

Representation, Voice and Empowerment: Towards gender outcomes in Uganda's Local Governance Decision-Making Processes

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Abstract

As part of the wider global effort to 'liberate' women from historically and culturally rooted social injustices, Uganda in 1997 enacted a law in which one-third of every local government (LG) council is reserved for female representatives. This move increased the number of elected female representatives in LG councils and promised to eliminate the hitherto male-dominated spaces of decision-making. Given its two decades of implementation, we examine the extent to which this initiative in Uganda has influenced gender inclusion in democratic decision-making processes and the contextual factors influencing its effectiveness. Data was collected from six LG units in western Uganda using mixed methods. Results revealed a 2:1 male-to- female ratio of representation, indicative of a positive step, but LG Council deliberations remain largely gender-neutral. Without affirmative action, LGs in Uganda would almost obviously be male-dominated. We conclude that female quotas for LG councils provide a space that could be more extensively used to address gender imbalances. Actions beyond filling the female quota, such as regular community dialogues and sensitisation on the mandate of their representatives have been given less attention. Yet, these remain critical demand- side imperatives for gender inclusiveness, representation, empowerment, and voice.

Keywords: *Gender, Female quota, Representation, Empowerment, Local Government, Uganda*

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Introduction

The growth and universalisation of women's representation in political and organisational structures are well-founded in the inclusive development literature and debates (Gupta et al., 2015; Hickey et al., 2015; Hickey 2013). For over three decades now, there has been a steady growth in popularisation of gender as a development concept, even more specifically gender-responsive and inclusive economics, politics, or democratisation. The main thrust of this interest and debate is based on the growth in evidence that culturally rooted gender inequalities in diverse parts of the world and local communities greatly account for what we see as limited progress in processes of social, political, and economic change. The fifth sustainable development goal focuses on gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls, as critical means through which social and economic development and transformation can be achieved. Among its nine targets, the goal emphasises ensuring full participation by women in leadership and decision-making (United Nations, 2018). Similarly, the third Millennium Development Goal had equally emphasised increasing the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments as one of the progress indicators. And, despite the slow progress, 22 percent of all national parliamentarians were by 2015 female, rising from 11.3% in 1995 (UN-Women, 2015).

One of the very initial efforts to promote gender equality is traced to the famous to the 1945 charter of the United Nations, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (UN-Women, 1979). The CEDAW has since become a reference point in the quest for gender equality. The popularly held assumption in the advocacy endeavor for increased representation of women in political and organisational leadership is also, arguably, an outcome of the theoretical and practice debates around gender mainstreaming that became popular in policy circles during the first decade of the third millennium (Dally, 2005). Gender mainstreaming as an approach to achieving gender equality seeks to 'institutionalise equality by embedding gender-sensitive practices and norms in the structures, processes, and environment of public policy' (Daly, 2005:435). It aims at ensuring that gender perspectives and the goal of gender equality, fundamentally become part of public policy development and implementation, legislation, resource allocation, policy, and program monitoring (Walby, 2005; Moser, 2005).

Gender mainstreaming has also been used as a means, or measure of good governance and inclusive development (Umukoro and Egbai, 2016; Grosser & Moon, 2005; Phillips, 2005). When decision-making

processes and outcomes of public or private organisations are inclusive and participatory, allowing the needs and aspirations of both men and women to be considered, such practices become good governance practices (Graham et al., 2003). This paper contributes to the debates on whether interventions that promote gender representation in leadership structures translate into good governance outcomes.

Gender-inclusive local government decision-making processes as a good governance discourse entered the limelight in Uganda when the National Resistance Movement (NRM) came to power in 1986. It has been argued that the NRM provided a fertile ground for women's movements to flourish in Uganda (Tripp, 2002), and this may in part be reflected in key legislations undertaken under the NRM leadership, that seek to promote gender equality. For example, Article 3 paragraph VI of the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda states that: "The state shall ensure gender balance and fair representation of marginalised groups on all constitutional and other bodies". The later enactment of the local government statute of 1989, which was subsumed into the Local Government Act of 1997, and the National Gender Policy of 2007 were also important steps towards promoting women's involvement in governance. Gender mainstreaming has even become a requirement for both donor and central government funding in which local government

programs or projects that appear to be lacking indicators of gender mainstreaming are penalised. The Gender and Equity Budgeting initiative spearheaded by the Equal Opportunities Commission and Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development (MFPED) makes it mandatory for local governments and other government ministries and departments to carry out gender budgeting as a legal requirement (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2017).

Given their proximity to people at the grass-roots level, local governments as frontline service providers always have a comparative advantage in meeting the needs of the marginalised, impacting on women's lives, and are best placed to respond faster to them (Salga, 1998 in Maharaj, 2004). Subsequently, they are also best placed to measure the impacts and outcomes of their interventions or programs on the communities they serve and where necessary seek community views and opinions on service delivery. Local governments are also effective engines for planning and resource utilisation. Since the enactment of the Local Government Act (1997), a new wave of local governance exists in Uganda, which gives women an opportunity through legislation, to occupy 30 percent of the seats in local councils. The quota was in fact, a deliberate effort to empower the hitherto marginalised women to effectively influence processes and outcomes of local government

business. The overall impact of this legislation was expected to result in a significant and progressive improvement in the well-being of women. But, the important question remains as to how this opportunity is bearing real benefits for women.

