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ASSETS OWNERSHIP AND WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN IRINGA MUNICIPALITY, TANZANIA

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ABSTRACT

Despite the fact that women's representation in political leadership positions in Tanzania has increased through government efforts and legal frameworks, yet gender inequality in political leadership is problematic because the political space continues to foster unequal power relations, which give men an advantage over women. This study investigates the effects of assets ownership to women representation in leadership political position in Iringa Municipality. The study adopted a mixed-method research approach targeting women participating in political activities in the study area. A sample size of 63 respondents and 5 key informants were drawn using simple random and purposive sampling techniques respectively. Semi-structured questionnaire and interview methods were used to collect primary data from the respondents. Analysis of quantitative data was descriptively done, while qualitative data was analysed by using content analysis and findings were presented in tables and figures. The study found that most respondents had an opinion that assets owned can support women participation in political activities by support political campaigns, political meetings, and secure collateral for credits important for participation in political activities. The study found that assets ownership influence women representation political leadership and provide opportunities for women to interact with people connected with political and leadership activities. The study concludes that ownership of assets contributed to increased women's representation in political leadership positions through the use of productive assets and social capital. The study recommends to Iringa Municipal Council

Authority to strengthen asset-development support for women through productive asset management and asset-financing services.

KEYWORDS: Assets Ownership, Women representation, Political Leadership.

1. INTRODUCTION

Women's representation in political positions is a key issue in the contemporary world. The representation of women in political leadership is crucial for ensuring that women's needs and interests are adequately represented in decision-making processes to enhance gender equality (Makalanga, 2023). Gender equality in representation can make a significant difference in politics as it can bring the much-needed sobriety and the equilibrium required to tackle political and societal matters sustainably. According to the study by WEF in 2017, women representation in political leadership has several societal benefits including inequality reduction, improved cooperation across party and ethnic lines, and increased prioritization of social issues, such as health, education, parental leave and pensions. In African countries, political leadership and representation remain largely male dominated. This runs contrary to basic principles of democracy, given that women in Africa constitute at least 50 per cent of the population across all countries (Chikwanha and Moyo, 2024). This gender inequality in political representation and participation contradicts international law, in terms of the principles of human rights and equality between men and women as espoused in international agreements and conventions to which most African countries are signatories.

In Tanzania, gender inequality in political leadership is problematic because the political space continues to foster unequal power relations, which give men an advantage over women (URT, 2023a). In most cases, women representation in political leadership has been constrained by numerous factors which include traditional norms which perpetuate the perception of women primarily as homemakers; socio-economic constraints, such as inadequate resources and the struggle to balance family and political responsibilities; and institutional shortcomings, including a lack of support mechanisms and limited opportunities, contribute to the underrepresentation of women in political leadership positions, exemplifying systemic barriers (Nchimbi, 2021; Mushi et al., 2022 and Dominico, 2024).

In Iringa Municipality, political leadership positions play an important role in local governance and community development (URT, 2023b). Political leadership bringing diverse perspectives, prioritizing essential public services, and improving the responsiveness of local decisions. The municipality has implemented several strategies to promote gender equality

and increase women's participation in leadership positions to encourage their involvement in political activities and decision-making processes (URT, 2023b). The strategies include provision of grassroots governance training, mentorship programs, and gender empowerment as outlined in the Iringa Municipal Council Strategic Plan. Despite all these efforts, yet women representation in political leadership position in Iringa Municipality is low. The study, therefore, was undertaken to establish the effect of assets ownership to women representation in leadership political positions.

2. STUDY AREA AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Area of the Study

This study was conducted in Iringa Municipality, located in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania. The Municipality covers an area of about 576 square kilometres and is bordered by Iringa District Council to the north, east and west. Iringa Municipal Council is one among the four councils forming the Iringa Region which lies between latitudes 7° South of Equator and longitudes 35° East of the Greenwich Meridian. The altitude is between 1560 and 2000 meters above sea-level. According to Tanzania Population and Housing Census (2022), Iringa Municipality had a total population of 202,490 of which males were 96,392 and females were 106,098. Administratively, the Municipality has one division, 18 wards and 192 “mitaa” administrative neighbourhoods. The Municipality covers an area of 331.4 square kilometers (URT, 2016). The people in the area are living in both urban and peri-urban settings, where the economic activities done are mainly small-scale trade, farming, business activities and salaried employment. The reason for selecting the Municipality for the study was based on the fact that the Municipality has low number of women in political leadership position.

