nyamira County applauded the passage and promulgation of the new constitution in 2010 as it contains many gains for them for example:-

Among the key gains for the women in the constitution is the citizenship chapter which grants them the right to donate citizens to their children. In the past, only the father could donate citizenship.

They are also protected against violence and have the right to dignity, land ownership and equality in marriage.

The other major gain is the two-thirds gender rule. In any appointment or elective posts, no gender should exceed two-thirds. Women are therefore, guaranteed one-third of slots in elective and appointive bodies.

More importantly, one of the best things for them is the attempt to bring women to leadership. There are clear provisions showing how women will occupy positions of leadership.

In the senate and county assemblies women must constitute a-third of the sitting members. Article 98 of the constitution provides for the senate members. First 47
directly elected from the counties and secondly 16 women nominated by political parties in proportion to the number of elected senate seats they garner in the election. The National Assembly has more seats which women will occupy as a right (Sunday Nation, 29 July 2012).

The new constitution provides women with more political and democratic space, but it is the implementation and enforcement of the constitution that will measure its success. While on paper the new constitution promises to have more women in the decision-making roles by increasing the number of female representatives in devolved assemblies to 30 percent, we need to see more commitment by the government in appointing women to leadership positions. It is now left upon the new government to look into its implementation and enforcement.

5.6 CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS IN WOMEN’S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NYAMIRA COUNTY: 2002-2013

The apparent political absence of women cited above must also be understood within cultural and structural constraints that women globally, nationally and at the local levels continue to face as they attempt to penetrate the political arena. The gender disparities that exist in Kenya generally and specifically in Nyamira County count be due to deep-rooted patriarchal, socio-cultural, economic and political structures and ideologies. Under these conditions, Kenyan women have been excluded from participation in governance capacities.

Numerous studies on women’s participation in politics and public decision-making globally (Yoon; 2004, Coward; 1983, Kariuki; 2010, Mwangi; 2004, Oduol; 1993, 1995, Nzomo; 1993, 1997, 2003, Kabira and Masinjila; 1997) indicate that the electoral playing field has always been tilted heavily in favour of men, more so in developing countries such as Kenya which are highly patriarchal, thus relegating women to the sphere of
domestic tasks and home mates and by 2002, lacked a democratic constitution and electoral laws to facilitate free and fair electoral process.

There was no single party that had an affirmative action policy on women candidates during the party nominations, even for parties such as NARC that had promised to give women one-third of the seats. In fact in some cases, political parties dropped women candidates who made it in the preliminaries in favour of male candidates because of culture and traditions that perceived leadership as a preserve for the male gender. On the other hand, violence that characterized the nominations made it difficult for women candidates to mobilize support. In certain situations, male candidates used violence as a strategy to scare away women (Nzomo, 1997).

Another factor that discourages women from running for political office or works against those who attempt is the threat of electoral violence. A culture of electoral violence that tends to be harsher towards female than male candidates is another reason for fewer Nyamira women in politics. As Moikobu (O.I; 18.5.12) observes, “As elections draw closer, normally there is an escalation of election violence against women”. This is a sad phenomenon women’s participation in politics. Some women aspirants are beaten and attacked by groups and gangs causing serious harm to the women with more being insulted and threatened through text messages, phone calls or even face-to-face verbal threats. Men in Nyamira County have for years used violence as a tool frightening women from the public sphere (OnyarO.I., 2012 and Mitullah, 2003). She notes that negative stereotyping against women seeking political leadership from the Gusii community is yet to change its cultural mindset about women’s leadership with majority holding a view of women from the community were not yet ripe for political leadership especially in the National Assembly.
Though majority of women from the Gusii community vied for different seats in the just concluded General Elections, retrogressive cultural mind-set hampered their bid to capture the positions. The traditional view that women should concentrate on their domestic roles has made politics to be seen as a ‘no go zone’ for them. Women continue to be socialized to believe that it is only men who can take up political leadership. According to Moikobu (O.I. 2012), a woman who takes up such challenges is said to be a bad woman. In fact, most of the women in Nyamria who have tried their hand in politics have been branded as divorces and men-bashers (Moikobu, O.I 2012, Kamau, 2003). This name calling discourages other women from getting into politics. They continue to get discouraging comments such as politics is dirty, it is not good for any good woman of good moral standing, it is too violent, one requires a lot of money, who can vote for a woman?, Who wants to be led by a woman?, We are not yet ready for women leaders (ibid). Such perceptions may also influence the way women view themselves as leaders and, indeed, the way the general public view their leadership abilities.