In this study, we assessed the extent to which decision-making in local government councils in Uganda has been made more gender inclusive. We also sought to establish contextual factors that augment or constrain the efficacy of female representatives in gender-inclusive democratic decision-making in grassroots councils. We present and discuss findings on the extent to which local council deliberations and decisions are responsive to gender. We also analyse individual and institutional constraints to engendered decision-making and conclude by highlighting complementary and contextual strategies for engendering processes and outcomes of local government decision-making.

Theorising Empowerment, Voice and Representation

Empowerment is the capacity to make strategic and meaningful choices by those who have previously been denied this capacity but in ways that do not merely reproduce, and may indeed actively challenge the structures of gender inequality (Kabeer, 2017). The aim is to enable those previously denied the ability to make strategic life choices to acquire such ability to inspire

collective action and decision-making (Eerdewijk, Wong, Vaast, Newton, Tyszler, & Pennington, 2017; Kabeer, 1999). Empowerment is a collective social rather than an individual process of change that transforms power relations through building critical consciousness (Eerdewijk, Wong, Vaast, Newton, Tyszler, & Pennington, 2017; Cornwall, 2016). It thus challenges relations of power and institutional structures, which gives individual women or groups of women a voice and agency in confronting dependency, deprivation, coercion, manipulation, and control (Kabeer, 2016; Cornwall, 2016; Hanmer & Klugman, 2016; Porter, 2012; Kaur, 2010).

As a facet of agency alongside consciousness and action, voice captures one's ability to bargain, effectively reflecting power and authority (Kabeer, 2010). It also captures one's ability to initiate, enter, or exit a bargaining session by expressing their interests and articulating their opinions (Eerdewijk, Wong, Vaast, Newton, Tyszler, & Pennington, 2017; Paterson, 2011; Kabeer, 2010). Voice is impacted by social norms that may determine who speaks, what to speak about, and to what effect the speech is (Paterson, 2011). The capacity to voice depends on the resources the individual can mobilise (Kabeer, 2010). Voice shapes decisions, lives, and futures privately and publicly (Eerdewijk, Wong, Vaast, Newton, Tyszler, & Pennington, 2017). Voice can positively or negatively impact

representation. According to Potke (1997), representation in politics plays a crucial role in shaping both positive and negative aspects of governance. It allows authorised agents to act on behalf of others, based on reliable communication and decision-making that binds the represented individual. This representation is vital for the development of democratic practices and capacities. However, it relies on the agency of the principal, who selects a representative and seeks recognition from others in this political relationship. Additionally, the context of representation matters, as choices involve balancing gains and losses in specific situations. In interest representation, citizens aim to clarify their preferences, while representatives strive to pursue those interests and expand participation, communication, and effective involvement of previously marginalised groups. However, these efforts face resistance from those who perceive politics as already complex or view such expansions as undesirable.

Methodology

Using the mixed methods research approach in a concurrently triangulated design (Creswell & Clark, 2007), qualitative and quantitative data were collected from two urban and two rural local councils in two districts of Bushenyi and Kasese in western Uganda. The two districts had opposite ratings in local government performance. Bushenyi had been rated one of the best performers while Kasese was among the worst.

They were also within proximity to each other and had distinct cultural and economic set-ups. A total of 114 (22 percent women) out of 124 local councilors were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire. The variables of interest included the experiences of the councilors about gender and affirmative action performance, achievements and challenges in representing constituencies, and specifically in influencing gender-related processes and outcomes of decision-making. Eight focus group discussions with the community (four in each of the districts) were held to obtain views on the performance of area council representatives in promoting gender-inclusive governance. In addition, analysis of documents from two key ministries, the Ministry of Local Government, and Government, and the Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development was undertaken. The review of available documents explored critical factors at the macro, meso, and micro levels that influenced gender-inclusive decision-making in local government councils. The documents reviewed included the equity promotion strategy paper, the National Women's Council Act Chapter 318, the National Local Government Capacity Building Policy 2005, and the National Gender Policy 2007. To examine gender participation in council deliberations and the gendered nature of deliberations, two sets of minutes of local government council meetings for both Kasese and Bushenyi districts were reviewed. The

minutes were retrieved from council files and analysed for the period 1998–1999 and nine years later (2007–2008) to ascertain possible changes. Finally, four civil society organisations were purposively selected and consulted to garner a more independent and expert opinion on issues of women’s representation and gender outcomes. Quantitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with local government councilors was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Scientists, while qualitative data was analysed using thematic and content analysis techniques.

