

Women in Management and Leadership in the Public Service, Kenya a Gender Audit Report for the County Government (2014-2020)

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ABSTRACT

Chapter 12 of Kenya's 2010 Constitution established a transformative framework for local governance, replacing former local government structures with 47 County Governments in 2013. This decentralization aimed to increase democratic participation, enable communities to self-manage, and promote a fairer distribution of resources nationwide. A key component of this framework, Article 27(4), guarantees protection against discrimination for all, including marginalized groups, while emphasizing gender inclusion and equality in governance. County governments are structured with both legislative and executive branches to support effective governance and accountability. The legislative branch, the County Assembly, consists of elected representatives responsible for drafting and passing county-specific laws. The executive branch is led by the Governor and Deputy Governor, with support from County Executive Committee (CEC) Members, who oversee policy implementation, budget management, and the county's development agenda.

This study aimed to evaluate women's representation in County Government decision-making roles from 2014 to 2020, focusing on women's presence across job groups J-T, which range from entry-level to upper management. Through this analysis, the study sheds light on changes in gender representation within county administrations and highlights the progress and challenges in achieving gender equity in leadership and decision-making roles.

Key words: Women's Representation, Decision making, Leadership, Management, Participation, Gender Equality, Equity,

INTRODUCTION

Globally, there is a gender wage gap differential estimated at 23 percent (United Nations 2020; ILO, 2017). The 2018 KNBS report indicated that the modern or formal sector employment had 880,000 women compared

to 1.68 million men in 2016. This indicates that women trail men by 65.6 percentage in formal employment. According to the 2019 Census in Kenya, women comprise 51.2% of the total population and constitute half of Kenya's labor force (KNBS 2019, 2020). Kenya's Vision 2030 and the consequent Sessional Paper No. 10 on Vision 2030 highlight that women are equal players in the social, political and economic pillars of the economy.

Women participate across both the informal and formal employment sectors, although they are more heavily represented in the informal sector, as noted by the McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) report (2015). This high concentration in the informal sector often translates into lower wages, less job security, and fewer opportunities for career advancement. In contrast, increasing women's participation in the formal sector has far-reaching implications, as it can significantly improve their income levels, enhance household livelihoods, and contribute to overall economic growth (Atieno, 2006; KNBS, 2019). Formal employment not only offers more stability and benefits but also provides a pathway for women to gain influence and visibility in the workforce, helping to reshape workplace dynamics and norms in favor of gender equality.

The MGI report (2015) and Nigam (2014) argue that gender inequality within the workforce mirrors the broader social structures and cultural norms of a society. Persistent gender roles and biases often limit women's access to formal employment and higher-paying jobs, reinforcing economic disparities. Additionally, structural inequalities in sectors such as education, health, and finance often impede women's opportunities for economic advancement, locking them into lower-paying, less secure work environments. Addressing these structural barriers is essential for fostering an inclusive workforce where women can access equal opportunities for advancement and economic empowerment.

A significant barrier to women's full economic participation is rooted in their "triple role," as described by Moser. This framework highlights how women often balance reproductive (household and caregiving), productive (income-generating), and community roles, leading to time poverty and reduced access to the resources needed for personal and professional growth. These overlapping responsibilities can hinder their ability to fully engage in formal employment, limiting career progression and perpetuating income inequality. For women, the challenge of managing these multiple roles often results in trade-offs, where career ambitions are sacrificed to meet family obligations or community expectations, further entrenching gender-based economic disparities.

Overcoming these obstacles requires comprehensive policy interventions that support women's entry and advancement in formal employment. Strategies such as expanding access to affordable childcare, promoting family-friendly workplace policies, and investing in targeted training programs can empower women to participate more fully in the formal economy. By addressing the barriers posed by gendered expectations and providing greater institutional support, societies can foster a more inclusive workforce that promotes gender equality and strengthens economic resilience.

Research suggests that women's under-representation in the labor market hampers overall productivity (Ellis, 2007). The McKinsey Global Institute (2015) notes that reducing this gender gap in labor productivity could yield significant benefits, as increased female participation in formal employment has the potential to add around 26 percent to global GDP by 2025. The UN Sustainable Development Goals, along with various international forums, stress the importance of women's empowerment and well-being. While these initiatives aim to reduce longstanding gender inequalities, questions remain about their real impact. A key challenge is effectively measuring women's economic empowerment, which is essential not only for evaluating progress but also for setting benchmarks, understanding different social and economic contexts, and designing policies that identify improvement opportunities to boost productivity and economic growth. Kabeer (1999) highlights that accurate measurement is crucial for assessing projects and policies to support economic advancement. In alignment with these global efforts, the Kenyan government has ratified several international agreements promoting gender equality.

Sessional Paper No. 02 of 2019 addresses gender equality and development, supported by a legislative framework embedded in the Constitution of Kenya 2010. However, despite these legal and policy advances,

women remain significantly under-represented in leadership and management roles within the formal labor market, resulting in a persistent workplace gender gap (KNBS, 2019).