2.2 Study Methodology

The study population involve women in political leadership positions and political activities in Iringa Municipality. The study used ward councilors, political party leaders and the gender desk officers to provide the needed information. The study adopted a cross-sectional research design of which data was collected from targeted respondents at a single point in time. The design provided an opportunity to collect information on income level, employment status, and ownership of assets and women's representation in political leadership positions from different respondents within the study area. The study adopted a mixed-method research approach. The sample size of 63 respondents was used in the study. Purposive sampling was used to obtain key informants. Women participating in political activities were sampled from

the selected ward by using simple random sampling. Quantitative data was collected from the respondents by using semi-structured questionnaires, while qualitative data was collected by using interviews. The collected quantitative data was descriptively analysed to get frequencies and percentages with support of Statistical Product for Social Solution (SPSS version 26.0) computer software. The qualitative data from key-informant interviews was analysed by using content analysis techniques.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

The demographic characteristics of the respondents selected were age, marital status and education that can affects women participation in political activity. Table 1 shows characteristics of the respondents who participated in the study. The age of the respondents was categorized into four groups ranging from 18 to 55 years. The categorization showed that most (36.5%) of the respondents interviewed were at age group between 26 and 35 years (Table 1). About 34.9% of respondents interviewed were aged between 18 and 25 years and about 14.3% of the respondents were aged between 46 and 55 years. Likewise, majority (60.3%) of the respondents were married and about 39.4% of the respondents reported to be single by found to be never married, widowed and divorced. The results show that more than a half (50.8%) of the respondents had attained primary school education. It was also found that 6.3%, 20.6% and 22.2% of interviewed respondents had post-secondary, no formal education and secondary education respectively. These findings on demographic characteristics of the respondents imply that majority of the respondents involved in the study were matured enough to respond to the questions related to asserts ownership and participation to the political leadership in study area. Also, most of the respondents in this study were married and had attained primary education which implies that they were able to can read and write. Furthermore, it is widely known that middle aged (40s) women often achieve higher social and economic engagement, unmarried women often demonstrate higher independent interest and flexibility for political organizing, and educated women are more confident, better equipped to navigate bureaucratic or political networks, and more likely to challenge traditional patriarchal restrictions ((Huminet et al., 2024).

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents. (n=63)

Respondents' age groups	Frequency	Percent (%)
18–25 years	22	34.9
26–35 years	23	36.5
36–45 years	9	14.3
46–55 years	9	14.3
Total	63	100
Marital status		
Never married	4	6.3
Married	38	60.3
Divorced	8	12.7
Widowed	13	20.7
Total	63	100
Education level		
No formal education	13	20.6
Primary education	32	50.8
Secondary education	14	22.2
Post-Secondary education	4	6.4
Total	63	100

Source: Field data, 2026

3.2 Respondents' Main Income Sources and Duration in Political Activities

Respondents' income sources were determined in the study area of which more than 74.6% of the respondents mentioned livestock keeping as their main source of income and followed by employment which accounted by 17.5% of the respondents consulted. The main source of income is directly relevant to the study because income level is one of the economic status factors examined in relation to women's representation in political leadership positions. According to Nchimbi (2021), individual economic condition is associated with participation and representation in political leadership and representation by providing an opportunity of accessing financial

Data on the income sources and duration in political activities were collected from the respondents. Table 2 shows the findings that 44.4% of the respondents had about 6 to 10 years of experience in leadership positions. Respondents who had less than two years of experience accounted for 33.3%, while 22.2% of the respondents had 2-5 years of experience in political activities. The findings demonstrate that the respondents involved had different levels of experience in political activities and leadership positions. Duration in political activities shows an indication of experience and exposure to political activities, decision-making processes and leadership responsibilities. Roswe (2023) reported that women's involvement in local government political leadership is shaped by factors that include their

social and economic circumstances. services and contribute to women's representation in political leadership positions.