Findings

The findings show that in both periods under study, there was an overall average male-to-female participation ratio of 2:1 in council meetings. There was also no discernible difference in terms of gender participation in council deliberations in the period immediately after the enactment of the Local Government Act (1997) and ten years later (see Table 1). Female councilors and some of the civil servants interviewed also reiterated that the burden on female representatives was heavy, suggesting that the law should aim at equal representation if it has to achieve greater results for women, as one respondent from Bushenyi district local government observed:

‘Female councilors seem to be having a bigger burden than their male counterparts...they represent two sub-counties while male councilors are in

charge of one each...even female members of parliament are in charge of the entire district, in which you can find more than three constituencies represented by male members of parliament. This ideally should mean more support and facilitation for the female councilors, or members of parliament’

The review of a sample of minutes in local governments revealed limited gender sensitivity in council deliberations. Out of the slightly over twenty issues discerned from the reviewed minutes in both periods under study, was found to have been raised by a female member of the council, and none directly addressed an intrinsically gendered social injustice. The major issues discussed in the minutes of both study periods focused on generic issues of local government service delivery. The limited number of issues tabled for discussion both at district and lower-level councils were mainly gender-neutral and informed by the broader national policy frameworks (see Table 2 and Table 3). The minutes were also, to a large extent, characterised by the presentation of activity reports from different technical committees or departments as well as statements from key local government leaders, notably, Resident District Commissioners (RDCs) and District/Sub-county chairpersons. Such statements mainly covered the general state and environment of public service delivery and related logistical issues, employment contracts and

appointments, budget proposals and annual work plans, procurement issues, development plans, as well as human security.

A comparative assessment of Kasese and Bushenyi districts and lower-level councils did not reveal detectable differences in gender responsiveness of local government council deliberations or decisions between the two study periods (1988/89 and 2007/2008). Similarly, based on the findings from councilors' self-assessment, there was no difference between old and new local government councilors in terms of capacity to influence gender-responsive council deliberations during the two periods under study, nor were there noticeable differences in terms of gender participation (numbers) and gender-responsive deliberations. In Bushenyi district, however, we found some evidence of council decisions aimed at enhancing the well-being of women, with concerns raised about the education of female children in the review period 1998-1999 and improved maternity services for expectant mothers for the 2007-2008 period (see Tables 1 and 2). Thus, to some extent, a local government's performance along other parameters such as efficiency in the utilisation of central government grants and financial accounting may enhance its potential for gender-responsive decision-making. While it is true that Bushenyi district has had a good record of performance relative to other local governments in the country, it is still hard to determine

whether a positive relationship exists between general local government performance and gender sensitivity of local government council deliberations and their outcomes; our findings only point to a positive trajectory on which more empirical evidence can be built.

Key constraints to gendered processes and outcomes of local government decision-making were found at both the institutional and individual levels. At the individual level, the constraints consisted of varied knowledge and interpretations of the term 'gender' and the female quota among councilors, the motives behind taking up the responsibilities and self-perception of achievements remotely related to gender advocacy and mainstreaming, as well as limited experiences of councilors in politics. At the institutional level, inadequate logistical and financial support and facilitation of female councilors, vis-a-vis large-size female constituencies, and limited capacity building were also identified as key constraints.

The inquiry on councilors' understanding of the term 'gender' and processes of gender-inclusive governance as a proxy measure of their potential to pursue gender-sensitive local government decisions revealed that the majority (44 percent) had the correct understanding of the concept 'gender', that is, 'ensuring equal opportunities for both women and men'. On the other hand, 38 percent understood the term as sex differences between men and

women, while 15% understood gender as referring to ‘women’s issues or concerns’ (see Table 4). All the councilors were conversant with the legislation concerning reserving $\frac{1}{3}$ of all council seats for women and viewed the participation of both male and female councilors as critical in building gender equality through the generation of gender-sensitive decisions and having these reflected in local government development plans, programs or services.

Based on their individual experiences, 76 percent of councilors and other local government personnel agreed that adherence to the quota increasingly contributed to gender-sensitive leadership and decision-making. They all felt that without such a quota, women would not have been elected and subsequently denied the opportunity to participate. Affirmative action is key in bringing women to the decision-making table by granting them an assured percentage of the legislators in the councils. Whereas their presence may not be enough to alter the decision-making processes to always generate gendered outcomes, it provides an opportunity for women to deliberate on matters that they choose to be part of. A study among European countries by Beauregard (2017) showed that countries with quotas for women had a reduction in gender gaps for some political activities, despite glaring challenges to achieving more desirable gender outcomes. Related to this, our study found some misgivings among participants

regarding whether women who make it to local government councils were committed and able to change the situation of women in their respective constituencies. The general attitude of our study participants was that the limited lobbying skills of female councilors hindered the desirable realization of gendered council decisions and that this was further stifled by the minimal support from male councilors. It was fascinating to note that some of the key technocrats from both districts felt that the quota provision impeded real women’s emancipation. This pessimistic attitude was attributable to the belief that the majority of female councilors were merely capitalizing on filling the quota, which also limited their right and chance to openly compete for other leadership positions open to both men and women. This tendency by women to ‘stick’ to the quota, leaving the rest of the seats to be occupied by men, eroded women’s confidence to challenge decisions of male-dominated councils. Concerning this, one Key Informant from Kasese district observed that:

‘There is a need to focus on empowering women economically such that they gain the clout and confidence to compete with men everywhere, including elective positions... unfortunately, our electorate respects people who demonstrate that they have money...and if women can do that, then the numbers will balance to generate more gender-sensitive development.’