The shambolic party primaries that preceded the elections, inadequate information on the position of women representative’s seat and candidate’s marital status conspired to deny women leadership positions. “The issue of the women representative’s seat provided for in the constitution was used by male aspirants to create an impression that women should not contest for any other political seat as they had already been awarded theirs by law,” observes Otachi (O.I; 18.5.12).

At the same time Otachi points out that financial constraint were a major challenge during the campaigns as they relied on family resources, support from well-wishers and personal savings to finance campaigns. While election laws prohibit voter-buying/bribing, Otachi says that the campaigns were a display of financial mighty among
various candidates, influencing the electorate to demand for cash hand-outs from aspirants.

Advancing the same view Kamau (2008) observes that lack of resources works against the aspiration of many women to run for political office. For women, to participate effectively in the political process substantial amounts of resources are required. These include finances, time, infrastructure and people. Of these resources required, finances are the most difficult to access (Otachi O.I. 2012 and Kamau, 2008).

Otachi (O.I; 18.5.12) laments incidents of voter-buying which influenced the voting patterns and final results as well as the electorates’ choice of leaders. It compromised the electorates’ democratic right to choose leaders based on politics and ability to deliver on the political position they are seeking. “Hand-outs played a major role in the campaigns and the electorate expected to receive cash hand-outs and thus ignored candidates if they failed to hint that they will part with something after addressing them,” she recalls (Chori, 2005).

Many women do not only lack basic education but also have inadequate political training that can enable them participate effectively in the political arena. This leads to a situation where women are not taken seriously even when they declare their candidature (Oduol, 2008).

On the other hand politicians have for decades exploited the local women’s poverty situation and misused them in political campaigns and elections. Any normal mind gets disturbed when he or she sees poor women from the local communities with young children strapped on their backs dancing to politicians the whole day during electioneering campaigns to give them a hand-out of Kshs.50 as a token. “What is
Kshs.50 for a woman with children to feed, buy clothes and take to school?” (Onyari, O.I. 2012 and Agbalajobi, 2009).

Thus, campaign financing is one area where Nyamira women are at a structural disadvantage relative to men. Political campaigns are notoriously expensive and Nyamira women who as a group have lower income than men and fewer economic resources are not likely to have the financial resources necessary to mount expensive political campaigns (ibid).

Another factor that goes against women’s aspiration for political office is lack of media visibility. It has been noted that the power of the media in building credibility and influence in politics is formidable and yet women struggle to receive media coverage and legitimacy in the eyes of the public. This may have to do with the fact that the media may not regard women issues as newsworthy. The media works against the interests of women when it fails to air important matters that concern them and their achievements, and also when it focuses only on their weaknesses as leaders. On this the media becomes biased against women when it fails to embrace gender neutral language that does not promote barriers against women such as glorification of conflict intimidation, negative attitudes and stereotype by society and lack of support from the electorate (Nyamato, O.I 2012 and Nyokabi, 2003).

The Gusii electorate has for decades lived with the reputation of never electing a woman to parliament since independence. This is chiefly due to patriarchal pressures that reign supreme in the community. Giving men a higher social status over females has crept into public life, which reflects in County activities. The family plays an important role in maintaining this patriarchal order across generations. The socialization of children to expect and accept different roles in life has created a social mechanism for the
development of values that engender the several forms of discrimination against the female gender. Thus, by the time children start school, they already have a deeply imbued sense of what it means to be male and female in society. Accordingly, the length of time men have enjoyed dominance over women has made women to take it for granted especially in the area of politics that often continue to stereotype women and justify their subordination. Therefore, patriarchal together with the oppressive cultural traditions have been cited as some of the reasons underpinning Abagusii women’s exclusion from political participation (Okemwa, 2002).