An audit was undertaken to provide data on women’s representation in the public service within Kenya’s County Governments for the period between 2014 and 2020. The goal was to assess progress in gender equity, identify barriers to women's advancement in leadership and management roles, and support evidence-based policies aimed at achieving a sustainable increase in women’s representation. Through this data, the audit sought to inform strategies that can elevate the proportion of women in decision-making positions to 30% by 2025, thereby contributing to gender equality, enhancing economic empowerment, and fostering a more inclusive and equitable public service.

Enhanced participation of women in public service management is acknowledged as a crucial factor in advancing their economic empowerment (UN Women, 2018). Following the study’s findings, recommendations were developed for institutions and organizations responsible for implementing policies to support this goal, particularly the

Objective of the Study

To establish the representation of women in leadership and management in the County Government of Kenya between 2014 and 2020.

Research Question

What was the representation of women in leadership and management in the County Government in Kenya between 2014 and 2020?

METHODOLOGY

Quantitative data was obtained from the Ministry of State for Public Service, (Integrated Payroll and Personnel Database - IPPD, 2010-2021). Using this data the study sought to establish the representation of women in the laid-out decision making positions within the County governments for the period between 2014 to 2010. The study looked at the representation of women within job groups J-T (Entry level management positions to Upper-level management positions).

FINDINGS

The representation of women in leadership and management in the County Government of Kenya between 2014 and 2020.

Demographic characteristics of employees

(a) Distribution of employees by Gender

1. Proportions of Women at Entry Management Level (Job groups J-L) (2014-2020)

Then study sought to establish the representation of both men and women at the entry management level positions.

Table 1: Distribution of employees by gender - Job Group J-L

Year	2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
J	656	911	706	1027	730	1145	732	1187	730	1180	809	1434	1158	1826
K	979	2050	1008	2011	905	1721	802	1284	825	1286	771	1224	765	1257

L	870	1104	869	1113	873	1290	779	1413	744	1398	719	1361	665	1218
Total	2505	4065	2583	4151	2508	4156	2313	3884	2299	3864	2299	4019	2588	4301

Women are seen to dominate job group J-L between 2014 and 2020 with the highest numbers being registered in 2016 at 4156(62.4%) compared to the highest number of men recorded at 2588(37.6%) within the same period (2014-2020).

2.Proportions of Women in Middle Management Level (Job groups M-P) (2014-2020)

Table 2: Distribution of employees by gender - Job group M-P

YEAR	2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
M	312	284	355	325	374	388	552	669	580	690	576	673	524	709
N	260	196	309	204	295	195	363	293	356	287	359	303	418	403
P	192	110	98	69	85	73	105	92	95	93	86	83	112	124
TOTAL	764	590	762	598	754	656	1020	1054	1031	1070	1021	1059	1054	1236

In 2014, 2015, and 2016, the number of women in middle management was lower than that of men. This trend reversed in 2017, 2018, and 2020, with women surpassing men in representation, though there was a slight decline in 2019, from 1,070 (51%) to 1,059 (50.1%). Women’s highest representation occurred in 2020, reaching 1,236 (53.9%). In contrast, men's representation showed a gradual decrease between 2014 and 2016 but then rose slightly, from 1,020 (49.1%) in 2017 to 1,031 (49.2%) in 2018. Men's highest number was recorded in 2020, at 1,054, though it remained lower than that of women in this category. County governments appear to be working towards meeting the two-thirds gender rule in middle management positions (Job groups M-P).

3.Proportions of Women in Upper Management level (Q-T)

Table 3: Distribution of employees by gender - Job Group Q-T

YEAR	2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Q	73	41	93	52	76	49	77	53	93	57	114	71	129	80
R	58	16	76	24	80	30	84	42	86	42	87	42	82	40
S	26	8	39	13	40	14	37	13	27	10	35	12	35	12
T	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	3	0	3	0	2	0
Total	157	66	208	90	197	93	198	108	209	109	239	125	248	132

The audit data revealed a significant decrease in the number of women in upper management (levels Q-T). Throughout the period studied (2014–2020), men consistently held the majority of decision-making roles at this level. In 2015, the number of men sharply rose to 208 from 157 the previous year. Although there was a slight decline in 2016, with the number falling to 197, it then steadily increased, reaching 248 by 2020.

Ironically, during the same period, the total number of women in upper management steadily increased from 2014 to 2020, rising from 66 to 132, with the majority concentrated in job groups Q-S. The lowest representation was in job group T, where only one woman held the most senior position in 2014 and 2015. Despite this growth, women’s numbers remained lower than those of their male counterparts throughout the period. This highlights that county governments have yet to achieve the full inclusion envisioned by Kenya’s 2010 Constitution. Many counties still struggle to provide women with equal opportunities, making gender inclusion largely theoretical and constrained by persistent patriarchal norms. Consequently, women, including those in special interest groups, remain underrepresented in key decision-making roles.