Another informant from Bushenyi district noted that:

‘The quota is good, but it seems that it is all that women can struggle for -- competing among themselves. They need to be supported to expand their numbers beyond the establishment of the quota either by having more numbers of women or by stepping up their lobbying skills.

The general view from both male and female respondents was that it is ‘wishful thinking’ that women elected as per the ‘one-third’ legislation can necessarily make council decisions gender-responsive, arguing that much more than just the quota needed to be paid attention to, such as individual women’s agency, ability, and skill. Incentives to leverage social mobilisation and lobbying by female councilors to influence gendered council decision outcomes in Uganda’s currently male-dominated councils were considered critical. Moreover, potential female leaders continue to be excluded from joining politics because of the highly monetised and expensive elections. Expensive party primaries, nomination processes, campaign posters, transport costs, venue rentals, and various forms of voter bribes (Madanda, 2016; Mpiima, 2016; Mpiima, 2015; Ahikire, 2007) are real obstacles to participation. Currently, women disproportionately make up the percentage (14.1 percent) of Ugandans living below the poverty line (Republic of Uganda, 2020; UNFPA, 2017). The economic situation characterised by

a weak financial inclusion for women compared to men entrenches a male political hegemony and could ‘gift’ the political space to uninterested or incapable, but ‘financially sound’ women (Ahikire, 2007). More men than women have access to employment, credit, and asset ownership (Madanda, 2016). By implication, economic circumstances make it nearly impossible for politically active women to fully participate in political processes as candidates. In some cases, women candidates are economically shortchanged and exploited by the little campaign money by their male agents who barely mobilise women voters, even when they are given money to do so (Nakijoba, 2016).

Questions regarding their commitment to advocating gendered local government deliberations and decisions, motivation for joining politics, leadership tenure, and self-assessment in terms of ability to effect change revealed a 51% first-time representation, and more female (60%) compared to male councilors (46%) had served more than two terms. While the majority (89%) had good intentions to promote gender equality, they did not specifically mention gender concerns or women’s empowerment as their primary motivation to represent their constituencies (see Table 5 below). Our study found out that there was a higher retention in local government councils compared to male councilors because most of them compared to male councilors reported serving a second five-year term. We hence

assumed that the higher female retention in the councils translated into more experience with council debates and therefore was better placed to lead deliberations, achieve gender-sensitive legislation. However, this was not the case. This is embedded in the vagueness of their agenda as they go into the councils with 'good intentions'. The majority (62%) of the councilors reported that a driver for joining politics was the promise of support from the electorate. This was proportionately higher among male than female councilors (see Table 5). Generic statements such as the development of constituencies, lobbying for income-generating projects sponsored by the government, and economic empowerment were pointed out as essential drivers for councilors seeking to serve as representatives and 4 percent simply stated the desire for politics as their motive. None of the above is a strong anchor for the electorate to demand gender inclusion in council decisions, and therefore politicians, including women representatives, would not be compelled to frame gender-sensitive debates that would lead to gender inclusion in council decisions.

Ahikire (2007) notes that most female politicians who eventually vie for political offices are actually not career politicians but are instead urged to run for political positions by their community members who observe their potential leaders' hesitancy. She concludes, however, that such support carried the advantage of building

a culture of consensus politics, as candidates who are 'pushed' by the community tend to be more accountable to the community. She further argues that the hesitancy and eventual 'pushing' by voters may not bode well for proper legislative power, with the woman councilor beholden by voters whose desires at the time are not gender-sensitive legislation and therefore affect the performance of the woman councilor in this regard.

Councilor self-assessment of their perceived achievements, particularly regarding the promotion of gender equality, revealed that 15% rated their success in mobilising their constituencies over nationally oriented policies such as sending girl children to school, increased participation of women in development, and income-generating activities (see Table 6). Although this study did not assess the validity of these claims, these perceptions constitute a key factor for understanding the likelihood of a conscious pursuit of gender-sensitive decision-making. Table 6 indicates that a bigger proportion of councilors measured their success or failure in terms of other variables (infrastructure development, sensitisation, education, and sports) compared to those who specifically mentioned issues related to the promotion of gender equality. The implication from this self-assessment is that it is possible to have development interventions overseen by gendered councils but support the implementation of gender-blind development interventions. Such

scenarios disadvantage the recipients of development interventions in the jurisdiction of the councils because of the latter's inability to track and address any pressing gender needs as programs are being implemented (Mpiima, 2016).