Lack of a gender support structure that could help increase Kenyan women’s visibility in terms of voicing their concerns and inclusion in policy and decision making can be attributed to a lack of sustained women’s movements in Kenya (Kiragu, 2006). This has been the case despite the fact that there have been some women’s organizing movements from the pre-colonial period up until the time of carrying out this research. Under the above circumstances and the general marginalization of women by the male dominated leadership, they were therefore unable to shape electoral party decisions especially at the nomination stage. This was evident especially in 2002 party nominations when several women were sacrificed by their political parties at the party nomination stage in the run up to the election in favour of men (Nzomo, 2003).

The male dominated parliament like the one prevailing in Kenya continue to block any agenda that seems to address issues that specifically affect women. For instance, when one considers the bulk of work being done by women in Kenya generally and Nyamira County specifically, they are literally the backbone of our economy, a fact acknowledged by President Kibaki (Kamau, 2003 and O.I. Omanga, 2012). It is sad that all their efforts are left at the doorstep of policy makers who happen to be men and without their will
none of the issues get addressed. Unless women get their space in politics there will be no good Samaritans amongst the men to save them (Kamau, 2003).

The dismal performance of Kenya in regard to women’s representation in political leadership, despite having pioneered and provided leadership to the post-1990 multi-party women empowerment programmes in East African region, continue to raise concern both at the level of theory and praxis. It has been argued that Kenya has some unique aspects that continue to keep the numbers of women in politics low, such as lack of an affirmative law, and the gender insensitive male political cultures, which continue to dominate key social and political institutions (Nyamato, O.I 2012 and Yoon, 2004).

5.7 **SUMMARY**

In this chapter we have discussed the participation of women in political processes in Nyamira County during Kibaki’s era and the empowerment of women socially, economically and politically during this period. It has been noted that President Kibaki saw education as the ultimate empowering tool of any nation’s youth and the equalizer that gives young people a fighting chance in life. Unlike the previous the President Kibaki supported education of the girl child through sensitization and conducive legislative framework.

It has also been noted that factors that hinder women from political participation, ignorance, patriarchal tendencies, culture of electoral violence and masculine party manifestos are the major factors. Due to patriarchal tendencies the electoral playing field has always been titled heavily in favour of men locking out women.

It has also been observed that the establishment of Women Enterprise Fund helped to empower women economically. This had positive effects on women as many of them including the rural women, were able to make more independent decisions after receiving
the fund. In Nyamira County women were able to purchase health and educational services for their children and to purchase family property and even some were able to stand for elective positions.

It has also been noted that President Kibaki issued a directive requiring that 30 percent of all appointments, recruitments and promotions in public and private service be reserved for women. Following this decree, there has been an increase of women in key appointments. In Nyamira County a number of public institutions like primary and secondary schools are headed by women.

It has also been observed that the new constitution came to fruition with the promulgation of the new constitution in the year 2010 during President Kibaki’s tenure. The new constitution guarantees women rights that were previously absent. It promises women more political and democratic space. Now Nyamira County has a woman Alice Chae in the National Assembly, and nine women nominated into the County Assembly.
CHAPTER SIX
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.0 INTRODUCTION

This study set out to examine the participation of women in politics in Nyamira County from 1963 to 2013. It has been argued that despite women constituting more than half of the Kenya’s population, political representation and participation has been an uphill task throughout Kenya generally and in particular Nyamira County. It has also been noted that in Gusii land particularly in Nyamira County, women participated fully in political spheres together with men before the advent of Europeans. Their roles and responsibilities might have been different but not inferior to those of men. The roles of men and women were complementary in nature. The society recognized their participation and the aspect of age determined what roles a woman was to play in society. For instance, older women who had gained power by dint of the number of their sons and daughters-in-law were often in-charge of negotiation between fighting parties. They were also charged with punishing of young women who misbehaved, whereby the wrongdoer had to pay several baskets of finger millet to the culprit depending on the wrong done. In problematising the analysis an integrative approach was preferred. Capitalism as a branch of Marxist feminist and gender as a tool of analysis were employed.