(b) Education Level by Gender

Table 4: Distribution of employees by gender and education

YEAR	2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Bachelors	816	952	758	877	762	848	834	918	912	1016	923	1016	899	962
Masters	52	69	64	86	63	81	66	88	65	92	66	92	72	93
Doctorate	4	9	4	8	4	6	3	4	1	10	0	10	3	10
Postgrad Dip	16	17	17	19	16	15	15	15	14	14	14	14	16	14
Total	888	1047	843	990	845	950	918	1025	992	1132	1003	1132	990	1079

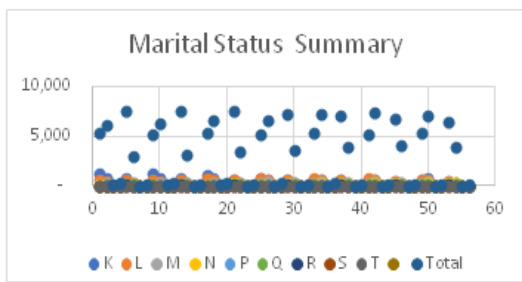


Figure 1: Distribution of employees by gender and education

County data (IPPD, 2020) indicates a gender disparity in educational attainment, with more men than women holding higher educational qualifications between 2014 and 2020. Across the period, men consistently outnumbered women in bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees. Specifically, there were 5,904 women (47.2%) compared to 6,589 men (52.7%) with bachelor’s degrees. At the master’s level, 601 men (57.3%) held degrees compared to 448 women (42.7%). In terms of doctorates, men significantly outpaced women, with twice as many men (9) as women (4) holding doctorates in 2014, and by 2018, only one woman held a doctorate compared to 10 men. This imbalance likely contributes to the absence of women in upper management roles (job group T) from 2016 to 2020.

This trend underscores ongoing educational disparities that limit women’s representation in senior positions. The gap in advanced degrees restricts women’s access to high-level decision-making roles, reinforcing structural barriers to gender equity in leadership. Bridging this educational divide is essential for increasing women’s visibility and influence in county-level leadership and aligning with constitutional goals of gender parity.

(c) Marital Status (Married)

Table 5: Marital status

Year	2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
J	415	464	476	468	499	465	508	449	501	432	559	424	626	486
K	1212	716	1171	719	996	644	696	553	652	539	613	490	576	464
L	596	582	593	590	710	605	790	547	773	512	746	485	651	423
M	85	151	97	168	104	157	269	259	277	274	273	262	339	287
N	84	126	95	182	88	185	106	200	99	192	95	188	132	214

P	22	68	14	53	21	46	20	57	20	48	21	45	31	42
Q	22	43	27	55	24	47	27	46	30	52	29	61	30	65
R	5	41	8	54	10	58	13	67	16	66	18	65	19	61
S	5	12	9	24	10	26	9	24	2	18	3	22	2	21
T	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	1
Total	2447	2203	2491	2313	2463	2233	2438	2202	2370	2135	2357	2044	2406	2064

Over the seven-year period, the number of married men and women remained relatively stable, but the number of single women steadily increased, surpassing that of single men. In 2014, there were 6,056 single women, rising gradually to 6,270 in 2015, 6,545 in 2016, and 6,653 in 2017. This upward trend continued with 7,235 single women in 2018 and 7,448 in 2019, before a slight decrease to 7,109 in 2020.

This trend suggests a shifting demographic in the workforce, with a growing representation of single women. This increase could reflect changing social dynamics, where more women are pursuing careers and independence, contributing to greater gender diversity in the workplace. However, it also points to potential challenges, such as the need for policies that address the unique economic and social support needs of single women in the workforce, ensuring they have equal opportunities for growth and advancement.

CONCLUSION

Women are heavily represented at entry-level management in county government, but their numbers drop significantly in middle and upper management roles. Likewise, the proportion of women with advanced educational qualifications declines at higher management levels. Interestingly, single women are more often found in senior management, whereas married women are more concentrated in lower job levels. Enhancing the representation, quality, and equity of women in the public sector is essential for delivering effective services, as it addresses the intersecting factors of gender, professional roles, and economic empowerment. Given its influence, the public sector can play a pivotal role in setting standards and shifting norms toward greater gender equality across the broader labor market.

This underscores the importance of promoting policies that support women’s progression into higher management roles and invest in their educational advancement. By leveraging its substantial reach, the public sector can drive systemic change, creating a more inclusive and equitable work environment that benefits both public service and the wider workforce.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Public Service Commission should strengthen efforts to fully implement the two-thirds gender rule to effectively reduce the gender gap and work toward equal representation (50:50) across all areas of public service.

1. It is essential to investigate why women are predominantly found in lower-level positions in county government while men hold most senior, decision-making roles.
2. A closer analysis of the workplace environment is needed to understand how it may advantage men in pursuing higher education and advancement, often leading to better promotion opportunities, while women may lack equivalent support.
3. The rising trend of single women in public service requires exploration to identify the factors driving this pattern.
4. An evaluation of the implementation of the National Policy on Gender and Development within county governments is necessary to assess its effectiveness and identify areas for improvement.

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