An understanding of the likelihood that decisions of councils deliberately constituted of male and female councilors may themselves be gender-blind calls for a deliberate intention to support councilors with skills and abilities through training) to promote gendered council decision outcomes. Our study indicated that trainings targeting male councilors on gender issues were limited. Female councilors interviewed felt that such training was critical in building the individual capacity of both male and female councilors to influence gendered council decision outcomes. A female councilor from Bushenyi district observed that:

‘Workshops on gender issues that target all councilors are very vital if we have to achieve our goal of balancing council business. Although female councilors have had a series of trainings, it is not enough. We need more that target both male and female councilors.

The study also established that some female councilors were networking with existing grassroots organisations to create opportunities for building gender awareness and advocacy campaigns. For example, Karambi Action for Life Improvement (KALI), a Community-Based organisation

(CBO) in Kasese district, was widely used to mobilise groups of women and men to participate in gender budgeting advocacy and gender mainstreaming within local governments. Networks consisting of such alliances are an opportune gateway to increasing gender inclusion in council decisions and bridging gender inequality in development interventions. CBOs transfer knowledge to councilors, who in turn may deploy this knowledge in their legislative duties and also offer women councilors a platform within the community to offer feedback to their electorates about impending development interventions. Ahikire (2007) notes that women councilors in Mukono district were known for making a greater contribution outside the council, especially within the communities, because of the training and support they were exposed to by various community-based organisations.

In Bushenyi district local government, ICOBI (Integrated Community Based Initiatives), a local community organisation was reported to be among the major partners of the district efforts to stimulate grassroots development activities that promote gender equality, which, due to institutional weaknesses, the local government alone was unlikely to implement. ICOBI was prominent in community education and sensitisation on HIV/AIDS education, among other capacity-building interventions. This was confirmed by one senior local government official who reiterated that:

‘The activities of some organisations such as ICOBI have tremendously reduced the inefficiencies of limited local government funding in the communities we serve. They target women and vulnerable children for HIV education and health, especially in PMTCT (Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV), IGAs (Income Generating Activities), and nutrition...I am sure that the limited local government finances would not have even covered the smallest fraction of what they have been able to do... Our main constraint is funding.

Analysis of the qualitative data revealed that male councilors were aware of the need to make gender-sensitive council decisions; however, this was a domain of female councilors. To them, the female quota translated into an automatic responsibility for taking women’s needs into governance. This is contrary to the observation that more needs to be done than just filling the female quota and it is attested to by the observation by a female informant in Kasese who complained that:

‘Male councilors show us that it is okay to have one-third reserved for women on councils...and they are still comfortable as long as we are still fewer than them in number. Moreover, they seem to think that because the female quota has been adhered to, then all decisions made by the council and the discussions that generate them are engendered’.

It is evident that the tag ‘women councilors’ radically changes the constitutional understanding of the role of women councilors. It creates the assumption that women represent women’s interests yet, their mandate is broader in the sense that a geographical area must be represented. The expectation that women represent women’s issues pushes away the potential male allies in pushing the gender-sensitive agendas in councils, creating pockets of patriarchal pushbacks and thus derailing the effectiveness of the women representatives in pushing through gender-sensitive decisions even when they try due to their inferior numbers (Madanda, 2016).

Both male and female councilors indicated that cooperation and mutual support among them were essential in building the capacity of councils to generate gender-sensitive decisions. However, some male leaders (both political and technocrats) indicated that they ‘need to be well guided’ by their female colleagues on how to ‘undertake gender advocacy’. This statement implies that the male councilors believed that the onus was on female leaders to persuade them to support the female cause. Indeed, in one of the interviews with a female councilor in Kasese, this attitude is a cause for concern. In her view:

‘Without the female quota, it would take ages for society to uplift women’s status; the quota allows us to get more involved in politics. You can imagine up to today the district

and sub-county technical people still ask us to clarify simple concerns of women such as how to come up with a gender-sensitive budget'.

A study by Tamale (1999) on the intricacies that resulted in a gender-sensitive constitution in Uganda indicates that synergies between female representatives, women's organisations, and male legislators are a powerful tool for realizing gender-sensitive legislation. This can be successfully replicated at the local council level. There is a considerable presence of women's groups at the grass-roots level, with which gender advocates can build synergies to seek gender accountability from their leaders.

Expansive constituencies with minimal logistical support were also cited by female councilors as key bottlenecks for their effectiveness, particularly because of the associated logistical demands. Electoral areas for the female quota were said to be twice or three times bigger than those available for both genders, which usually attracted male candidates. Female councilors argued that the limited logistical support from their local governments to enable them to traverse and consult their electoral areas overstretched their capacity to adequately deliver on their mandates. The following quote from an in-depth interview with a female councilor in Bushenyi elaborates on this concern.