Table 2: Respondents' Income Sources and Experiences in Political Activities. (n=63)

Respondents' Main Sources of income	Frequency	Percent (%)
Salary	11	17.5
Business	2	3.2
Farming	3	4.8
Livestock keeping	47	74.5
Total		
Duration in political activities (Years)		
Less than 2	21	33.4
2–5	14	22.2
6–10	28	44.4
Total	63	100

Source: Field data, 2026

3.3 Assets Ownership and Women Representation in Political Leadership Activities

An asset is a valuable resource owned or controlled by an individual or organization that can contribute to wealth creation. These assets such as personal income, family income, land, and financial resources directly shape and enable women's participation in politics (Meena et al., 2027). Table 3 shows the responses of the respondents on whether the assets owned can support women representation in political activities in the study area. Majority (92.1%) of respondents reported that assets ownership influence women representation political leadership, while 7.9% reported that it did not. This finding indicates that owned assets provided opportunities for respondents to interact with people connected with political and leadership activities. This finding was supported by one Ward Councillor in Iringa Municipality who reported that: *assets owned brings women into contact with different people, including individuals involved in community and leadership activities, and that these relationships can continue beyond the workplace... (Interview with Ward Councillor; 8 July 2026)*. The findings from interview relate with the study findings from Deere and Doss (2021) who reported that ownership of productive assets strengthened women's economic position and supported their involvement in decision-making activities.

Table 3: Assets' Ownership and Political Leadership Activities.

Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Use of assets to support political activities		
Yes	58	92.1
No	5	7.9
Total	63	100.0
How assets are used (n=58)		
Collateral for credit	16	27.6
Supporting campaigns	22	37.9
Supporting meetings	9	15.5
Supporting leadership activities	11	19.0
Total	63	100

Source: Field data, 2026

Respondents were also asked to state how assets owned by respondents can support women in political leadership position. The findings show that 37.9% of respondents used assets to support political campaigns, 27.6% of respondents used them as collateral for credit, 19.0% used them to support leadership activities, and 15.5% used them to support political meetings (Figure 1). Assets owned is an indicator of economic power of an individual reflecting the purchasing power and the influence of an individual in the community in various social activities including political ones. The finding is similar to what reported by one political leader interviewed in Iringa Municipality who stated that: *... most people use income they owned to support campaign activities and other political expenses, while land and livestock can also provide resources when additional funds are required (Interview with Political Party Leader, 12 July 2026)*. The finding shows that productive assets could be converted into financial resources that supported women's participation in political leadership positions. The finding is consistent with Duflo (2021), who found that women's control over productive resources strengthened their economic independence and increased their ability to participate in public activities. Furthermore, the study findings by Oduro and Baah-Boateng (2022) found that ownership of economic assets strengthened women's bargaining power and participation in leadership initiatives.

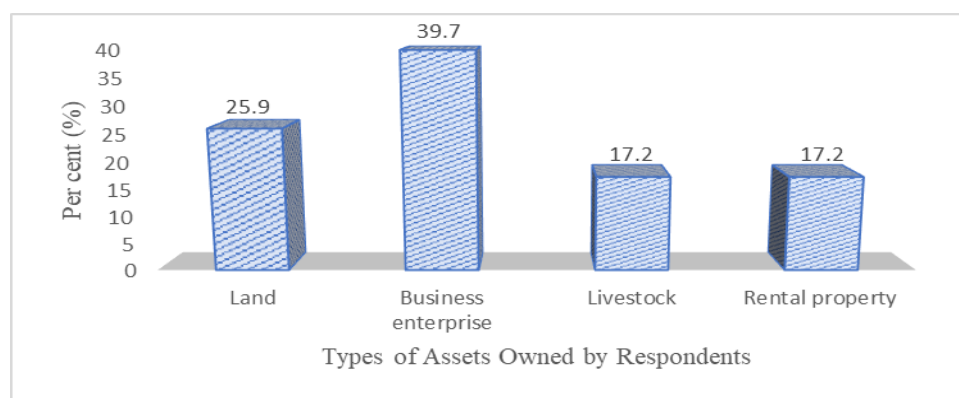


Figure 1: Types of assets used in political activities by the respondents.

3.4 Contribution of Assets Ownership and Community Relationship

This includes the resources such as cash, land, and business. The findings in Table 4 show that 87.3% of respondents reported that asset ownership contributed to their stronger community relationships and connections, while 12.7% reported that it did not. The finding indicates that productive asset ownership was associated with stronger community relationships among most respondents. Interview with a Ward Councilors in Iringa Municipality revealed that women who own businesses, farms or other productive assets interact with different community members through their economic activities and community involvement. This opportunity gives those women with chances to use their resources to support community activities and become more recognized within their communities. The finding agrees with Agarwal (2023), who found that women's ownership of productive assets increased their involvement in community affairs and decision-making activities. Similarly, Deere and Doss (2021) reported that productive asset ownership strengthened women's position within households and communities.

Table 4: Assets Ownership and Community Relationship in study area.

