



FES Tanzania, UWT and Omuka Hub

Advancing Women's Political Participation:

Evidence from the 2024 Local Elections in Bukoba Urban, Kagera, Tanzania

Key Messages

1. The 2024 legal reforms opened space for women's political participation, but gains remain concentrated in reserved seats.
2. In Bukoba Urban, women now hold 220 of 396 local leadership seats, yet only 20% of the elected street chairpersons and 23% of mixed-member positions are women.
3. Capacity-building, party support and women's solidarity enabled progress, but institutional challenges, electoral gender-based violence, stereotypes, financial barriers and male resistance still shape nomination outcomes.
4. To turn descriptive gains into substantive representation in future local elections, Tanzania needs to re-think its electoral system and institutional framework, mandate gender transformative reforms within political parties, and ensure sustained support to women aspirants, candidates and leaders.

1.0 Background and Rationale

Local elections in mainland Tanzania are held at the village, hamlet and street levels, where citizens directly elect their grassroots leaders. Tanzania held its seventh local government elections in 2024 covering 12,319 village councils, 64,384 hamlets and 4,263 streets.

Village councils consist of 25 members and must reserve one third of all seats for women, including eight women's group members, alongside the village chairperson, five hamlet chairpersons and eleven mixed-group members. Each hamlet elects a single chairperson, and because only one position exists, the law does not provide for reserved seats for women at this level. Street committees in urban areas have six members, two of whom must be women.

The one-third reserved seats requirement has helped increase the number of women in local governance and enabled Tanzania to reach the 30% descriptive representation threshold. Although women are legally permitted to contest in open seats, most remain concentrated in reserved positions, with far fewer competing for chairperson or mixed-group roles. Although information for other local election cycles is limited, the 2019 results show that women held only 2.1%, 6.7% and 12% of elected village, hamlet and street chairperson positions, respectively.

Tanzania's 2024 electoral reforms, the Political Parties Act (2024) and the Presidential, Parliamentary and Councillors Elections Act (2024), introduced important measures to enhance women's participation in politics, including:

1. Criminalisation of gender-based violence in elections
2. Requirements for political parties to adopt gender policies and establish gender desks
3. Obligations for parties to implement capacity-building programmes for women, youth and persons with disabilities

In addition to the national laws, the 2024 local elections were governed by specific regulations, including:

- The Election of Street Chairpersons and Members of the Street Committee in Urban Authorities Regulations, Government Notice No. 574 of 12th July 2024.
- The Regulation for the Election of Hamlet Chairpersons in Township Authorities, Government Notice No. 572 of 12th July 2024.
- The Regulations for the Election of Village Chairpersons, Village Council Members, and Hamlet Chairpersons in District Authorities, Government Notice No. 571 of 12th July 2024.

- The Regulations for the Election of Village Chairpersons, Village Council Members, and Hamlet Chairpersons in Urban Authorities, Government Notice No. 573 of 12th July 2024.

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Tanzania, working together with the ruling party Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM)'s women's wing, Umoja wa Wanawake Tanzania (UWT), and Omuka Hub, has played a central role in advocating for the 2024 electoral reforms. As part of monitoring the implementation of the new laws and regulations, FES, UWT and Omuka Hub assessed women's participation in the 2024 local elections in Bukoba Urban. This locality was selected because its remoteness and limited accessibility have historically constrained efforts to strengthen women's political participation. This policy brief draws on evidence from the 2024 local elections, capitalising on the experiences of women in Bukoba Urban, to identify the strategic interventions needed to strengthen women's participation and leadership in future local elections.

2.0 Methodology and Approach

The study used a rights-based and election-cycle approach to assess how the 2024 legal reforms were implemented by Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) and Umoja wa Wanawake Tanzania (UWT) to support women as aspirants and candidates. Data collection in Bukoba Urban was conducted in three phases

- a. Pre-nomination phase (October 2024):** This phase included a workshop on local election laws and the election calendar, Focus Group Discussions with women aspirants from three wards and key informant interviews with leaders of CCM, UWT and local government authorities. It assessed women's preparedness, their understanding of nomination procedures and the early challenges they anticipated
- b. Post-nomination phase (10 November 2024):** A workshop examined women's performance in the CCM primaries and the barriers they encountered. Additional FGDs with successful and unsuccessful aspirants provided insights into effective strategies, constraints during nominations and factors influencing withdrawal or nomination.
- c. Post-election phase (30 November 2024):** The final phase, undertaken after the conduct of the local elections on 27 November 2024, involved a workshop that brought together elected leaders, CCM and UWT representatives, the President's Office – Regional Administration and Local Government, the Office of the Registrar of Political Parties and the media. Discussions identified key enabling factors, persistent structural and informal barriers and practical recommendations to strengthen women's participation in future electoral cycles.