We represent two sub-counties while male councilors represent only one sub-county.... yet we get the same

allowance! There is a need for a policy change, either by doubling our allowances or by ensuring that a female representative is elected per sub-county (in-depth interview with a female councilor, Bushenyi District).

The larger geographical space covered by female politicians who occupy the quota is undoubtedly a relative burden on female politicians both during the election period and after winning the elections and may serve not only to discourage their participation in electoral politics but also negatively impact their commitment to work. Whereas they earn the same allowances, they must cover a larger geographical space and reach more voters, which is a mundane task for the already poor women.

Discussion

Our examination of the influence of the female quota on the processes and outcomes of local government council decision-making in Uganda shows that formidable challenges remain. Reserving the quota in itself is a great milestone on the trajectory of inclusive democracy in Uganda. However, its actual influence on gendered outcomes continues to depend on how proximate variables at both the individual and structural levels play out. While the quota provision is appreciated, albeit cautiously, by males, it is evident from our study findings that active female political participation, especially in local governance settings in Uganda, needs the concerted effort of both women and men. The

female quota is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for promoting gendered local government decision-making. The inquiry confirms that promoting gender participation in council decision-making processes will require more than just numbers; its provision has to be accompanied by capacity building; community mobilisation, lobbying, and advocacy, among others, to be able to harness male engagement and address male dominance. Male dominance not only diffuses the small number of women in the councils but also fuels resistant patriarchal pockets and sustains gender inequality in legislation and community structures that would otherwise work against it.

An overall average male-to-female ratio of 2:1 in local council sessions in both periods under investigation demonstrates increased opportunities for female participation in local governance, but this is still an imbalance that underscores the need for innovative strategies by government, local and international development partners to develop and maintain appropriate techniques to lobby for more gender-responsive local government programs. Such efforts will greatly demystify the tendency to rely on the power of numbers. Indeed, the literature has indicated that having female representatives in decision-making processes alone does not automatically translate into engaged governance. What is therefore needed is a combination of this and other contextually enabling factors at

the individual and institutional level (Ahikire, 2007; Tamale, 1999).

Leveraging local government financing for community education, social mobilisation, and basic service delivery has been cited as a key driver of engendered policy outcomes (Mpiima, 2008; Ahikire, 2007; Tamale, 1999). It has also been argued that lack of motivation, self-confidence, and fears of failure underpin the sociocultural constraints confronting women in leadership (Jalalzai and Krook, 2010; Maharaj (as other factors alone cannot sustainably generate engaged local government decisions, particularly in male-dominated councils. The question, therefore, as Galligan, (2007) and Neila (2005) observe, is the extent to which women are supported in achieving the collective capabilities necessary to overcome the constraints they face in their leadership roles.

Councilors' understanding and perception of gender and the quota for women in local government councils suggest that local politicians are highly gender aware. However, their perceptions slightly vary. This variation calls for interventions to fill such knowledge gaps among the 'gender equity flag-bearers', the female council representatives. The review of the sample of council minutes did not reveal that gender, as the inclusive development had was yet to influenced the minds of politicians. No decisions or motions were explicitly directed towards gender equality. The relatively extensive political experience of

councilors should have also ideally leveraged the participation of female representatives in council debates, increasing the likelihood for them to participate in general and gender-specific debates, but this support was not evident from the study findings.

With nearly half of the councilors having represented their constituencies for more than one term, opportunities exist for gender mainstreaming, but these could be enhanced if gender-sensitive representatives consciously and continuously lobby and articulate gender-related advocacy issues. It is a promising trend that at least some councilors indicated uplifting the status of women as one of their motives to join politics, and more so that some of these councilors were male. Such sympathetic male members could serve as a nucleus for effectively mobilising the rest of the male councilors to support engaged debates. But this will require their female counterparts to strategically and deliberately spearhead the mobilisation process to avoid the risk of losing support from the would-be supportive male councilors, on the grounds that the female councilors occupying the quota appear to be less deliberate in pressing for gender-inclusive policies. Indeed, Jalalzai and Krook (2010) and Annesley et al., (2007) observe that the presence of more women in political dispensations changes male dominance in public decision-making, and provides a useful platform for women to attend to their basic needs. Other studies have

also indicated that despite deliberate efforts to promote gendered politics and governance outcomes, politics largely remains a male arena, (arena, (Maharaj N & Maharaj B, 2004; Ahikire, 2007; Mpiima, 2008). It is thus not surprising that some female councilors interviewed indicated that the promotion of gender equality was not their primary motive for joining politics. Instead, promises for support from the electorate, general economic development, or 'love for politics' constituted their major sources of motivation to join electoral politics.