6.1 GENDER AND CAPITALISM: PRE-COLONIAL NYAMIRA

It was argued in chapter two that the pre-colonial Gusii community was designed in such a way that although men and women performed separate tasks, the worth of these duties was given equal recognition. The concept of superiority between the two sexes was therefore no-existence. As men were engaged in leadership responsibilities in the society, women concentrated on advising councils of elders and in educating their children. In
cases where disputes were to be settled, among wrongdoers in the society, women were consulted and their decisions respected. Both men and women also participated in the day-to-day community activities. As concerning farming, as men tilled land women followed them planting seeds. During harvesting season, men harvested maize while women took the harvest home and put it in the harvest home and put it in the granaries. In trade both men and women were involved. Women were engaged in the purchase and sale of cereals, vegetables, herbs and eggs while men bought and sold animals such as cows, sheep and goats. This division of labour ensured that there was no discrimination against any of the sexes. These roles were complementary to each other. Thus the society had designed each role as per the capabilities of its members and the aspect of age determined what roles each individual was to play in society.

Although no discrimination was reported, men quite often considered women as inferior because they paid dowry to marry them. This made them act as superior within their households and could hence give orders on who was to do what and when. With the advent of colonialism in Kenya in 1894, and the ultimate introduction of capitalism and invention of private property, the independence of women was altered and most household duties were left to them. As already discussed, the colonial system with its attendant forces was exploitative and oppressive. With its Victorian ideology colonists considered the place of women to be the kitchen while that of men as the public. They therefore relegated women to the periphery as they were considered their appendages. The place of Nyamira County women was deconstructed and their independence denied. They were to rely on men for their needs and were therefore not to engage in public activities. The introduction by colonialists of the public and private spheres meant that women were not to join trade unions and other organizations that were redeemed
political. Women were left out to perform domestic duties. Therefore, the division of labour that the colonialists introduced reflected a gender gap, which was not resolved at independence. Europeans also tried to force the natives to discard their valued traditions. For instance, the missionaries wanted the Gusii women to do away with clitoridectomy and polygamy, which the Gusii considered a fabric of their culture that could not be discarded. This resulted into antagonism between the missionaries and the Gusii who rioted against what they considered an abuse to their customs. The missionaries on the other hand refused to offer training to the circumcised girls. The study however established that Gusii continued practicing their customs. In early 1900s led by the Gusii prophetess Moraa Ng’iti, the Gusii revolted against the whitemen in which she was arrested. Moraa was severely reprimanded and set free due to her advanced age. This action must be seen as an attempt to reassert Gusii administration against colonialism. During these revolts Nyamira women actively participated by providing food and medicine to the injured warriors. Their participation in these independence struggles however did not change their status and they therefore remained marginalized by men in the society. It has also been observed that Nyamira women just like other women elsewhere in Africa did not welcome the European concept of patriarchalism and Victorianism. Most of them continued trading with their neighbours in the locality as well as with other communities including the Luo and the Kipsigis. The study has finally established that by the time Kenya was gaining independence, these women had organized themselves into welfare groups. Colonial administrators’ wives had also started the MYWO, which most Gusii women rejected due to its association with colonialism.

As it has been argued, the attainment of independence in Kenya did not translate into a better political place for Gusii women whose relative position in politics was better
before the advent of colonialism. Although women were granted voting rights and could vie for any political post, the patriarchal nature and roles that they were expected by the society to perform could not allow them. They remained marginalized even after fighting to chase the British from the area. In addition, they continued to undertake the duties that men had abandoned as they left home in search of jobs. These doubled the responsibilities left them with little or no time to participate in politics as they had earlier done.

When President Moi took over power from President Jomo Kenyatta, majority of the women groups particularly in Nyamira County had flourished as there was tea boom. Their monthly contributions had also doubled from around twenty to fifty shillings. In the county, women were selling cereals, animal feeds as well as animals. The establishment of the Women’s Bureau and the Declaration of 1975 as the International Women’s Year had generally proved a forward-looking step towards the emancipation of women. The society generally had begun to look at women as active members whose ideas in the development of the country could not be ignored. They were no longer to be viewed as appendages of men. Although not much was achieved particularly at the local level during the early year of the establishment of such a body and the declaration of 1975-1985 as the women’s decade, President Moi took over power at a time when women were beginning to be enlightened through such forums as education and in their formal groups. As it has been observed, just like the former President, Moi did not have any regard for women and as such he did not mention women in his development agenda. Therefore, the attempted Coup de tat in 1982 resulted in a decreased involvement by women in the establishment groups and organizations.
It should be noted here that although women did not actively participate in the 1982 Coup, leaders considered them part of it since their fathers, brothers and/or husbands participated in the attempt to overthrow the government. Women thus declined in their group participation more so because of the poverty caused by drought and the diminishing boom from coffee.