Assets Ownership and Community relationships (n=63)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	55	87.3
No	8	12.7
Total	63	100
Social benefits resulting from asset ownership (n=55)		
Community trust	16	29.1
Community recognition	15	27.3
Social networks	13	23.6
Community support	11	20.0
Total	63	100

Source: Field data, 2026

Also, the respondents were asked to explain the community benefits that can be obtained to women owning productive assets in study area. The study findings show that community trust was reported by 29.1% of respondents as the main way asset ownership contributed to relationships and connections. Community recognition accounted for 27.3%, of the respondents interviewed, social networks benefits accounted by 23.6% of the respondents, and community support for 20.0%. The findings indicated that community trust is the leading social benefit reported by respondents as the results of individual asset ownership. The finding is similar with the views from one interviewed political leader from Iringa Municipality who had reported that:

... women who own businesses or other productive assets become known through their economic activities and can use their resources to support community activities that help to build trust and recognition, while regular interaction can strengthen relationships with community members (Interview with a Political Party Leader, 12 July 2026).

The finding is consistent with Agarwal (2023), who found that asset ownership increased women's visibility and involvement in community decision-making. Also, the study by Oduro and Baah-Boateng (2022) similarly found that economic asset ownership strengthened women's bargaining power and opportunities for involvement in public affairs.

3.5 Resources Mobilization and Political Activities in Study Area

Respondents were asked to state how mobilization of resources contribute to the women participation in political activities. The findings in Figure 2 show that the collected resources have been used to support various political activities such as financing campaign which is accounted by 34.5%; transport support reported by 25.9%; meeting expenses by 22.4%, and while community contributions accounted by 17.2% of the respondents interviewed in the study area. The findings indicate that productive assets provided resources that women could use to meet different costs associated with political leadership activities. The finding was validated by a Ward Councillor from Iringa Municipality who explained that *..women who own businesses, livestock or other productive assets can obtain resources for political activities easy to support their campaigns, transport and meetings than those who experienced difficulty in mobilizing resources for political activities....* The finding agrees with Duflo (2021), who found that control over productive assets strengthened women's economic independence and their ability to participate in public activities. Similarly, Oduro and Baah-Boateng (2022) found that productive assets provided women with resources that strengthened their participation in leadership and governance activities. The present study

adds that campaign funds were the leading resource mobilized through asset ownership at 34.5%, followed by transport support at 25.9%. This indicates that productive assets provided women with resources that supported their representation in political leadership positions.

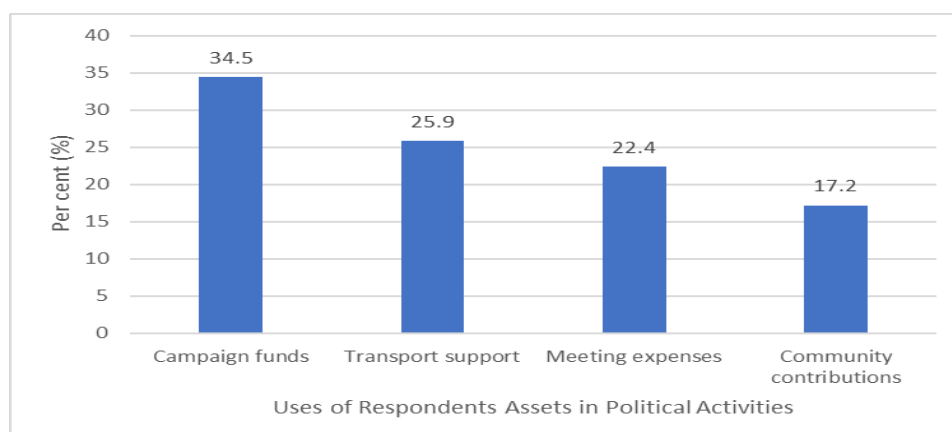


Figure 2: Resources mobilization and Political Activities in Study Area.

4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study found that asset ownership strengthened community trust, recognition, and social networks which supported women's efforts to seek political leadership positions. The study concludes that ownership of assets contributed to women's representation in political leadership positions through the use of productive assets, resource mobilization and social capital. It also found that productive assets provided resources for political activities and campaigns, while asset ownership supported the mobilization of campaign funds, transport support and meeting expenses. Therefore, the study recommends that Iringa Municipal Council should strengthen asset-development support for women through productive asset management training, affordable asset-financing services and support for business, land and livestock activities.

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