This study has shown that basic needs being met at the community level do not necessarily benefit women. For instance, whereas council minutes showed that Ishaka Town Council had built market toilets, there was no evidence to suggest that the facilities were gender sensitive (restrooms specifically designed to accommodate women with functional changing rooms and disposal facilities for sanitary towels and towels and water). The reality is that markets are attended by both genders without sensitivity to gender differences and needs. While council minutes reach no decisions in the periods under study that could have been directly intended to uplift the enrolment of girls in school, the perception of a 15 percent increase in girl child enrolment as an achievement of the councilors helps us to predict that gendered achievements may in the future constitute a strong motivation factor for seeking representation in local government councils. However, rather than the influence of councilors,

it may be obvious in Uganda that the increase in enrolment of girls is most likely attributable to the government's policy of free education for all at the primary school level under the Universal Primary Education (UPE), and most recently, the Universal Secondary Education (USE) program. Even so, councilors ought to play a big role in mobilising communities to positively respond to these programs.

The presence of women in the governance structures of society carries the potential to change unjust practices, but if the women in question are drawn from a narrow elite or if they have been 'invited' rather than 'elected' or with no grassroots constituency to represent and answer to, their presence and influence may only remain a token. We argue that gendered decisions of local governments result more from a combination of factors including but not limited to capacity building of councilors on issues of gender mainstreaming, individual councilor competence to lobby and enlist support, and logistical and other institutional and environmental factors. It is thus crucial that efforts to explore and mitigate contextual factors that minimize the capacity of male-dominated local councils to frequently generate gender-sensitive decisions are stepped up, leading to the elimination of gendered injustices afflicting local governments. Key and innovative strategies include targeting the mindset of both female and male councilors to embrace the involvement of women. This is because our society, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa is still largely patriarchal, a reality

politics is not insulated from. Indeed, effective caucusing has demonstrated that women can bring men to their side by softening sympathetic and moderate men to support them (Tamale, 1999). Also, gender responsiveness in local government deliberations, decisions, and programs needs to be considered as one of the key parameters while undertaking local government performance reviews and assessments in Uganda.

Deliberate and compulsory refresher leadership courses targeting both male and female councilors should be organised for every newly elected set of local government representatives. This should not be an end in itself, but efforts to facilitate councilors to undertake research and/or use research findings to lobby for women and other socially disadvantaged groups should be promoted. Sensitising male councilors about the importance of research will also contribute to leveraging the importance of such research. In local government contexts, politicians make decisions, while civil servants are responsible for their implementation, in addition to providing technical advice to politicians on issues of policy. Consequently, technical staff from different local government sectors such as education, health, production/agriculture, and community development need to be aware of the importance of gender mainstreaming in the design and implementation of programs and the delivery of services. Thus, there is a need for local governments to consider continuous training and sensitisation

of both politicians and civil servants in local governments to appreciate the importance of gender equality in their everyday work. With most programs being implemented through extension workers in different fields like agriculture and health, targeting such staff would ensure that their interactions with communities are mitigated against being gender blind.

Conclusion

The legally established female quota for women's representatives on local government councils in Uganda remains a significant 'socio-political' resource for liberating the hitherto politically and socio-economically marginalised gender. Today, both men and women, Ugandan or not, highly revere the processes that led to the 1997 law. The evidence generated by this study has served confirm past evidence and further existing debates that reserving seats for female political representation enables women to not only slow down the effect of gendered social injustices on women but also allows women to sustainably push towards ending injustices that have afflicted them. Despite the persistence of complex social and structural impediments, the quota has indeed created the opportunity for elected female representatives to not only push for the interests of women in male-dominated political spaces but also to mobilise men in those spaces to pick interest and support agendas that promise to liberate women. Empowerment as the outcome of promoting inclusive politics can

therefore arguably be targeted at both women and men, as both can act as 'gate-keepers' for the emancipation of women; women who get elected into representative positions have to pick up the skill and hard work to 'soften' their male political counterparts to understand that they have a role to play in addressing gendered social injustices against women and that by doing so they too benefit directly. Representation ensures that women's marginalised voices are included in decision-making processes, but these voices must be planned and targeted to change the male gatekeepers. When female representatives experience limited capacity and skill to plan and target male gatekeepers, they become gatekeepers themselves. Hence, the need to ensure that female representatives are skilled enough to be able to deal with male-dominated spaces remain fundamental to the long-term empowerment and inclusion goal of Uganda's popular legislation of reserving one-third of every local government council position for female council representatives. Achieving greater impact and outcomes from the female quota, that is, sustainable political representation, voice, and socio-economic empowerment for women, will in contexts such as Uganda require more than just reserving the quota it will require actions that are intentional in sustainably building the capacity of women to pursue such desirable outcomes. Such actions will target the entire women's ecosystem, but most crucially, the elected women's representatives.