3.0 Key Findings

3.1 Increased Participation, but Concentrated in Quotas

For the first time in Bukoba Urban, women hold 220 of 396 local government leadership seats, compared to 176 held by men. However, women's representation is heavily concentrated in reserved seats.

- Street chairpersons: 13 women (20%) vs 53 men (80%)
- Mixed group members: 75 women (23%) vs 123 men (77%)
- Special seats (women's quotas): 132 women

3.2 Factors that Enabled Women to Be Nominated and Win

1. Support from Civil Society Organizations

Training by FES, Omuka Hub and UWT equipped women with knowledge of electoral laws and leadership skills, helping them participate confidently. As one woman noted, "The efforts by UWT and CSOs such as FES and OMUKA Hub to build confidence in women have made a significant difference."

2. Commitment from CCM Leadership

The party leadership intervened when women were denied nomination forms and promoted merit-based nominations, which encouraged women to run. Participants confirmed this support: "If a woman was denied a nomination form, party leadership stepped in to correct the issue," and "In CCM, it's not about gender; it's about your capability."

2.1 Improved Access to Nomination Information

Deliberate dissemination of information by CCM and UWT enabled women to effectively prepare and complete the nomination process. As one participant explained, "We received sufficient information about the election process, we took the forms, submitted them, and in the end, some of us were able to be nominated."

2.2 Influence of Visible Female Leadership

The presence of women leaders, locally and nationally, motivated women to contest, signalling a slow decline in patriarchal norms. One woman stated, "Patriarchy is decreasing... We are inspired by our first female president and female speaker of parliament."

2.3 Women's Solidarity and Mutual Support Networks

Collective initiatives for women to support each other and shared campaign symbols, strengthened women's mobilisation. As one participant put it, "When women support each other, we win."

2.4 Presence of Reserved Seats

The one-third gender rule placed women firmly within the electoral landscape by guaranteeing their representation in street committees. This structural requirement served as a crucial enabling factor, ensuring that women were not excluded from the electoral process even where competition for open seats remained male-dominated. As one participant explained, "These reserved seats gave us a chance, even for those of us who could not gather the courage to contest for competitive positions."

3.3 Factors that Hindered Women from Getting Nominated

1. Electoral Gender-Based Violence

Despite the electoral laws criminalising gender-based violence, women continued to face intimidation, destruction of campaign materials and verbal abuse, which undermined their willingness to compete. As one participant noted, "Violence was directed not only at the women candidates but also at their families."

2. Gendered Stereotypes and Moral Policing of Women Candidates

Women were judged based on "acceptable" behaviour rather than capability, reinforcing discriminatory norms. As a participant remarked, "Women who are loose... they can't be nominated. They need to keep themselves as modest women to be able to lead others."

3. Beliefs that Women Cannot Lead an Entire Street Committee

Some streets limited women's leadership by allocating all mixed-member positions to men whenever a woman contested for chairperson. This practice effectively blocked additional women from contesting. As one participant explained, "They said a street cannot be led by a committee made up entirely of women... so other qualified women were disqualified simply because one woman was already contesting for chairperson."

4. Minimum Financial Support During Nominations

Candidates were expected to provide refreshments and hold celebrations to the voters, which disadvantaged women. A female aspirant explained, "The party doesn't provide any financial support for women aspirants and candidates yet there are so many things to spend money on."

5. Fear of Competing with Men in Open Seats

Many women withdrew due to fear of confrontation or family pressure, opting for special seats considered safer. One participant shared, "You don't have to fight with so many people if you vie in women-only seats... sometimes it's the instruction from the party."

6. Resistance from Male Incumbents

Male leaders who had held power for long often resisted being challenged, sometimes using threats to deter competition. This resistance intimidated new entrants and limited women's opportunities to compete effectively. As one woman recounted, "When you try to run against a man who has been in that position for years, they mobilise others and intimidate you until you step aside."

7. Lack of Financial Recognition for Local Leaders

The absence of compensation for village, hamlet and street leaders created a significant economic barrier for women. Many could not afford to take up leadership roles that required substantial time and resources without any financial support. As several participants noted, the roles demanded "unpaid work that only those with independent income can manage," which discouraged women, especially those with caregiving responsibilities or limited financial means, from contesting these positions.