After the declaration by male leaders that women were supposed to be assisted by men in their endeavours, men took advantage and exacerbated their exploitation of women. Patriarchy was to be further solidified when the institution of bride wealth was commercialized. It was Moi’s era that witnessed an increase in the number of animals to be paid as bride wealth. To make matters worse in Nyamira County, the number of animals to be given as bride wealth were converted into money at the market rate then given to the bride’s family. Women were exempted from the discussions of bride wealth as men considered themselves as sole heads of their families. The society became insensitive to women during such debates and women were further marginalized. However, the end of the women’s decade in 1985 witnessed an improved awareness by women of their rights. The adoption by most governments of the convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which became operational in the early 1980, meant that most governments including Kenya, had recognized the importance of integrating women in their development agenda.

It has also been noted that Moi era saw an increment in girls' education. The declaration of universal free education in 1979 resulted in most girls enrolling in schools. This increased awareness of their rights through reading such pamphlets and reports as AAWORD that clearly indicated that if development has to be achieved in Africa
generally, women were to be integrated in policy and decision-making organs. The era also witnessed the advent of the second multiparty politics in the 1990s. During this time, women had actively mobilized themselves and had lobbied for the recognition of their rights. Women scholars such as Maria Nzomo had written extensively on the plight of women. Hence the government was aware of the demands of women and during this time Catherine Nyamato was nominated to parliament.

Although few voted for the then women presidential candidate, the fact that 45% of the women voted unlike about 40% in the earlier years meant that women had recognized that they were also capable of leading and influencing the country’s policies through their vote. Towards the end of the Moi regime, most women through civic education lobbying from fellow educated women had become aware of their political rights and were hence willing to vote and generally participate in politics in large numbers. Hence, in Nyamira County almost 56% of the women populace turned out during the 2002 general elections to vote for President Kibaki who they hoped would meet their marginalized demands. Although Kibaki’s government consisted more men than women, it witnessed an increased number of women heading various ministries while others acted as assistant ministers. The nominated women also indicated that the government had probably finally recognized the significance of women in development and hence in governance. Their involvement in the constitutional review process is also a positive trend that cannot be overlooked as the making of the constitution in the 1960s only reported a single woman. But as calls for a comprehensive review of the 1969 constitution intensified in the late 1990s and early 2000s, official and civil society constitution processes led to the adoption of what became known as the “Bomas draft” constitution (after the location of the
conference that adopted it). In Bomas there were a few women from Gusii community among them were Clare Omanga and Wilkista Onsando both from Nyamira County.

It has also been observed that the new constitution came to fruition with the promulgation of the new constitution in the year 2010 during President Kibaki’s tenure. It has also been noted that during Kibaki’s era, the establishment of Women Enterprise Fund helped to empower women economically. Women were able to make more independent decisions due to the empowerment. It has also been observed that it was during Kibaki’s era that education expanded tremendously. Following the introduction of Free Primary Education and Free Day Secondary Education in 2008, the number of universities also increased.

Notwithstanding, it has been noted that women in Nyamira County generally have showed a decreased political involvement despite the efforts by the government and the wider women populace. The reasons for this have been cited as patriarchy, religion, inadequate education, deeply engrained traditions such as commercialization of bride wealth and generally the commercialized nature of politics in Kenya. In addition, it has been established that most party manifestos do not have provisions for gender equality and even for those that have, the provisions only on paper. It has been observed that the participation of women in politics in North Mugirango Constituency is lower than the other three constituencies. This is because of the dominance of the Catholic Church there with its conservative nature as regarding sexuality. Other factors that have been identified include high levels of poverty in the area and the low level enrollment of girls in school.