Table 1: Participation in Council deliberations (1998/9 and 2007/08)

Review Period	Sets of Minutes Reviewed	Av. Male participation	Av. Female participation
1998-1999	17	22	10
2007-2008	31	12	7
Total	48	17	8

Source: *Local Council Records' Bushenyi and Kasese*

Table 2: Gender responsiveness in Council deliberations (1998 and 1999)

Local Council	Sets of Minutes (1998 & 1999)	Gender (Average for the Period under study)		Major issues discussed and identified in the minutes reviewed	Gender analysis of intended beneficiaries of decision outcomes
		M	F		
Bushenyi District Council	8	28	18	Councilors agreed to sensitise communities against handling defilement cases at the village level; minimum qualifications of midwives to be adhered to and councilors to ensure enforcement of the law; 45million Uganda shillings was earmarked as a loan scheme targeting needy	Girl child and general advocacy for the rights of children reflected. But girl children would benefit from law enforcement on education. Needy students could be disaggregated by gender giving chance for both male and female students to benefit equally. Expectant mothers were also to benefit from improved services for maternity.

Ishaka Bushenyi Town Council	7	14	6	General issues and reports on local government service delivery and mandates; feedback on previous and ongoing project performance; tax revenue collection issues regarding law enforcement.	Gender neutral issues. None of the issues discussed focused on any gender vulnerability in the period.
Kasese District Council	4	26	9	Presentations of statements by the Resident District Commissioner, the District Chairperson and Chairman District Parliamentary group; statements mainly covered security issues; an address by The President of Uganda on his visit to the district mainly on security.	Gender neutral. There were discussions and decisions covering the special safety needs of women during armed conflict.

Table 3: Gender Responsiveness in Council Deliberations (2007 and 2008)

Local Council	Sets of Minutes Reviewed (2007 & 2008)	Councillors by Gender (Average for the Period under study)		Major issues discussed and identified in the minutes reviewed	Gender analysis of intended beneficiaries of decision outcomes
		M	F		
Bushenyi District Council	12	Attendance lists are not provided in the minutes		Feedback on previous & ongoing projects; Councilors were to sensitise communities to take advantage of Universal primary and secondary education - also sought a law to deal with those who sabotage the programs; discussions and observations to improve quality of public service delivery; agreed to allocate funds to improve maternity services at Kyeizooba Health Centre III.	Maternity services to help expectant mothers. Girl children would benefit from education enforcement laws.
Ishaka Bushenyi Town Council	5	7	6	General issues of local gov't i.e. revenue collection, tenders, construction of market stalls, and water extension	Gender Neutral. The discussion largely covered general issues

Kasese District Council	4	25	15	Approval of Katwe Kabatooro Urban Land Committee with one female member; approval of a three-year Development Plan and discussion of budget proposals; management of Queen Elizabeth National Park; construction of district block with council chambers; procurement of Toyota double cabin for Bwera Hospital; reading of the audit reports as well as the recruitment of the sub-county support staff.	Gender neutral. No queries were raised in the discussion of the three-year development plan that aimed at balancing gender priorities
Ihandiro Sub-County Council	4	11	5	Absenteeism of civil servants especially teachers; raising funds for Ihandiro Vocational Secondary school; formation of Ihandiro savings and co-operative organisation (SACCO); Banana wilt and food security threats in Ihandiro Sub-county-sought ways and means of sensitising communities to mitigate impending hunger	Gender Neutral. Issues discussed did not specifically address women's concerns.

Katwe Kabatooro Town Council	6	8	5	Approval of the three year rolling plan; Approval of the annual work plan; Approval of the budget estimates 2007/2008; Approval of the environmental action plan; Approval of the revenue enhancement strategy plan for the financial year 2007/8; motion seeking hiring external audit firm to audit the council.	Gender nNeutral. Issues discussed generally focused at approvals of plans and proposals on everyday local government mandates
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Table 4: Understanding of the term ‘gender’ among councilors in Uganda

Councilors’ understanding of the term ‘gender’	Male		Female		Total	
	(n=89)	%	(n=25)	%	(N=114)	%
Equal roles and opportunities for men and women	38	43	13	50	51	44
Sex differences between men and women	36	40	8	30	44	38
About women issues only	15	17	3	10	18	15

Table 5: Councillor’s main motive for joining local government politics

The main reason for choosing to represent the constituency (Multiple responses)	Male		Female		Total	
	(n=89)	%	(n=25)	%a	(N=114)	%

The electorate showed their support and trust in my leadership to solve local problems	58	66	13	52	71	62
Lobbying for economic empowerment and development of my constituency	23	26	3	12	25	22
I like politics	3	3	2	8.	5	4
Fight for the promotion of gender equality	5	6	8	32	13	11

Table 6: Councillor Self-assessment and explanation of their perceived performance

Self-assessment on success (N=89)	Frequency	%
Somewhat successful	68	60
Very successful	23	20
Not yet succeeded but optimistic	21	18
Have lost hope	3	2
Councillor explanation for the perceived success or failure (N=82, multiple response)		
Increase in girl child involvement, participation and employment	16	15
Lobbying for infrastructure development and service delivery	49	41
Community sensitisation about needs	4	4
Improved education information and sports promotion	13	11
Councillor explanation for the perceived success or failure (N=32, Multiple responses)		
Limited resources/funds	24	22
Low participation of women compared to men in all issues	4	4
Political divisions	4	4

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