8. Limitations of the Applied Electoral System

The electoral system in Tanzania, particularly the First-Past-the-Post system, poses challenges for women. Male-dominated party nomination teams are hesitant to nominate women candidates in open seats due to the belief that voters prefer men. Despite high interest with many women taking and returning nomination forms, conversion into competitive positions remained low, especially for street chair roles.

4. Priority Recommendations

The findings from Bukoba Urban demonstrate that advancing women's political participation requires coordinated action across institutions, political parties, civil society and women themselves. The following priority recommendations outline measures that each stakeholder group can adopt to strengthen women's effective participation in future local elections.

4.1 Office of the Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP)

4.1.1 Enforce gender and inclusion provisions in the Political Parties Act by:

- i. Requiring all parties to adopt and implement gender and social inclusion policies and to establish functional gender desks.
- ii. Introducing clear gender quotas for party leadership and candidate lists and requiring submission of disaggregated data (sex, age, disability, location).
- iii. Linking party subsidies to demonstrable support for women, youth and persons with disabilities, and establishing monitoring mechanisms and sanctions for

non-compliance.

4.1.2 Model gender equality internally by ensuring gender-balanced staffing and building staff capacity on gender and inclusion.

4.2 Political Parties

4.2.1 Institutionalise voluntary quotas for women in party leadership and candidate nomination at all levels.

4.2.2 Strengthen gender desks and implement structured capacity-building programmes for women, including leadership, legal literacy, fundraising, public speaking, digital campaigning and personal branding.

4.2.3 Reform nomination processes to make them transparent, merit-based and free from violence and discrimination, including training nomination committees on gender equality and inclusion.

4.3 Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)

4.3.1 Design and implement gender-responsive civic and voter education, including accessible formats (sign language, braille, large print, subtitles, tactile materials).

4.3.2 Ensure effective enforcement of electoral codes of conduct and sanctions for gender-based violence and hate speech against women candidates, voters and supporters.

4.3.3 Strengthen civic education and engagement with security forces to prevent and respond to electoral violence in a survivor-sensitive manner.

4.3.4 Promote women's representation within INEC leadership, staff and temporary workforce through affirmative measures.

4.4 Development Partners (Donors)

4.4.1 Provide early and sustained funding for programmes that identify, mentor and train women aspirants well before the election calendar.

4.4.2 Support campaign-readiness programmes (policy development, messaging, fundraising, digital skills, media engagement) targeting women outside major urban centres.

4.4.3 Fund women-led observation and monitoring initiatives to capture gendered dynamics, including violence against women in elections.

4.4.4 Invest in public education to shift social norms around women's leadership and to build public support for gender-equal representation.

4.5 Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

4.5.1 Support parties and ORPP to develop and implement gender policies and operational gender desks.

4.5.2 Expand programming to rural and remote areas, targeting marginalised groups of women (young women, women with disabilities, low-income women).

4.5.3 Provide timely, multi-cycle capacity-building and mentoring for women aspirants using both in-person and digital platforms.

4.5.4 Monitor and document women's participation across the full election cycle, including incidents of electoral violence and the performance of inclusion measures.

4.6 Parliament

4.6.1 Exercise legislative oversight over the implementation of electoral reforms by regularly demanding reports and accountability from relevant institutions.

4.6.2 Review legislation to ensure financial recognition and compensation for village, hamlet and street leaders, reducing the economic penalty for women who assume these roles.

4.6.3 Advise the government to consider migrating from first past the post to proportional representation electoral system.

4.6.4 Pass a law that would allow INEC to manage local elections.

4.7 Media

4.7.1 Adopt gender-responsive reporting that focuses on women candidates' platforms and performance rather than personal lives.

4.7.2 Provide balanced airtime and visibility for women candidates and showcase positive stories of women leaders.

4.7.3 Work with platforms and regulators to tackle online gender-based violence, including clear reporting and redress protocols.

4.8 Women Themselves

4.8.1 Prepare early and strategically: meet legal criteria, engage in party structures and build leadership profiles between election cycles.

4.8.2 Cultivate confidence and "daring attitudes" and run for competitive seats and not only special seats.

4.8.3 Invest in networks, fundraising skills and communi-

ty-based support, and deliver tangible results when elected to build credibility and voter trust as part of re-election strategy.

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