6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion it has been established generally that women in Nyamira County are increasingly expressing the desire and willingness to participate in the political arena. In
view of the above findings and conclusions the following recommendations are suggested.

The way forward in enhancing generally Kenyan and specifically Nyamira women’s political participation in all spheres, there is need to device strategies to redress their discrimination and inequality. These may include; the government to take corrective measures and affirmative action to redress the gaps and obstacles that hinder women’s equal and full participation in political leadership and decision making focusing attention to the need to overcome social norms, prejudices and practices that negatively portray women in political leadership. The government on the other hand should ensure that electoral laws in place make it an obligation for political parties to adhere to the gender parity principles in appointing or electing representatives to the governance bodies and choosing party candidates at different levels, development or review of their party constitution and manifesto, and the equal involvement of members in the party affairs.

Vigorous sensitization measures should be undertaken for girls and women, and boys and men on the whys and hows of the goal of gender equality so that every girl and woman will understand and appreciate gender equality, internalize these rights and claim their rights and every boy and man will also understand these rights. In the same vein, special training should be developed for parents and teachers on how to apply and teach the values of human rights, equality, especially gender equality and democratic governance in the family and in the schools. More work should be done to also advocate and assist relatively hierarchical institutions like religious organizations on how the values of equality, including gender equality, can be enhanced in their structures, procedures and programmes.
The media plays a critical role in the positive portrayal of women’s political plight through their support of women’s election campaigns and challenging existing typecasts of women.

The government through the IEBC should ensure that the political environment at the local level is conducive for both men and women participation in the democratic processes of the counties by promoting a culture of peace and securing a level playing ground that is free from any form of discrimination, threat and intimidation.

The government through the IEBC should make sure that political parties are engendered in their ideologies, visions, structures, programmes, languages, symbols and images. This will ensure that the electoral laws in place make it an obligation for political parties to adhere to the gender parity principles in appointing or electing representatives to the governance bodies and choosing party candidates at different levels.

The deep-seated oppressive cultural traditions and attitudes towards gender roles in public and private life should be altered through extensive educational and public awareness campaigns if progress is to be made toward equal political representation in the country and Nyamira County as well.

Women should be encouraged to frequently attend social and political gatherings where political information is likely to be shared.

Worthwhile female participation would be enhanced by deliberate electoral reform and constitutional amendments as demonstrated by Rwanda, South Africa, Mozambique and Namibia. Countries that have made progress have either instituted affirmative action or quotas in their constitutions or adopted rules to enforce gender quotas in their dominant
parties. Quotas ensure that women play part in political life. They address the problem of visibility and ensure women are there. In this case, our new constitution offers special seats for women from each county for the first time to represent the women in the national assembly. Nyamira County women are represented by Alice Chae in the national assembly.

Every man and woman in Nyamira County is obliged and should feel free to participate in the political activities of the country and county in order to make it a better place. There is therefore need for civic education to enlighten women to support women into political leadership.

6.3 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This work has investigated the political participation of women in Nyamira County between 1963 and 2013. To achieve this, the document examined the place of Gusii women on the eve of independence and assessed whether political, economic and socio-cultural factors had impacted on their participation. It was noted that pre-colonial Gusii was patriarchal but there were some complementarities. However, the colonialist introduced policies and practices that reinforced the subordination of women.

In analyzing the political participation of women during the reign of Jomo Kenyatta (1963-1978), it was revealed that the granting of independence did not change the state of women in Nyamira County. They remained marginalized, oppressed and subordinated.

The investigation done to find out whether the Moi regime attempted to involve women in Nyamira County established that just like the former president, Moi did not have any place for women. They were marginalized and remained relegated to the periphery in politics and other spheres of life.
Finally, it was established that the Kibaki government made some efforts to enhance the level of political participation of women in Kenya generally and specifically Nyamira County.

Obstacles to Nyamira County women’s political participation with possible strategies have also been discussed in the work. The obstacles include lack of economic power, lack of education, cultural traditions and practices. Some of the strategies include education to the girl-child, economic empowerment to the women just to name a few.

Given the research on political participation of women in Nyamira County, it is suggested that there is need to conduct research, in other counties, conduct research on why women being the majority do not vote their fellow women into elective positions, carry out research on the women’s awareness of the new constitution and what it has for women, conduct research on women’s participation in economic activities in the county and carry out research on the number of girls in different levels of learning institution from the county. If this is done, it will be possible to understand the position of girls/women empowerment in the country given that education of women and girls is very necessary in their empowerment and if empowered they will be able to participate in all spheres of life.
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Sunday Nation, November 2005.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED

<table>
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<tr>
<th>NO.</th>
<th>NAME</th>
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<th>PLACE OF INTERVIEW</th>
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**APPENDIX 2: QUESTION GUIDELINES**

Sex: ☐ Male ☐ Female

Age: ..............................................................................................................................

**Level of Education**

Primary ☐ Secondary ☐ Tertiary ☐

Adult education ☐ University ☐ Illiterate ☐

**Colonial Period**

1. Did women participate in politics in Nyamira County? If yes, describe their participation.................................................................................................

2. What role did women play in political parties or associations?.............................

3. Did they play any role in liberating Kenya?
   a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐

4. How successful were women’s political activities?..................................................

5. Did women face any difficulties in their political activities? If so, explain.
   a) Yes.................................................................
   b) No.................................................................

6. Did men support women in their political activities?
   a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐

7. Did women support one another?
   a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐

8. What aspects of colonialism affected women in their political participation?
   ......................................................................................................................................

9. How did they respond to them?..............................................................................
   ......................................................................................................................................
10. Were there any initiatives taken by men and women to enhance women’s political participation?

POST INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

1. Describe the nature of women’s participation in politics in post-independence period?

2. Which basic changes have taken place in women’s political enrolment since 1963?

3. Did women’s political experiences become better after independence? If so, explain how.
   a) Yes
   b) No

4. Has women’s political involvement improved in any way during and after independence? If any, explain.

5. Are there some cultural, economical, political or relations beliefs that discriminate or promote women’s role in politics?

6. Are women interested in party politics? If so, explain.
   a) Yes
   b) No

7. How popular was women presidential aspirant (Hon. Charity Ngilu) in this area in 1997?

8. How popular is Hon. Martha Karua who has declared aspiration for presidency next general election-2012?

9. Did women vie for political positions during the last two general elections?
   a) Yes  
   b) No

10. What are some of the negative effects of low participation of women in political processes in Nyamira County?
Strategies used to enhance participation of women in political processes in Nyamira County

1. Are there any attempts being made by men or women in this area to increase women’s participation in politics? Are they effective? ..............................................................

2. Are there any women groups in this area? If so, are these centres of political mobilization? Who are the members of these groups? ..............................................................

3. Are there any attempts made by the different regimes to enhance women’s participation in political processes? ..............................................................

4. Do the men support women’s political endeavours? If so, how successful are they?
   a) Yes ..............................................................................................................................
   b) No ..............................................................................................................................

5. Are women interested in politics in this area? If yes, explain.
   a) Yes ..............................................................................................................................
   b) No ..............................................................................................................................

6. What are some of the negative effects of low participation of women in political processes in Nyamira County? ..................................................................................

7. In your own opinion, what can enhance women’s political participation in this area? ..............................................................................................................................

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR THOSE WHO HAVE VIED FOR PARLIAMENTARY OR CIVIC SEATS

Name: .................................................. Age: ..................................................

Sex: Male ☐ Female ☐

Location: .................................................................................................................................

Seat vied for: Civic ☐ Parliamentary ☐

Level of Education

Primary ☐ Tertiary ☐
Secondary ☐ University ☐
Adult education ☐ Illiterate ☐

1. For how long have you been participating in politics?

2. When did you vie for this seat for the first time?

3. Did you face any challenges? If so explain.


6. Do women support one another?

7. Are women involved in any political activities in Nyamira County? If so, how successful are they? Please explain.

8. Are there some cultural, economic, educational, political or relation beliefs that discriminate or promote women’s role in politics?

9. How has low participation of women in politics impacted on women themselves and on the general development of the area?

10. Are there any attempts being made by both men and women in this area to increase women’s participation in politics? Are they effective?

11. In your own opinion, what can enhance women’s political participation in the area?